

Regional sociology and management: a “roadmap” for interaction



**Valerii Vasil'evich
MARKIN**

Doctor of Sociology, Head of the Center for Regional Sociology and Conflict, Institute of Sociology, Russian Academy of Sciences (24/35, Krzhizhanovsky Street, Moscow, 117218, Russian Federation, Moscow, markin@isras.ru)

Abstract. The article considers the main directions of development of the domestic regional sociology in modern conditions. It contains several research findings of the Russian Academy of Sciences fundamental programs. The author outlines the main directions (“roadmap”) of the interaction between sociological forces and actors of regional administration. The conclusion, substantiated in the article, is that the main mechanism of interaction between regional sociology and administration subjects consists in bilateral and multilateral partnership between academic and university centers, authorities, business and non-profit organizations (NPOs). In addition, the author provides some characteristics of the potential of regional sociology in the implementation of the roadmap.

Key words: sociology of the region, sociology in the regions, social space, regional administration, interaction between sociology and administration subjects.

Domestic sociological science along with the research in national and international character is traditionally interested in regional social problems. It is caused by the fact that in the 1960–70s domestic sociology revived not only in Moscow and Leningrad; the Ural, Siberian, Volga schools formed actively as well.

So, the societal problems were embodied in the primary representative material obtained directly in the regions.

Its analysis gave an opportunity to identify special, geographically-specific features, consider common features and develop a certain “mosaic” sociological picture of the country.

Over the past 25 years the new regional sociological schools have been developed, such as the Tyumen, Rostov, Stavropol, Krasnodar, Belgorod, Saratov, Saransk, Kaliningrad, Nizhny Novgorod, Yakutia, Vologda schools, etc. The distinctive feature of both old and new regional sociological schools and the guarantee of their success is their close cooperation with regional authorities, the leaders' high authority in scientific and public circle and prominence in Russian and international sociological communities. The schools leaders usually head major research groups and educational centers that train sociologists. Some specialists are demanded in the sphere of management.

Therefore, the phrase “regional sociology” in the title of the article means two interrelated aspects: regional sociology and sociology in the regions [Gorshkov, 2007: pp. 5-7].

In contrast to diverse foreign interpretations of the concept “region” (from Latin *regere* – to operate in the territorial aspect), the Russian science defines the region as a subject of the Russian Federation. The praxeological approach justifies it: the bigger subject is considered as a macro-region (for example, a “federal district” or an “economic region”), the smaller – a sub-region, an intra-regional, a local establishment (an urban *okrug*, a municipal district or a settlement).

However, it is required to further categorize the definition “region” as one of the basic concepts of sociology of the territorial community. In this context the region is a fairly isolated part of the overall social space according to certain indicators

(a complex of physical-geographical, economic, political, administrative and socio-cultural indicators) that serves as a transformer of socio-spatial regulation in the network of global (international), national (state) and local (settlement) management with the feedback in both directions [Markin, 2008, p. 130].

Therefore, the subject of regional sociology as sociology of the regions is at the intersection of these directions. Sociological studies in this aspect should identify the special features that the region has in its social configuration (specific conditions, factors and mechanisms of social organization of human activity in a particular territorial community), its regional identity in the aspect of social differentiation by the territorial indicator, and the involvement of the community in the societal connections (network), i.e. the socio-spatial integration (consolidation). In this case the scientists single out two sides of social organization of regional communities: object (conditions, vectors and factors of human activity in this territory) and subject (actors and their relationships (interactions) in the localized regional social space and in the relations with the external environment in relation to this region.

The general field of interaction between regional sociology (understood as sociology of the regions and sociology in the regions) and regional management subjects (authorities, business-structures, non-profit organizations) is territorially differentiated social space of Russia, considered in a broad sense as geo-socio-economic space, where various social institutions and social actors interact.

The Center of Regional Sociology and Conflict Resolution at the Institute of Sociology of the Russian Academy of Sciences in collaboration with other academic institutions and regional partners according to the programs of fundamental research of RAS no. 27–28 “Fundamental problems of spatial development of the Russian Federation: an interdisciplinary synthesis” (in 2009–2011, the coordinator – Academician A.G. Granberg), the Program no. 31 “Role of space in the modernization of Russia: natural and socio-economic potential” (in 2012–2014, the coordinator – Academician V.M. Kotlyakov) and the Program of fundamental research of the Department of Social Sciences of RAS “Economic, social and political environment of Russia in the globalizing world” (in 2007–2011) has put forward the concept of regional identity and regions’ social simulation in the discourse of differentiation and consolidation of Russia’s social space.

At the beginning of the work on the above mentioned programs two fundamental questions were raised:

- Has the transformation of social space in the new entity ended? Have its components achieved internal consistency or not? Is the process of transformation of social space far from accomplishment? Is it subject to disintegration risks?;
- Has the socio-humanistic vector become leading in the social space transformation [Lapin, Markin, Drobizheva, Hali, 2013, pp. 162-163].

Our studies show that the transformation of social space into the new entity is still far

from accomplishment and it can be subject to disintegration. To a great extent, this statement is confirmed by the answer to the question about the socio-humanistic vector, which has not become the leader in transformational processes taking place in the Russian society and in some significant regional dimension. Moreover, it is inconsistent with other vectors (economic and political), relevant factors and components of the consolidation of Russia’s social space, the interaction between the main actors on its individual space.

The transformation occurs primarily in the interests of big business (corporations) and the so-called “elite”, high income groups, which, in fact, are extraterritorial in nature and not focused on the humanistic vector. They exercise their social responsibility very limitedly in the regions where they operate, giving preference to their corporate interests. It is indicated in this survey of 450 experts conducted in 30 subjects of the Russian Federation, in all federal districts, where all the main types of regions according to their level of development (high, medium, low) are presented (*table*).

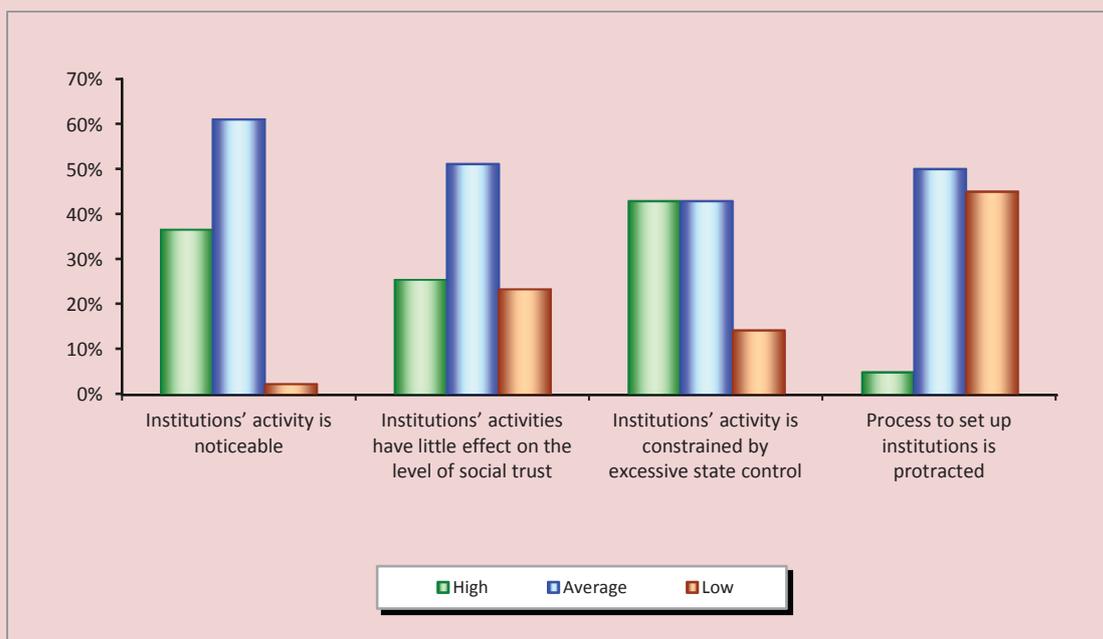
In this case, the expert evaluation has also identified the weak influence of the civic society institutions (non-profit organizations) in the regions (*figure*).

The regional government is between the rock and the hard place (big business and the population). Moreover, it is corporations that form their structures of influence in the government bodies and promotion of its members in these bodies. The people do not virtually have institutional “lobbyists” of

Evaluation of the role of the “elite” in the development of the region
 Concurrence (contradiction) of interests of the regions with plenty of resources
 (on the data of the survey of 450 experts in 30 regions of the Russian Federation, 2009)

		From the assessment of the overall development of the region		
		Average	Low	High
		Column N %	Column N %	Column N %
In the political sphere	Largely coincide, and the elite plays a leading role	48.4%	45.8%	17.6%
	Partially coincide, the elite is quite closed	48.4%	37.3%	58.8%
	The interests are opposite, the elite uses opportunities	3.2%	16.9%	23.5%
In the economic sphere	Largely coincide, and the elite plays a leading role	32.3%	30.5%	17.6%
	Partially coincide, the elite is quite closed	58.7%	40.7%	35.5%
	The interests are opposite, the elite uses opportunities	9.4%	28.8%	47.1%
In the spiritual-cultural sphere	Largely coincide, and the elite plays a leading role	30.8%	39.7%	38.9%
	Partially coincide, the elite is quite closed	53.8%	46.6%	55.6%
	The interests are opposite, the elite uses opportunities	15.4%	13.8%	5.6%

Assessment of civic society institutions in the region and their impact on the level of trust and solidarity in the regional society, observance of the rights and freedoms of citizens



their interests, they are sometimes forced to demonstrate their will quite spontaneously in the form of protests, etc. The bodies of regional and municipal management have to meet this challenge.

What role does sociology play in cooperation with the regional administration, including not only government bodies, but also business-structures and civic society institutions? What kind of interaction would it be?

First of all, this is continuation of basic research in the main factors of differentiation of Russia's social space and opportunities of its consolidation on the basis of shared values and coordinated activities of the main actors in the vector of socio-humanistic approach to the processes of transformation of the Russian society, in relation to regional features.

This direction, in our opinion, requires further work according to the programs of the Russian Academy of Sciences with extensive involvement of regional partners, especially authorities, business structures and NGOs.

Fundamental research should be associated with a wide range of pilot studies of this direction, such as research in Eurasian content, differentiation and consolidation of the Russian space; characteristics of transformational processes in the azimuths "North–South" and "median" regions of Central Russia, Volga Region, the Urals on the basis of the macro-regional approach, etc.

Applied research should be based on fundamental and pilot studies. The software solutions to the problems of social significance should be developed together with government bodies, business-structures and NGOs.

The main mechanism of interaction between regional sociology and subjects of regional governance is two- and multilateral partnership between academic and university centers, authorities, business and NGOs.

The main areas for partnership are the following:

1. Programs of fundamental research of the RAS; joint research grants, primarily in regional areas. Nowadays, these areas are indicated only in the RFH with the co-financing from regional authorities. It is necessary to expand this practice among other scientific and public funds, including the newly formed Russian Science Foundation.

2. Joint participation in tenders for state and municipal orders of social problematics.

3. Joint scientific and educational centers at the leading regional universities, which activity has recently become widespread.

4. Participation in dissertation councils for sociology and other social sciences. Today, though their number has decreased, the requirements to them have increased significantly, therefore the assessment of theses (leading organizations, opponency, reviewing, comments on abstract, etc.) and work in these councils demands professional competence and inter-regional cooperation.

5. Cooperation with foreign sociological centers on the basis of comparative regional studies, including those on issues of border (cross-border) territories.

6. Formation of regional test sites for the development and testing of joint projects, preparation and implementation of model-based software solutions for the most significant social problems.

The “road map” of this interaction has the following directions. The socio-humane estimate of draft laws and other normative legal acts of social significance should be of great importance along with legal and financial-economic assessment. Probably, it is necessary to start implementing this initiative in the regions and then in the country, as a whole. The main indicator is social efficiency of a draft law or another normative legal act, which requires appropriate methodological and methodical study.

We should also pay attention to the sociological component of the monitoring evaluating the activities of regional government bodies and other social establishments including business and civil society institutions. Moreover, under the RF President decrees no. 825 (modern edition no. 1199) and no. 607 since 2007 this work has been conducted in all RF subjects and single municipalities under the auspices of the Ministry of Regional Development of the Russian Federation.

The Institute of Sociology of the Russian Academy of Sciences has a direct contact with the executors of this monitoring, but there remain some substantial methodological and methodical issues requiring a solution. It is important to carry out such monitorings on social responsibility in the regions (together with the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of the Russian Federation) and on the influence of civil society institutions in the regions (the Civic Chamber of the Russian Federation).

There is also a sociological component of the law enforcement practices monitoring in the regions.

The Institute of Sociology of the Russian Academy of Sciences has some experience of such cooperation with the Institute of Legislation and Comparative Law under the Government of the Russian Federation and the Russian Law Academy of the Russian Federation Ministry of Justice by single RF subjects. This experience is important to spread in other regions.

Undoubtedly, it is important to study the sociological component of regional programs, especially those meeting social requirements, and the development of appropriate model-software complexes.

The question is raised: does regional sociology have sufficient potential to implement such an ambitious task? In our opinion, it has the potential:

- three specialized sociological institutes of the Russian Academy of Sciences and a number of developed sociological departments in other academic institutions;
- university sociology is presented in almost all regions; only more than 80 state classical universities train specialists in sociology and have such departments and research centers (laboratories, groups);
- more than 10 nationwide centers, conducting the population surveys, have an extensive regional network (branches, representative offices);
- a number of information-analytical centers in the government bodies, corpo-

rations, NGOs have specialized sociological departments that are associated with regional themes (approximately more than 200);

– consulting, marketing, recruitment agencies and PR centers (public relations), which also has sociological groups or individuals (approximately 1000);

– the Russian Scientific Fund, the Russian Foundation for Basic Research, the Russian Humanitarian Scientific Fund and other scientific and public funds, which support sociological projects in the regions;

– the Russian Society of Sociologists, the Russian Society of Professional Sociologists, the Russian Sociological Association, the Society of Sociologists and Demographers, the Sociological Society named after M.M. Kovalevsky and other sociological scientific and public organizations with their regional representatives (many scientists are members of several organizations).

Thus, the potential is really significant, and its implementation requires coordination.

We should pay attention to the structure and forms and develop relevant proposals for the sociological community in Russia.

The interest of the authorities and other actors in the regional governance is crucial for the implementation of this roadmap. Where the government is interested, there is effective cooperation. This is particularly true in the regions with a high level of socio-economic development. Unfortunately, we have to admit that in the regions with a middle and low level the sociologists' initiatives are delayed.

As it is known, due to the renewal of elections of RF subjects heads, the new order of formation of bodies and heads of local self-government in 2014–2015 the elective campaigns will be carried out in most regions. The sociologists will have opportunities to promote their electoral ideas (voters' preferences survey) and to participate in the formation of social strategies of regional development and their implementation mechanisms.

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