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Issues of state-society relations



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The issues of state-society relations that have become especially acute in the conditions of the world financial and economic crisis cannot be neglected, because it can trigger the growth of protest moods. This calls for the necessity to provide public authorities with a constructive, science-based programme. In 2013 the Institute of Socio-Economic Development of Territories of RAS (ISEDT RAS) carried out a research aimed at analyzing whether the state policy corresponds to the main requirements of the modern Russian society.

In order to achieve this goal, the following tasks were set out: to review the state of the civil society in Russia and in the Vologda Oblast, in particular after the 2008 global financial crisis; to identify the socio-economic and socio-political problems, which arouse main concern among the population of the Russian Federation and the Vologda Oblast in the post-crisis period; to describe the measures undertaken by the government to address these issues.

The authors came to the following conclusions:

1. Civil society both at the federal and at the regional levels is at the stage of formation; nevertheless, it possesses significant potential. This has been proved by the protest actions (December 2011) that made it clear to the authorities that it was necessary to respond to the demands of the growing civil society.

2. *The citizens of Russia and the region express their concern at similar issues. At the same time, the Vologda Oblast residents compared with the Russians in general express more concern about the condition of the housing sector, and less concern – about socio-political (corruption), ecological and ethical issues.*

3. *After V.V. Putin was elected President in March 2012, the social policy was focused on handling those issues that have long become vital in the society. However, the reforms are characterized by the discrepancy between the declared and the actual objectives, by the declarative nature in many aspects, by shifting the responsibility to the regional authorities.*

Therefore, the authors suggest the implementation of the following measures: to revise the approach to many issues at which the people express their concern; to abandon imitation in the execution of reforms; to promote further development of civil society.

Civil society, authority, public opinion monitoring, protest potential, the level of trust.

The large-scale character of civil processes has become a characteristic feature of the global world of the 20th and early 21st century. The multitudes of people, that had not previously possessed full rights, entered the sphere of civil relations and became involved in economic, social, and political life in their countries. The democracy of the minority started to transform into the democracy of the majority [11, p. 16].

Population is beginning to play an increasingly important role in the socio-political life. This process has two consequences: first, the government cannot ignore the citizens' opinion on the most acute socio-economic and political issues any longer. Second, it became necessary to provide public authorities with a constructive, science-based programme that would stipulate that the authorities address sociology on a regular and planned basis [2, p. 26].

The global financial crisis that started in 2008 has had a significant impact on the Russian society; moreover, its negative consequences were not only of economic nature. The crisis has questioned the adequacy of the ideological and political doctrine of liberalism, according to which wealth should defeat poverty through economic growth based on free and open market. It is this open market that has brought the world economy to the brink of disaster.

Therefore, in 2008 it became clear that the “invisible hand” of the market should be backed by the “visible hand” of the state [3, p. 12].

In other words, the global financial crisis has aggravated the problems of state-society relations. Ignoring them today creates the actual danger of the rapid increase of protest moods, which may lead to a further split-up of interests of the population and authorities.

As for scientific community, it does not stand aloof from the problems of state-society relations. In 2013 the Institute of Socio-Economic Development of Territories of RAS conducted a study for analyzing the conformity of the state policy with the main requirements of the modern Russian society.

To achieve this goal the following tasks were set:

1. To analyze the condition of the civil society in Russia and the Vologda Oblast after the 2008 global financial crisis.

2. To identify the socio-economic and socio-political problems, which are of primary concern among the population of the Russian Federation and the Vologda Oblast in the post-crisis period.

3. To analyze the nature of the activities undertaken by the government to handle the most acute issues of modern civil society.

The issues concerning the essence, functioning and development of civil society have

been developed profoundly by foreign scientists. The systemic approach to civil society dates back to the works of T. Parsons, D. Easton, G. Almond, K. Popper, H. Anheir, M. Glasius and M. Kaldor, who developed the concept of global civil society that is a space of ideas, values, institutions, organizations, networks and individuals, that are between the family, state and market and that operate across the borders of societies, countries and economies [24].

The latest works of foreign researchers (J. Bartelson [22], A. Benessaieh [23], J. Ruggie, [25]) are devoted to the conceptual foundations and prospects of civil society in the context of sustainable development. Such scientists as J.L. Cohen, C. Schmitt, R. Schmitter, J. Schumpeter, J. Keane explore the major institutions of civil society, the forms of their interaction with the state [10].

The research into the civil society in the post-Soviet Russia is characterized by a variety of disciplinary and methodological approaches. The works of the Russian social scientists emphasize that this category has not been comprehended with the necessary theoretical clarity, conceptual description or a thorough assessment of its condition. The most comprehensive studies of civil society in Russia are as follows:

1. "Civil Society Index – CIVICUS" that is measured by the National Research University "Higher School of Economics". This index, according to the methodology of the project, takes into account 5 key indicators: quantitative and qualitative characteristics of nonprofit organizations (NPOs), the degree of involvement of the population in their activities, opinions of citizens, experts and representatives of public organizations concerning the impact of such associations on handling different social issues, the values inherent in civil society, as well as the state of socio-economic, cultural and external conditions affecting the life of civil society [21].

2. A study of the state of civil society, carried out by the Institute of Socio-Political Research [8]. Here, the main parameters are the opinions of people concerning the degree of development of public organizations, political parties, self-government, legal state, democracy, etc.

3. Extensive information on this subject is contained in the reports of the Public Chamber "On the state of civil society in the Russian Federation". The authors of the reports regard nonprofit organizations, the system of local self-government, and the media in as the components of civil society [5].

Thus, for all the diversity of theoretical and methodological approaches to the study of civil society, it is generally acknowledged that nonprofit organizations constitute its institutional framework; and the most important condition for its development is found in the level of social activity of people, their readiness to consolidation, their attitude to NPOs.

The main conclusion that is made by researchers consists in the following: civil society in Russia cannot be estimated unambiguously as "good" or "bad", it is in the stage of formation, it has its own disadvantages, as well as some positive qualities. In particular, its weaknesses include the following:

1. People tend to trust only their community, and they rarely agree to social interaction. At the same time, there has been a tendency toward a slow recovery of solidarity consciousness and practices.

2. The authority of nonprofit organizations in the eyes of the population and the readiness of citizens to participate in their activities remain low. Civil participation is largely informal in its nature (informal volunteering, informal donations).

3. Civil society is poorly integrated into the relations with the state; it does not act as a guide that communicates the population's values to the elites; consequently, political decisions rarely take into account the opinion of ordinary citizens.

The strong points of civil society are as follows:

1. A relatively high level of organization (51.4%) that is the evidence of institutional sustainability. It should be noted that positive trends are observed in this component. Thus, according to Rosstat, a significant growth in the number of NPOs has been registered: in 2008 their total number was 73.2 thousand [14, p. 57], in January 2013 – 85.2 thousand [15, p. 66].

2. Considerable potential. Thus, the social base of civil society in Russia (people involved in the social practices of civil society or focused on such participation) is not less than 90% of its adult population.

What is the state of civil society in the region? According to the public opinion monitoring carried out by ISEDТ RAS¹, only one in four residents of the Vologda Oblast takes active part in the public and political life (27–23%; *tab. 1*). On the other hand, the potential for civil participation more than twice exceeds the degree of actual participation: half of the oblast's residents refer themselves to those who are ready and rather ready to unite with others for any common activities for protecting their own interests (43%). Based on these data, we can argue that there is certain potential for the development of civil society, but it remains unrealized.

909 public associations were registered in the Vologda Oblast in 2012, 908 – in 2011, 907 – in 2010. Number of NPOs for the period from 2010 to 2012 has increased from 762 to 801, or by 5%. At the same time, the number of positive decisions on the state registration of NPOs in 2012 decreased by 10%, and the number of denials of state registration increased by 47% in comparison with 2011 [4, p. 23].

¹ The public opinion monitoring is held by ISEDТ RAS once in every two months with the participation of 1500 respondents aged 18 and older in Vologda, Cherepovets and 8 districts of the Vologda Oblast. The method of the survey is a questionnaire poll by place of residence of respondents.

The situation concerning the attitude of population toward nonprofit organizations is less optimistic: in 2013, the vast majority of respondents were neither members nor volunteers of any NPO (88%), one in three knows nothing about the activities of NPOs (34%), and one in four believes that NPOs have no influence on the oblast's life (26; *tab. 2*).

Therefore, the condition of civil society in the region is contradictory. On the one hand, according to the official statistics, the situation with NPOs is quite stable. On the other hand, the degree of people's participation in the activities of NPOs is low; in addition, there is skepticism in people's assessments of the impact that nonprofit organizations exert on the life of the society. Despite the fact that quite a few citizens are potentially ready to unite with others for protecting certain common interests, this potential remains unrealized [4, p. 19].

Further development of civil society requires the following:

1. Enhancement of people's motivation to take an active part in the public life.

2. Creation of conditions for the consolidation of various population groups and the society in defending the main political, humanitarian and civil values.

3. Search for mechanisms of interaction between the society and the state.

4. Expansion of the scope of activities of NPOs.

Given the new circumstances, the Russian state has to take into consideration the public opinion on handling the issues that are of primary concern among the citizens. According to the Institute of Socio-Political Research under the Russian Academy of Sciences (ISPR RAS), the range of these problems in 2008–2012 included the following:

- socio-economic: high cost of living (51%), increase in tariffs on housing and utilities services (43%), increase in food prices (29%), unemployment (24%), division of the society into the rich and the poor (24%; *tab. 3*);

Table 1. Indicators reflecting the activity of the Vologda Oblast population's participation in the public life, as a percentage of the number of respondents*

Answer option	2011	2013	Dynamics, 2013 to 2011 (+ -)
<i>How would you assess the degree of your participation in the public and political life?</i>			
Active and sooner active	27.1	23.0	-4
Passive and sooner passive	48.3	49.8	+2
<i>Would you unite with other people for certain joint activities to protect your common interests?</i>			
I am willing or sooner willing	47.1	43.0	-4
I am not willing or sooner not willing	25.2	19.9	-5
* The question was included in the survey only in 2011 and in 2013. Source: data of the public opinion monitoring carried out by ISED T RAS.			

Table 2. Questions concerning the attitude of the Vologda Oblast population to nonprofit organizations, as a percentage of the number of respondents

Answer option	2008	2009	2011	2013	Dynamics, 2013 to 2008 (+ -)
<i>Do you know anything about the activities of nonprofit (public) organizations?</i>					
Yes, I do, from personal experience	8.9	12.3	8.1	12.7	+4
I hear something	40.7	40.3	39.7	34.7	-6
No, I know nothing	38.7	24.5	34.0	33.6	-5
<i>Do you participate in the activities of nonprofit organizations (regional offices of political parties, trade unions, religious organizations, human rights organizations, charitable organizations, etc.) or are you a member of any of them?</i>					
I am a member of an organization	8.2	7.0	5.4	4.5	-4
I participate in it as a volunteer	11.3	9.9	10.4	6.2	-5
I do not participate in any of them and I am not a member of any of them	80.5	83.5	84.2	88.2	+8
<i>In your opinion, to what extent do nonprofit (public) organizations influence the life in the oblast?*</i>					
The influence is great	n/a	5.8	6.5	4.7	-1
The influence is insignificant	n/a	18.4	29.7	22.4	+4
They do not have any influence	n/a	22.3	26.5	26.0	+4
* The question was not included in the survey in 2010 and 2012. ** The question was not included in the survey in 2008. Source: data of the public opinion monitoring carried out by ISED T RAS.					

Table 3. Problems of modern life that are of concern to Russia's residents, as a percentage of the number of respondents

Answer option	November 2008	December 2012	Dynamics, 2012 to 2008 (+ -)
High cost of living	58	51	-7
Arbitrariness of officials	28	44	+16
Increase in tariffs on housing and utilities services	35	43	+8
Crime rate	32	31	-1
Increase in food prices	36	29	-7
Moral and cultural decadence	29	26	-3
Ecological situation	32	24	-8
Unemployment	23	24	+1
Division of the society into the rich and the poor	22	24	+2
Your security and security of your relatives	24	24	0
Source: data of the Centre for Strategic Social and Socio-Political Research under ISPR RAS.			

- socio-political: arbitrariness of officials (44%);
- social: crime rate (31%), personal security (24%);
- problems of morality: moral and cultural decadence (26%);
- ecological situation (24%).

So, the most relevant problems for the Russians are connected mainly with their financial situation. The public opinion monitoring carried out in the Vologda Oblast shows the similar data (*tab. 4*). Inflation, low standards of living, poverty, division of the society into the rich and the poor – these very problems are most frequently pointed out by local residents as the most acute ones. In 2008, their relevance would be logical to explain by the influence of the global financial crisis that led to the loss of jobs, deterioration of people's financial situation. However, financial problems remain the most relevant for the population in 2012 as well. Moreover, compared with 2008, there has been an increase in the share of the region's inhabitants (from 31% up to 38%), who think that social differentiation is the most acute problem of modern life. In other words, people's expectations do not change; public

demands have long-term character, which may be a factor in the growth of social tensions and protest moods.

Consequently, the citizens of Russia and the region are concerned with similar issues (inflation, division of society into the rich and the poor, unsatisfactory condition of the housing and utilities sector, crime rate). At that, as the surveys' results prove, the Vologda Oblast residents, compared with the Russians in general, are concerned a bit more about the condition of the housing sector, and less about socio-political problems (corruption), ecological and ethical problems.

Let us have a closer look at the most important problems according to the estimates of the region's population. More than half of its residents are concerned about inflation rate (55%). According to the official statistics, the consumer price index has increased by 41.4% during the 2008–2011 period (*tab. 5*) [16, p. 334]. Real disposable money incomes of the population have decreased by 3% for the same period [16, p. 85].

This, in turn, highlights the issue of poverty and low standard of living. Thus, the share of people with incomes below the subsistence level

Table 4. What problems of modern life do you consider the most acute for Russia in general?, as a percentage of the number of respondents*

Answer option	2008	2012	Dynamics, 2012 to 2008 (+ -)
Inflation	56.3	55.3	-1
Low standard of living, poverty	41.4	43.2	+2
Division of society into the rich and the poor	31.4	37.5	+7
Problem of provision of housing, low availability of housing	36.3	28.6	-7
Growth of alcoholism	26.5	27.3	0
High crime rate, insecurity from organized crime	28.4	25.5	-2
Poor quality of engineering infrastructure (public utilities, roads, transport, etc.)**	-	25.3	-
Social insecurity of citizens	24.8	22.3	-3
Corruption, bribery	17.5	19.8	+2
Economic instability, shutdown of enterprises	16.9	16.5	0

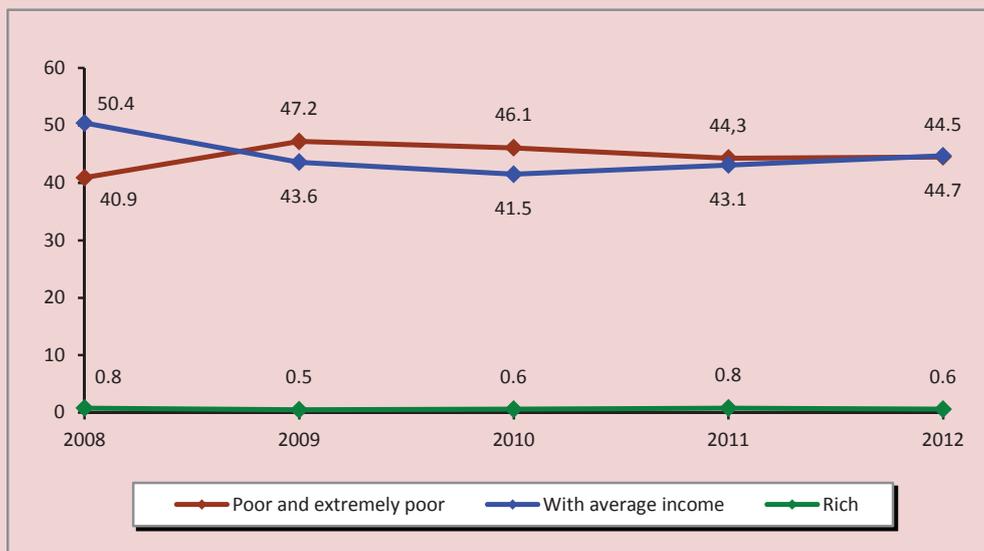
* The problems are presented in decreasing order, according to the results of the 2012 survey.
 ** The question has been included in the survey since 2010.
 Source: data of the public opinion monitoring (for the Vologda Oblast) carried out by ISEDT RAS.

Table 5. Dynamics of inflation and of the real disposable incomes of the Vologda Oblast population in 2008–2011

Indicator	2008	2009	2010	2011	Dynamics, 2012 to 2008 (+ -)
Consumer price index (in December as a percentage of that in December of the previous year)	114.3	107.2	109.2	105.7	+41
Real disposable incomes of population (as a percentage of those in the previous year)	98.7	90.4	108.6	100.1	-3

Source: Federal State Statistics Service.

Figure 1. Which category do you identify yourself with?, as a percentage of the number of respondents



Source: data of the public opinion monitoring carried out by ISEDT RAS.

Table 6. Dynamics of indicators of the Vologda Oblast population's differentiation by to their incomes in 2008–2011

Indicator	2008	2009	2010	2011
Ratio of the average income of the richest 10% to the poorest 10%, times	12.5	11.4	11.7	11.3
Gini coefficient (incomes concentration index)	0.381	0.369	0.372	0.368

Source: Federal State Statistics Service.

in the total population of the region increased by 2% in 2008–2011 (from 15.8% to 17.8%) [16, p. 85]. The sociological surveys also indicate an increase in the share of people who consider themselves “rich” and “poor” (from 41% to 45%; *fig. 1*).

One of the major problems for the region's population is the stratification into the rich and

the poor (see *tab. 4*). Statistical data confirm the presence of significant gap between the rich and the poor. The average level of monetary incomes of 10% of the population with the highest incomes in 2011, like in 2008, is significantly higher than the average income of 10% of the population with the lowest incomes (in 11.3 and 12.5 times respectively, *tab. 6*) [16, p. 86].

The situation in the sphere of housing construction continues deteriorating. According to the estimates of the oblast inhabitants, less than half of them were provided with housing in 2012 (46%). At that, 389.1 thousand square metres of housing were commissioned in 2012, which is 28.7% less than in 2008 (*tab. 7*). During the same period, the prices for housing in the primary market have gone up by 9%. The prices in the secondary market were growing even more rapidly: the average price for an apartment increased by 18.7%.

The major part of the oblast's housing stock does not comply with the requirements of the population in terms of its qualitative characteristics; it lacks some or other amenities. In 2012 the share of housing with the complete set of amenities (that has hot and cold running water, sewerage, heating, gas or electric cookers) was only 57.6%. The rundown and dilapidated housing fund is growing (by 13.9% compared to 2008) [6, p. 7].

One in four residents of the Vologda Oblast in 2012 expressed his/her concern at the increase in the rate of alcoholism (27%; see *tab. 4*). The number of people taken under observation with the diagnosis confirmed for the first time was 1.2 thousand in 2011 [19, p. 123]. The Vologda Oblast ranks 54th among other RF regions and 6th among the regions of the North-West by the incidence of alcoholic psychosis; the oblast ranks 38th in Russia and 7th in the Northwestern Federal District by the rate of mortality from alcoholic intoxication (in 1990 it ranked 42nd and 4th, respectively).

The residents of the Vologda Oblast and of Russia as a whole express their concern at a high crime rate, insecurity against criminals. In particular, for the period from 2008 to 2012 the share of inhabitants who feel safe at home and outdoors in the daytime has decreased (from 82% to 77%, and from 75% to 66%, respectively); less than half of the population feel safe in the streets in the evening (39–40%; *fig. 2*).

The problem of insecurity of people from organized crime is directly connected with the negative attitude to the activity of law enforcement bodies. The share of people, who are not satisfied with the performance of the police, increased twofold in 2010–2012 (from 14% to 27%; *fig. 3*). Although the share of negative opinions concerning the ability of law enforcement agencies to cope with crime decreased (by 12 percentage points), but it still considerably exceeds the share of positive judgements (44% and 19% respectively; *fig. 4*).

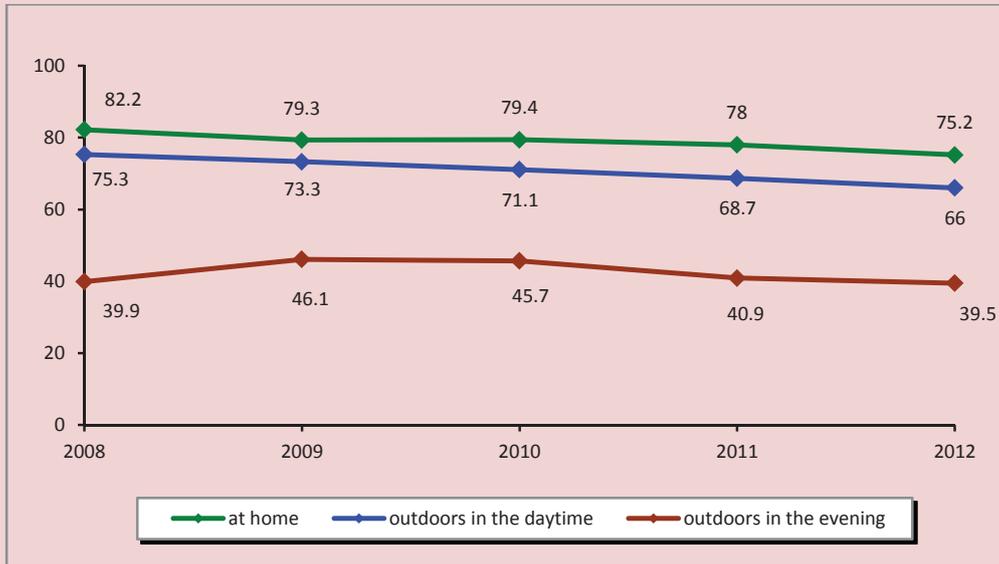
One of the main issues that arouse concern among the Russian population is the poor quality of engineering infrastructure (public utilities, roads, transport). The housing and utilities sector evokes the greatest anxiety. Almost half (49%) of all the appeals of citizens to the Public Chamber of the Russian Federation were connected with this sphere in 2012 [5, p. 29]. After two planned increases in the tariffs on public utilities as of July 1 and September 1, 2012 the overall utility payments increased by more than 15% in 20 subjects of the Russian Federation [5, p. 30].

Table 7. Housing stock of the Vologda Oblast in 2008–2011, as a percentage of the previous year

Indicator	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	Dynamics, 2012 to 2008 (+ -)
Total amount of housing built	111.6	89.8	83.7	106.0	89.6	-29
Overall dilapidated and rundown housing stock	95.3	108.2	102.4	100.0	102.8	+14
Average prices by the types of apartments in the primary housing market	101.2	85.8	100.6	115.3	109.5	+9
Average prices by the types of apartments in the secondary housing market	101.7	94.0	98.3	110.1	116.7	+19

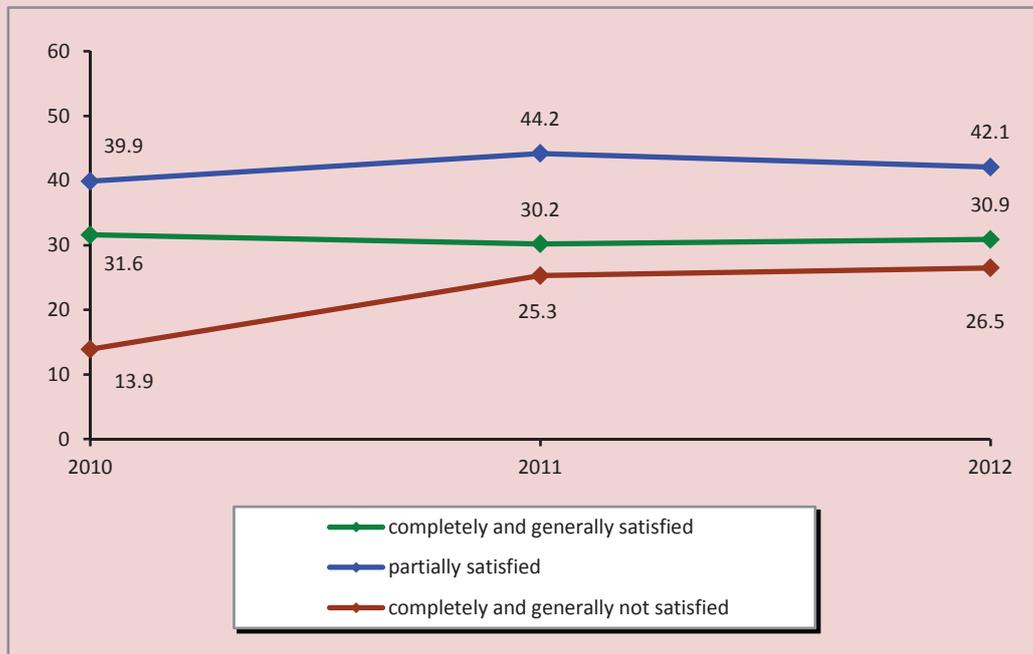
Source: Federal State Statistics Service.

Figure 2. Do you feel safe at present? (answer options: “yes and sooner yes than no”), as a percentage of the number of respondents



Source: data of the public opinion monitoring (for the Vologda Oblast) carried out by ISEDТ RAS.

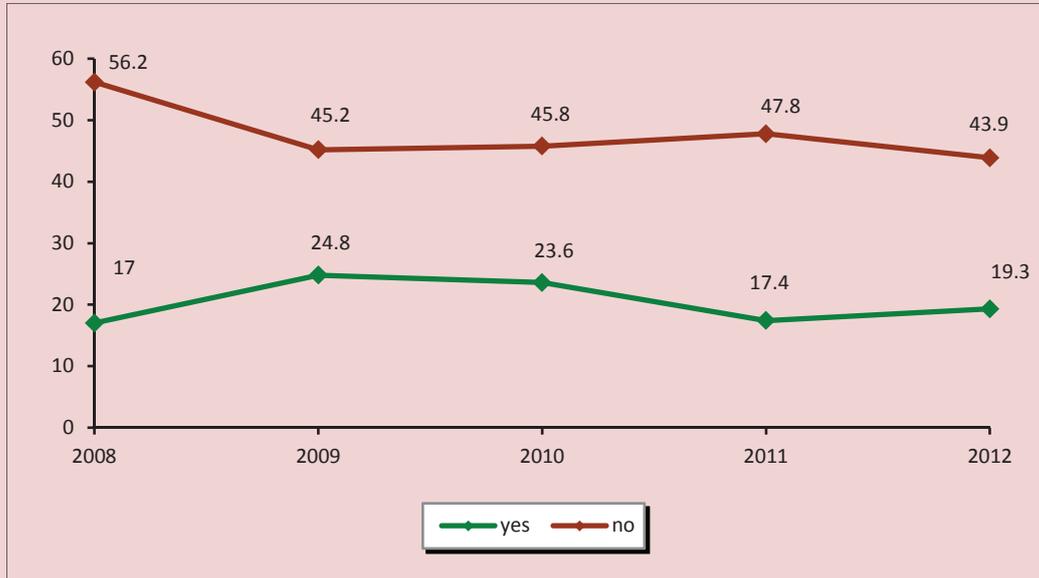
Figure 3. How satisfied are you with the performance of the police?*, as a percentage of the number of respondents



* The question has been included in the survey since 2010.

Source: data of the public opinion monitoring (for the Vologda Oblast) carried out by ISEDТ RAS.

Figure 4. Do you think that the police is currently able to cope with crime?, as a percentage of the number of respondents



Source: data of the public opinion monitoring (for the Vologda Oblast) carried out by ISEDT RAS

The Vologda Oblast population is also concerned about the state of housing and utilities sector. Utility tariffs in the region grew by 72% in the period from 2008 to 2011 [19, p. 338]. Most people do not approve of this situation. Moreover, in 2013, 74% of the Vologda city residents considered that utility tariffs did not correspond to the quality of services rendered (tab. 8).

Thus, in the post-crisis period, the acuteness of the most important issues, that worried the population, did not weaken; it has become lingering. That resulted in a decrease in the level of trust in the activities of bureaucracy, which, in turn, leads to non-participation of

the population in the political life of the country [12, p. 5]. The main reasons for this situation are as follows:

1. Corruption that has afflicted the entire system of social relations: economy, politics, social sphere. Mechanisms of protection against corruption have proved inefficient, exposed to intrusion of crime. Dysfunction of state institutions, having reached critical levels, is taking the form of a national disaster.

2. Exclusion of the majority of population from public policy and decision-making. For example, from December 2011 to February 2013 there has been a reduction in the share of the Vologda Oblast residents that agree with

Table 8. In your opinion, do the housing and utility tariffs correspond to the quality of the services provided?, as a percentage of the number of respondents*

Answer option	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	Dynamics, 2013 to 2009 (+ -)
Yes	5.1	5.1	9.9	3.9	6.2	+1
No	59.9	69.9	74.6	76.0	74.0	+14
It is difficult to answer	35.0	25	15.5	20.1	19.9	-15

* The question was not included in the survey in 2008.

Source: data of the public opinion monitoring (for the city of Vologda) carried out by ISEDT RAS.

the statement that they can influence the events in the city (from 12% to 7%), in the oblast (from 8% to 3%) and in the country (from 7% to 3%).

It is significant that for 2008–2012 the level of trust in all public authorities and public structures in the Vologda Oblast has decreased, while the national average situation is more optimistic (*tab. 9*). An equally important conclusion from our analysis points out that it is the state structures that primarily lost the trust of the population in the post-crisis period.

In 2012, as in the previous years, the majority of the population in Russia and the Vologda Oblast were convinced that the political system had many flaws, which needed to be eliminated (73% and 68%, respectively; *tab. 10*).

Despite the fact that the attitude to the political system in general is negative, and the trust in the institutions of authority is low, the residents of Russia and the Vologda Oblast preserve the high level of trust in the RF President (49% and 46%, respectively). It is necessary

Table 9. Would you please express your attitude to the existing public structures and institutions of power in Russia (answer option is “I trust”), as a percentage of the number of respondents

Institution	Vologda Oblast			Russian Federation		
	2008	2012	Dynamics, 2012 to 2008 (+ -)*	2008	2012	Dynamics, 2012 to 2008 (+ -)
President	65.2	45.7	-19	62.3	49.0	-13
Church	51.9	41.4	-11	47.0	53.5	+7
RF Government	60.2	39.6	-20	41.0	36.0	-5
Court	41.3	36.1	-5	11.7	15.5	+4
Vologda Oblast Leadership	48.6	34.6	-14	-	-	-
Procuracy	40.9	33.9	-7	11.7	15.5	+4
Federal Security Service	43.8	33.2	-11	-	-	-
Federation Council of Russia	47.6	32.3	-16	22.7	25.5	+3
Army	37.8	31.3	-7	43.7	47.5	+4
State Duma	42.0	30.5	-11	17.0	20.0	+3

* In decreasing order, according to the results of the 2012 survey.
Sources: ISPR RAS data (for the Russian Federation); data of the public opinion monitoring (for the Vologda Oblast) carried out by ISED T RAS.

Table 10. With which of the following statements about the political system of our society you agree to a greater extent?, as a percentage of the number of respondents

Answer option	2008	2012	Dynamics, 2012 to 2008 (+ -)
<i>Russian Federation</i>			
I am completely satisfied with the political system of our society	14.0	14.5	+1
The political system of our society has a lot of flaws, but they can be eliminated by means of gradual reforms	50.5	44.5	-6
I am not satisfied with the political system of our society, it must be changed radically	20.0	28.5	+9
<i>Vologda Oblast</i>			
I am completely satisfied with the political system of our society	8.8	11.1	+2
The political system of our society has a lot of flaws, but they can be eliminated by means of gradual reforms	47.7	44.8	-3
I am not satisfied with the political system of our society, it must be changed radically	20.3	23.4	+3

Sources: ISPR RAS data (for the Russian Federation); data of the ISED T RAS public opinion monitoring (for the Vologda Oblast).

to eliminate this and other socio-political contradictions in the near future; otherwise, the present-day trust of the society in the authorities may be lost permanently [11, p. 21].

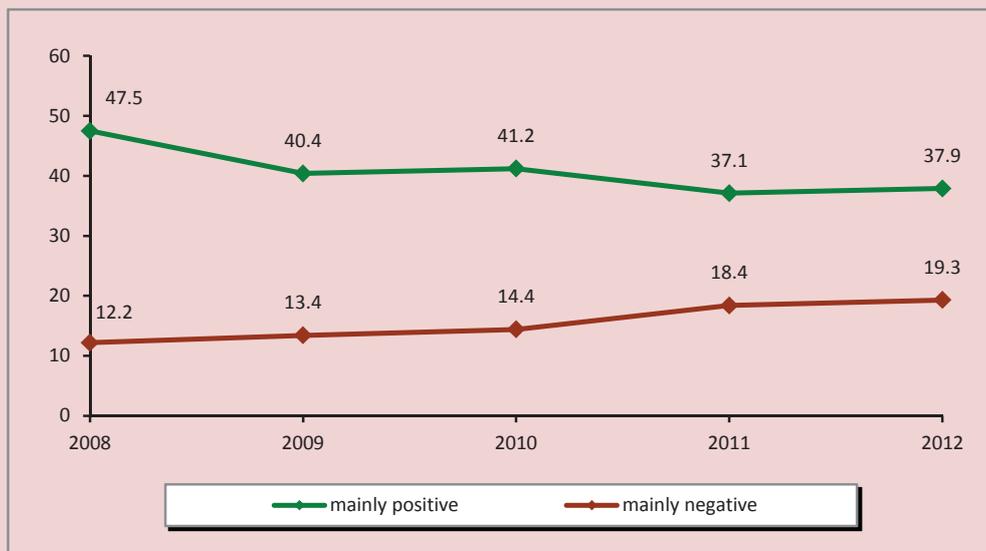
The level of civic culture in the society, the efforts of citizens and politicians were sufficient to avoid social protests and strikes after the crisis of 2008 [11, p. 17]. However, the population’s tolerant reaction to the consequences of the crisis did not mean that there were no critical moods in the society. In November 2008, immediately after the onset of the crisis, according to the opinion of more than half of the Russians, economic reforms carried out by the state authorities were not in keeping with the interests of the majority of population (52%). By December 2012, the share of respondents who supported this point of view, has not changed virtually (53%) [8, p. 9]. The share of negative opinions about the course of economic reforms carried out by Russia’s President has increased among the region’s residents for 2008–2012 (from 12% to 19%; *fig. 5*).

The economic crisis has aggravated the people’s anxious expectations regarding their financial situation. According to WCIOM (Russian Public Opinion Research Center), the share of Russians who believe, that in a year the wellbeing of their families will deteriorate or deteriorate significantly, has increased by 4% from August 2008 to August 2012 (from 11% to 15%) [1]. Over the same period, the share of the Vologda Oblast residents, who expect the deterioration of their financial situation in the coming year, has increased by 10% (from 11% to 21%).

Consequently, socio-political contradiction between the results of state policy and the fundamental interests of society remains the main driving force of the conflict that decreases or escalates depending on a situation [11, p. 18].

The escalation of this conflict occurred during the elections to the State Duma of the 5th convocation (December 2011) and presidential elections (March 2012). One in ten citizens of Russia was ready to take up arms, and one in three was ready for active civil

Figure 5. What is your attitude to economic reforms carried out by the President of Russia?, as a percentage of the number of respondents



Source: data of the public opinion monitoring (for the Vologda Oblast) carried out by ISEDT RAS.

actions to protect his/her own interests [11, p. 19]. The period of August 2011 – December 2011 witnessed an increase in the number of those who would do the following to protect their interests: sign the appeal to the authorities (from 19% to 22%); participate in a rally, demonstration (from 11% to 13%); take part in strikes (from 4% to 6%). It should be noted that the region's residents choose legal means for protecting their interests: over the period specified above, the share of those who, if necessary, would take up arms and come out to the barricades, has decreased from 4% to 2%.

In December 2011, all the major cities of Russia held mass meetings and demonstrations. For instance, on December 10 in Moscow, a rally that became the largest in the recent decade was held in Bolotnaya square, attended, according to various estimates, by 85 thousand to 150 thousand people. In Vologda, a protest action, held that very day, was attended by about a thousand people.

This could not but affect the general level of optimism among citizens. For example, only one third of the citizens believe that the President of the Russian Federation will be able to change the situation in the country for the better, 37% hold the opposite opinion, and 30% of citizens find it difficult to answer this question [11, p. 21].

Contradictions in the society began to fall after the presidential elections. In April 2012 compared with November 2011, there was a reduction in the share of citizens, who consider that there is great controversy and enmity between the rich and the poor (from 79% to 77%), inferior and superior classes (from 75% to 73%), employers and employees (from 56% to 52%), the younger and the older generations (from 40% to 36%), entrepreneurs and officials (from 38% to 34%; *tab. 11*).

Similar trends were observed in the Vologda Oblast. For instance, according to the survey, for the period from December 2011 to February

2013, there has been a reduction in the share of statements concerning the prevalence of disagreement in the society, disunity in the country, oblast and immediate environment (*tab. 12*).

The results of the parliamentary and presidential elections showed that amid the global financial crisis the Russian society has formed a new socio-political reality, an important feature of which lies in the dissatisfaction of citizens with the social results of conducted policy. The society is discontented with its position and the vast majority of people stands for changes and is waiting for them.

The protest actions of the population showed an increase in the potential of civil activity, making it clear for the authorities that they need to respond to the demands of the growing civil society.

It stands to reason that in the first decrees of V.V. Putin after his inauguration as President in May 2012, the social policy was aimed precisely at those problems that have long become especially acute in the society. In particular, it was proposed to do the following:

- to increase the real incomes of citizens;
- to solve the problem of social vulnerability;
- to improve living conditions, increase the availability of housing and the quality of housing and utilities services;
- to improve the health sphere [17].

Fight against corruption was carried out on extensive scale. By V. Putin's initiative, the officials and deputies became responsible for declaring their deposits in foreign banks and real estate abroad [7, p. 10].

Besides, the President has introduced certain measures to reform the political system:

1. Liberalization of the legislation on political parties. The minimum number of members of a political party has been reduced from 40 thousand to 500 people [19].

2. Re-establishment of gubernatorial elections [20].

Table 11. Assessment of the level of contradictions and enmity in the modern Russian society, as a percentage of the number of respondents

Existence of significant contradictions between population groups	July 2008	Dec. 2010	June 2011	Nov. 2011	April 2012	Dynamics, November 2011 to July 2008 (+ -)	Dynamics, April 2012 to November 2011 (+ -)
The rich and the poor	77	69	71	79	77	+2	-2
The lowest and the highest classes	69	65	67	75	73	+6	-2
Employers and employees	40	49	49	56	52	+16	-4
The younger and the older generations	35	35	33	40	36	+5	-4
Entrepreneurs and officials	31	34	33	38	34	+7	-4

Source: ISPR RAS data (for the Russian Federation).

Table 12. What prevails at present: agreement and unity, or disagreement and disunity?, as a percentage of the number of respondents*

Answer option	In Russia			In the Vologda Oblast			In your immediate environment		
	Dec. 2011	Feb. 2013	Dynamics, February 2013 to December 2011 (+ -)	Dec. 2011	Feb. 2013	Dynamics, February 2013 to December 2011 (+ -)	Dec. 2011	Feb. 2013	Dynamics, February 2013 to December 2011 (+ -)
Agreement and unity	14.2	14.1	0	19.3	15.9	-3	46.9	52.1	+5
Disagreement and disunity	61.1	59.5	-1	55.6	54.4	-2	29.3	23.2	-6

* The question was included in the survey only in 2011 and in 2013.
Source: data of the public opinion monitoring carried out by ISED T RAS (for the Vologda Oblast).

3. Expansion of the scope of activity of public councils, which play a crucial part in enhancing the efficiency of interaction between the authorities and society. Thus, the Public Council under the Vologda Oblast Directorate of the Ministry of the Interior (MVD), includes the Commission on Public Control over the activities of internal affairs authorities (OVD). A working group on reforming the housing and communal services sector was created under the Public Council of Cherepovets city [7, p. 62].

Both the federal and regional authorities make attempts to establish feedback with the society. For example, the idea of open assessment of the performance of certain power institutions is embodied in such projects of the Vologda Oblast Governor O.A. Kuvshynnikov as “Governor’s team: Your choice!” (the main

goal of the project is to identify the leaders that have the highest level of trust of the Vologda Oblast population), “Governor’s team: Your assessment” (aimed at the public assessment of performance efficiency of the bodies of executive power, and at the formation of a new quality of authorities, new quality of life of the population) [9, p. 102].

The Decrees as of May and the first steps for their implementation (for example, the adoption of the state programme “Social protection of citizens” by the Government of the Russian Federation on December 27, 2012 [13]) led to the reduction of discontent in the society. As a result, the protest potential on average in the Vologda Oblast has decreased by 2% (from 20% to 18%) over the 8 months of 2013 compared with the same period of 2012.

In June 2013 compared with the previous year, there was a reduction in the share of people who consider the most acute problems of Russia to be as follows: inflation (from 56% to 51%), high crime rate, lack of protection from criminals (from 26% to 23%), poor quality of engineering infrastructure (from 25% to 21%), corruption (from 20% to 17%).

At the same time we can point out several weaknesses of the measures taken by the state. They include:

1. Inconsistency between the declared and the real objectives of the reforms. For example, the liberalization of the legislation on political parties, was, probably, aimed at distracting people by the appearance of freedom of expression in the absence of chances of actual participation in legislative and representative authorities. Manipulations with political parties are nothing but an attempt to promise what is desired, but in fact they only imitate the care about democracy [18, p. 25].

2. Shifting the responsibility for the implementation of the May decrees to the regional authorities that often lack the necessary resources.

3. Most of the goals set out in the May decrees, are to be achieved only by 2018. However, according to opinion polls, the population is expecting that positive changes in the housing and health issues, in the issues concerning the improvement of material situation, etc. will happen at present already. That is why the issues, which worried the citizens before the 2011–2012 elections, are still relevant.

Inconsistency between the declared objectives and the actual state of affairs can once again lead to the growth of protest moods. More active and consistent actions are necessary in order to meet the key requirements of the society, because this determines the strategic line of Russia's development.

In this regard, it is necessary to carry out the following activities:

1. Revise the approach to many issues that arouse concern among the population; in particular, to improve the methodology for calculating inflation.

2. Abandon the abstract and non-binding phrases like “enhancing the quality of life and the standard of living”, the use of imitation in the implementation of reforms; to strive for the actual and most effective solution to the problems of the population.

3. Establish a better cooperation and open dialogue with the society, contribute to the further development of civil society.

The local authorities also need to carry out comprehensive measures for the improvement of the legislation at all levels and the provision of strong institutional support to education, health care, and the development of regional infrastructure.

In summary, the following conclusions can be made:

1. Civil society both in Russia and in the Vologda Oblast is developing dynamically, therefore, at present, one cannot give it a definite assessment. At the same time, it is obvious that the level of development of civil society in Russia has reached the point at which the authorities cannot ignore its requests any longer.

2. In the federal and regional levels the population is concerned about similar problems (inflation, stratification to the rich and the poor, unsatisfactory condition of housing and communal services, crime). At that, the Vologda Oblast residents, in comparison with the Russians in general, are to a greater extent dissatisfied with the condition of the housing sector.

3. The state tries to respond to the demands of the society, largely due to the protest actions held in late 2011. The main directions for

handling the key problems of the population were set out in the decrees of the RF President as of May 7, 2012. However, measures taken by the federal authorities, are characterized by a significant degree of simulation and declarative character. The final decision on almost all the issues is planned for the long term. That is why the citizens do not feel the immediate, current

positive results of the state policy. In order to avoid a new wave of protest, the authorities should take more active and consistent steps to solve the problems that are of the greatest concern of the society. The key measures in this regard should include the expansion of civil political awareness, training and direct participation.

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