

## Strategies and Practices of Collective Self-Preservation of Population in Northern Villages: Historical Experience and Modern Realities\*



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**Abstract.** The paper is a result of the scientific theoretical and empirical research conducted by the author on the issue of collective self-preservation of local societies on the territory of the Arkhangelsk Oblast. The rise of general welfare is achieved at the expense of weakening family ties, deformation of the demographic structure of the population and, as a result, aggravating demographic risks, various social deviations, destruction of traditional bonds that helped people survive for centuries thanks to social solidarity and mutual aid. Social risks entail, directly or indirectly, all other risks, making them particularly dangerous for the society. However, the society in historical perspective has formed the mechanisms of protection against the negative impact of social and other shocks. These mechanisms are especially pronounced in local resident populations and they currently remain in the form of social control, social solidarity, and other forms of collective protection. There also remain intra-social mechanisms, which in the conditions of remoteness from social services and law enforcement agencies make people stay active and offer mutual aid. This side of social life is not only of scientific interest (as the tradition that is being left behind), but also of practical importance – because the social and cultural potential that is preserved in this way can be developed and used for organizing the life of remote settlements. Based on the study of the history of the region, the author identifies socio-cultural risks that may arise among the population in remote and

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sparsely populated territories under the influence of various external and internal challenges. This concept served as the basis for the development and implementation of the program for field study of the policies and practices aimed to overcome these risks by local resident communities in 2015.

**Key words:** remote and sparsely populated areas, rural population, Arkhangelsk Oblast, socio-cultural risks, collective self-preservation, social history, field study.

The Russian village, peasantry, and rural population have always been a very popular research subject for economists, sociologists, historians, and culturologists. Now, when they reflect upon the consequences of the crisis phenomena in the social, economic, political and cultural life, this attention remains and continues to increase. It is due to the fact that any discussion about the current state of the Russian society and about the reasons for the failure of the reforms raises the question of “national mentality”. And if marginalized social group sooner or later change their mentality while adapting to the needs of modernized society, the traditionalist layers such as the peasants showed remarkable tenacity in maintaining their ideas and way of life during all the reforms and revolutions.

It seems that the peasantry, having its own special type of mentality and subordinate position in relation to the authorities and other social groups [14], was never an actor in political life. But it formed the majority of Russia’s population until the mid-twentieth century, and as American sovietologist M. Lewin, a native of the Soviet Union, points out, the peasantry in itself was the most important factor in the development of events in the Russian history [16]. Any changes occurred under the influence of the response of a relatively coherent multi-million peasant

society to coercive measures undertaken by the state for the purposes of modernization (no matter who the initiator of those measures was: Peter the Great, Pyotr Stolypin or Joseph Stalin). In 1917–1920, this reaction resulted in the archaization of the village, and it led to inversion and return of communalism in social life and agricultural production in economic life [2, 13, 15, 16].

However, M. Lewin proposed to take into account the fact that as a result of accelerated social mobility, the new elite throughout most of the 20th century was represented mainly by the descendants of the peasant environment, the carriers of the corresponding mentality, perceptions and social expectations. They brought to the implementation of the modernization project “their psychology, their ideas, their mentality, their archaic spontaneity” [see: 3], which, in turn, indicated the necessity of modernization [2].

Since all of the tumultuous events in Russia’s history throughout the 20th century happened during the periods of powerful urbanization processes, and their main participants descended from the peasant community in the first, or, seldom, the second or third generation, this explains the interest of foreign researchers in the village of the post-perestroika period. In the 1990s and early 2000s, several large collaborative studies were

conducted in Russia, one of them was the Russian-British sociological project “Study of the social structure of the Soviet and post-Soviet village” and the project “Industrialized village: on the transformation of rural life style in post-socialist societies”.

In the framework of these projects financial support was granted primarily to the documentation of “oral history” rather than to archival research; that was why a unique material was assembled, which allows scientists of different fields (sociologists, ecologists, political scientists, culturologists, lawyers, historians, economists) to understand the transitional period not only from the point of view of intellectuals, but also “through the eyes of commoners”.

Such a holographic study of the modern village, which makes attempts to understand the issues that have historical background (the inclusion of local communities and individuals in the “advanced society”, the consequences of the “major demographic transition”, a powerful socio-cultural and economic modernization, and so on), shows some shortcomings “inherited” from the times of Radishchev and the revolutionary democrats, which tended to idealize and, at the same time, to sympathize with the peasants, and which saw the “root of all evil” in government policy.

Describing the village, modern scholars point out the “lack of independence, lack of initiative, and hope for a strong leader”, seeing it as the “legacy of the Soviet regime, which the village, in turn, received from tsarist Russia, its predecessor”. “The paternalistic policy of the state, which was conducted through the peasant commune up to 1917,

and through the collective-state farm system after the revolution, taught people to hope that every problem would be solved for them” – this is how the authors describe their experiences from the study of the Siberian village [11, p. 64]. Since such explanation does not correspond to the accepted ideas about the special nature of Russian Siberians, another explanation was found. It turns out that in addition to the negative impact of the “kolkhoz-sovkhoz system”, the mentality of the villagers was affected by a large number of immigrants living here, who had come from “Smolensk and Belarusian villages, where only 50 years before the founding of [the village] there had been serfdom” [11, p. 64].

The head of the administration in one of the regions in the Republic of Bashkortostan thinks that the obstacle to a smooth work of local governments caused by the destruction of relations in the village can be found in migration processes, and, in his opinion, the repressions of the Stalin era (dekulakization, etc.) were their main facilitator [6]. In the early 20th century, migration was not so high, however, there were few people who wanted to be elected for administration posts – perhaps, due to an increasing confidence in the law that reduced the importance of self-government. When after the revolution there was the weakening and delegitimization of state power, then self-preservation institutions contributed to the reconstruction of a powerful system of self-government in the village, which, adapting to new state requirements, had to be destroyed in hard ways.

Thus, there remains a tradition to think that everything is bad because it is the result

of serfdom or a heritage of the Soviet regime. And for those groups of peasants that were traditionally considered as a positive result of free development (Pomors, Sibiriyaks), one more reason was added that there was another external influence in the form of immigrants who brought with them a negative opportunistic mentality. This whole range of reasons, as believed, influenced the rejection of those freedoms that were granted by the era of reforms; the rejection was explained by the fact that “the village has no other way to defend its interests then through resistance and distrust of any actions of the authorities” [10, p. 36].

It is difficult to blame serfdom (which was applied only on 40% of the rural population of Russia, was abolished a century and a half ago and brought many positive aspects – in the form of economic, social and cultural innovation imposed on the population). And nowadays the time of collective farms is not perceived negatively, which is associated with community tradition that continues to be idealized. In search of the reasons for the failure of reforms, one could consider the knowledge about the negative perception of any innovation by the peasantry (for example, introduction of potatoes by Peter the Great and up to the use of harvesting machines). V.O. Klyuchevsky said that the Great Russians had higher resistance of traditional forms due to the peculiarities of natural-climatic conditions; L.V. Milov explained this by the presence of minimized surplus product typical of Russia [18], which formed the fear of any innovation, any departure from time-tested standards.

Here it is necessary to consider regional features of separate peasant groups that cannot be ignored despite all the outward similarities of the peasantry existing due to its quality as a social framework. It is difficult, for example, to compare the peasants of the north-eastern districts of the Arkhangelsk Oblast not only with farmers in South Asia or in the Voronezh Oblast, but even with those in the Vologda Oblast. Thus, less adaptability to economic, social and cultural change is typical of peasants who did not know the “yoke of serfdom” (which, among other things, included the civilizational influence of the landlords, noble culture) and who were used to expect assistance from the government in certain circumstances.

Many interpretations of modern processes in the village can be subjected to critical analysis from socio-historical positions. But generalization is not the task of the historian. Therefore, the present paper provides its author’s understanding of the processes of “survival” in the conditions of one more variant of modernization of the Russian people living in remote and sparsely populated territories of the North of European Russia, who showed and show amazing examples of collective self-preservation in the conditions of any and most severe crises.

Peasants are commonly understood as representatives of the social groups involved in subsistence or subsistence-commodity agricultural production based on family farms (households) existing in a specific cultural and natural context [14]. The term is viewed as outdated. Sociologists and economists increasingly use the term “rural population”,

because for various reasons the majority of those employed at present in the agricultural sector are wage workers, and among other inhabitants of the rural areas there are a lot of misfits who were thrown out of city life under the impact of the crisis of the 1990s. The village is still the place of refuge for those who could not find their place in urban life, which throughout the 20th century was becoming more and more attractive for rural youth.

It is necessary to mention the fact that not only journalistic but often scientific literature based on statistical data and on the results of sociological surveys about “social wellbeing” of the population is permeated by decadent mood and assess the situation in the contemporary Russian countryside (primarily in the Non-Black Earth regions) as degrading.

Sociological polls show a puzzling “trend of social pathology and disorganization (alcoholism, crime, etc.), which today is much more pronounced in rural areas than in the city” [10, p. 24]. It is noted that rural population in assessments of its current state and in social expectations “is dominated by dark and dim shades” [5, 7, 22, 26]. Doctor of Economics L.V. Bondarenko wrote in 2005: “The village is, perhaps, going through the most dramatic period in its history. It was pushed back in its development by decades. Negative effects of the pre-perestroika period were exacerbated, new ones have emerged and are now developing – unemployment, mass poverty, lack of access to education, health care, culture, trade, personal services, and socio-psychological stress generated by the retreat from previously conquered positions and by insecurity, “the lack of light at the end

of the tunnel”, moral degradation [5, p. 69]. Based on specific figures, the conclusions are made that point out rural residents’ incomes lagging behind the incomes of urban residents, the reduction of rural settlements in Russia, high natural population decline due to many factors including the poor provision of rural settlements with the main objects of the social sphere, their inaccessibility due to the remoteness and underdevelopment of the transport infrastructure.

Thus, formal methods for the study of social and socio-economic conditions in the Northern village (and not only at the present stage, since we can refer to the publications of a similar nature made in the early 20th century) give a negative picture of what is happening.

Positive assessments of the village can be found, perhaps, only in the works of ethnographers, who, due to the specifics of the subject, study the remaining traditionalist forms, perceiving them most often as archaic and obsolete. However, based on her own field studies conducted in the 1970s–1990s, the author has seen in such traditional forms of material and spiritual life restored in extreme economic conditions of the 1920s the manifestation of self-preservation technologies that focused on the social, cultural and material survival [23]. J. Scott considered such resistance to innovation, the preservation of alternative ways of existence in collective memory, the willingness, if necessary, to revive them – as a way of passive resistance imposed by innovation [21]. However, according to the Israeli sociologist Sh. Eisenstadt, demonstrative rejection of imposed innovation can have

another meaning: to reflect “the process of reconstructing a number of existing [social and cultural] models” and their preparation for functioning in the new reality, that is, the creation of new forms of social life [29].

The study conducted by Yu.M. Plyusnin presents a contrast to grim assessments of the current state of the village (these assessments can be explained by a desire of rural residents to lower their financial situation when participating in a formal sociological survey, to describe their current situation negatively as compared to the past, this desire is generally characteristic of the rural population). Yu.M. Plyusnin studied for several years the system of local government in local communities “from within”, through participant observation [20], and he proposes “the hypothesis that the level of development of local self-government is determined by the influence of the mechanisms of isolation”, noting that “a more developed self-government” is evident in remote, local villages, that is, “in the presence of isolation conditions” [19]. Of course, the negative signs of modern rural life cannot be hidden; however, in the opinion of Yu.M. Plyusnin, they are exaggerated by less careful and thoughtful observers, and they are most commonly associated with an “alien” element, which (as after 1918) swept the Russian village in the 1990s.

The difference in the conclusions when studying one and the same object (the modern village in the Non-Black Earth area) is explained by the difference in research approaches. The formal sociological survey or interpretation of statistical information creates a different view than the participant

observation, in-depth interviews and processing of the obtained results with the use of thick description procedures, i.e. the methods commonly used in ethnography. Researchers V.G. Vinogradskii [8], and N.N. Kozlova [13] substantiate these techniques as applied to the study of the contemporary village.

Speaking about J. Scott, T. Shanin highlighted his ethnographic field work [27]. Scott’s conclusions on the “passive resistance” of peasants to any actions of the authorities as the only available weapon they have in the struggle [21] are widely used to interpret social history and modern reality of the Russian village. However, with all similar forms of resistance, it is hardly fair to compare the peasants of South-East Asia with the Russian peasants, especially the peasants of Northern Russia, which had virtually nothing to give, and the government in relation to them often used paternalistic policy, one of the forms of which was the consensus between the government and population in order to prevent a pronounced civil disobedience.

Researchers into the Russian village find J. Scott’s analysis important as it is a methodological tool to interpret various forms of social strategies of the peasant population that are observed by applying ethnographic methods with the help of historical knowledge, involving a large volume of comparative approaches in both synchronous and diachronic dimension. For example, when using “family” and other “oral histories” it is necessary to consider “the concealment of information” in front of “strangers”, as Scott noted, and when interpreting the results of participant

observation and written stories, it is necessary to use the available historical material.

In general, the fact that historical and ethnographic research focuses on the explanation of the fate of the Northern Russian village was evident at the peak of “perestroika”, at a conference held in Vologda in 1989 [1]. New approaches to the 20th century village in Vologda continue to evolve [12, 4]. However, these studies of the Non-Black-Earth village still primarily relate to the population of large villages. The author of the present paper has focused her attention on the territories which retained their population (in more ancient times as well) largely through the efforts of the state; she also focuses on those villages that have almost disappeared from the list of settlements, in order to find out what makes people hold on to this land.

The research that forms the basis for this article is not consistent with the general mainstream of peasant studies due to the specifics of the peasant population of the Northern territories: the peasants of these territories are not engaged in production activities and they are often engaged in completely non-agricultural activities. There is reason to believe that by the early 20th century in the Northern regions of European Russia there was no peasantry in its genuine form (not as a class, but as a socio-economic group) because due to the climatic conditions, the activities of the rural population did not have exclusively agricultural orientation. Any peasant family directed part of its workforce to non-agricultural work and factory work. If non-agricultural orientations of the peasantry in Central Russia began to develop in the post-

reform period, then in the European North commercial orientation of economic activity of the peasants had a long history. For peasants living in the Northern counties of the region, agriculture was only an additional occupation, which they used only in case of reduction of other kinds of earnings. This happened, for example, in the third quarter of the 19th century in connection with the reduction and elimination of state industry in the region. The peasant of Central Russia had to engage in non-agricultural activities to earn money to pay taxes. The Northern peasant needed earnings to purchase bread and other food commodities, this fact contributed to his desire to engage in wage labor. V.V. Bervi-Flerovskii, the economist-populist, wrote about the early proletarianization of the peasants in the North in the middle of the 19th century [25, p. 246].

We can say that agricultural aspirations here were formed during the Soviet time under the influence of collective farms that, as we know, were very difficult to leave. However, the remoteness of most of the Northern villages, poor transport links resulted in the fact that farming here was not only difficult because of natural-climatic features, but also useless, because sometimes it was impossible to take the manufactured products out in order to sell them. It was especially difficult in the market conditions when products produced in this way became uncompetitive compared to products imported even from “far abroad”.

In his research, the author proceeds from the fact that in the 1990s, the Russian village faced events similar to other “troubled” times (including after the revolution of 1917). The government has relaxed its control over

the economic, social and cultural life of the population. Transport links, health and education, and other forms of livelihood (trade, disaster relief, control of deviations) established in the Soviet times were damaged. This particularly affected the Northern territories, which since the 1970s were “sentenced” to a reduction in the number of rural settlements; in the 1990s, the program for “resettlement from the North” was not implemented to the fullest only due to the lack of funding.

The situation after “perestroika” was fraught with the fact that the village became “a refuge” for a large part of people who in the period of intensive socialist urbanization left their homes, but in the conditions of deindustrialization and deconversion in the 1990s lost their jobs and experienced other difficulties in life. It should be recognized that it was not the most successful city dwellers who came back, this fact created additional tension in the villages.

Specific **self-preservation strategies of local societies** (by which the author means the population of remote and sparsely populated Northern territories) were formed under the influence of colonization of those territories and those risks and dangers, which the population had to face due to adverse climatic factors.

A certain part of indigenous population of the Russian North settled down here in the conditions of the so-called “climatic optimum” that allowed settlers to engage in the usual activities. As the climate was cooling, the population adapted to the new conditions economically and culturally.

Migration processes that occurred in later time (from the late 17th century), were associated with political environment: due to the repressive policy of the state. It was old believers that came to live here. They tended to settle in remote areas. They were engaged in farming in the regions that were not suitable for that, and they dispersed in large Northern territories. Sparsely populated settlements of old believers were separated by vast roadless areas, and they consciously maintained such remoteness and inaccessibility. However, it was the old believers that began to engage in commodity-money relations, because they were interested in obtaining revenues to pay taxes to the government, which gave them the right to live relatively freely and to practice their faith. Agriculture in this zone of risky farming did not give the desired earnings. Therefore, the Russian population of the North sought to engage in new activities, penetrating deeper into the territories occupied, for example, by the Nenets, and creating competition in herding and in marine and forest hunting, and fishing. Another way of earning the money needed for the payment of taxes and other purposes was found in urban occupations: factory work, construction, service sector and so on.

Due to the specifics of population settlement, there emerged several groups of risks:

1. On the part of the authorities (officials) the danger was in the fact that a great part of the population belonged to the split.
2. We can assume that in the pre-Imperial and early Imperial periods, the population of such sparsely populated and remote villages

was attacked by robbers and bands of deserters, many of whom emerged during the grand constructions of the times of Peter the Great. The danger of an armed attack came from the neighboring population, who wanted to expel economic competitors from their territories.

3. Many risks resulted from the violation of an intra-society balance by the members of farming communities who lived outside them for a long time (while serving in the army, leaving home to find employment) and exposed to the influence of other cultures. Under the influence of these processes, the existing system of social control (and self control) was gradually undermined.

Historically, local societies developed a system for protection from these dangers.

#### **In relation to the authorities**

- As a result of moving towards each other's interests, there emerged *a system of consensus*, involving mutual concessions on the part of the state and the population. Local communities received the right of autonomy in addressing certain issues (for example, organization of internal life in accordance with "customary law"; the right to decide who was subject to the conscript obligation and other services to the tsar) in exchange for the payment of taxes and execution of state obligations: construction of roads and crossings, their maintenance, etc. On the part of the state that consensus was due to the inability to control the life of sparsely populated settlements scattered over vast territories. With the consolidation of the bureaucracy and strengthening of the rule of law, all population groups were included in the national legal space.

- A system of collective responsibility was formed, it was acceptable to both the authorities and population. The government interact with local communities via elected representatives, which in the case of violation of the established consensus answered to the authorities. For its part, the population guaranteed that its representative had protection if there was a possibility to be punished by the authorities. The authorities (both tsarist and early Soviet ones) understood that; "worldly crimes" (e.g., collective felling of state forests, distribution of grain and other resources harvested according to state order) were punished economically: the headman was fined or part of his property confiscated, and the population compensated the losses to their representative. If the government's demands were too hard to execute or economic punishment was too severe for the population, such collective responsibility was violated and the representative of local self-government was "given" to the authorities for execution of punishment ("to suffer for his people").

**Protection from "foreigners"** was originally expressed in a possible system of defense against possible attacks. Judging by later reports, it looked like this: if the village was attacked (for example, a punitive detachment came, as happened during the suppressions of riots) a signal usually the alarm bell, was given, and all men, armed, ran to the rescue. Later this method of self-defense was transformed into collective aid, for example, in a fire emergency. During the civil war there were precedents of creating self-defense units to protect their villages from requisitions, robbery by soldiers and squads of deserters. It was

also a relapse of collective memory, when the peasants took up arms together – first against gangs of robbers, and then against wolves. Such a system of self-defense was used by the state as well, it attracted the population to assist in catching fugitives.

History shows that in the pre-state times, local societies could **protect** themselves from **their own** deviant members with the help of exile and even murder. Later, in fear of responsibility for vigilante justice, the “unwanted” individuals were surrendered to the authorities or given passports to depart. It should be noted that some “deviations” were positive in the eyes of the state. For example, the desire to be engaged in other activities, to obtain education, to go to another bar, etc. Soon there emerged a kind of balance: the people that were unwanted and for various reasons unnecessary in a peasant environment were pushed out of it and found their place in an “extended” society. Some of these misfits, usually forced ones, returned to the village (after military service, apprenticeship and seasonal work in town); they were forced to conformal behavior with the use of social control, as demanded by tradition. Others, breaking away from their roots, came back to the village due to the circumstances. The return was especially widespread from cities that suffered from starvation during the revolution and civil war. Members of the same community who came back often carried with them new ideas that were alien to the traditions of the local society. Group pressure (negative stereotyping, neglect, defamatory penalties and other sanctions did not always have the desired effect on such people. Their fellow

villagers tried to get rid of them in other ways; sometimes, they, by agreement, accused such unwanted people in front of the authorities. There existed more severe punishments against fellow countrymen whose behavior threatened the well-being and peace of others (such cases were described by the author using the materials of the post-revolutionary Northern village [24]).

The above results of the study of social and cultural history of the region served as the basis for determining those socio-cultural risks that may emerge among the population of remote and sparsely populated territories under the influence of the different nature of external and internal challenges. Based on the findings and on her own experience of field work carried out in the 1980s – 1990s, the author executed the program for studying the strategies and practices to overcome these risks by locally residing communities, the program was implemented in 2015 in remote settlements of the Arkhangelsk Oblast.

This present paper describes the results for the villages of three districts – Leshukonsky, Mezensky and Pinezhsky. The area of these districts is 92.3 km<sup>2</sup> and the population is slightly more than 40 thousand people (that is 0.4 inhabitants per km<sup>2</sup>), and it is continuously decreasing. The population lives in 225 villages, rural settlements and hamlets; there are two urban settlements (Mezen and Kamenka), former town of Pinega (now it is a rural settlement) and two more regional centers – Leshukonskoye and Karpogory. The total population of these “towns” is 11.5 thousand people, i.e. more than a quarter of the population of the districts. In the remaining

220 settlements there are approximately 140 people in each. But this is an average value. For example, in the villages of the “most urbanized” Leshukonsky District there are 4–5 times fewer residents than this figure.

Back in the 19th century, these territories were populous (by northern standards) and wealthy. The Pomor crafts gave way to profitable industrial timber production. In the Soviet times there were many forest settlements, and corrective labor camps, the inhabitants of which were engaged in the felling and floating of timber to the mills. Transport connection was established: in summer – on the Pinega and Mezen rivers, in winter – by the “winter road”. Due to unorganized felling, rivers became unnavigable and were only used for rafting timber. Air transport in the 1970s became the most accessible and convenient, it connected the district centers with Archangelsk and with large villages. In the 1990s, local aviation almost completely collapsed, and the roads were in a very bad condition. Only the settlements along the middle course of the Pinega River were in a better condition, because there was a railroad there.

In other places and only in winter, owner drivers at their own risk began to carry passengers in the little “Paz” buses on the roads fit only for tractors and trucks. In the 2000s the situation began to improve: first, winter roads were used for passenger traffic, then automobile roads began to be built and they were interrupted by numerous crossings of the river. Currently, the number of these crossings has been steadily declining due to

the construction of pontoon bridges, and across small rivers – permanent bridges. This significantly improved the life of local population; however, it actually means economic surrender: bridges dam up the river and timber rafting becomes impossible. Timber delivery by motor transport significantly increases the cost of these raw materials, making timber processing unprofitable. Once populous settlements engaged in timber industry become desolate. However, the village continues to live. Collectivization, the program for the elimination of “unpromising” villages conducted in the 1970s, the “transition to a market economy” in the 1990s – these events were unable to destroy the village completely.

In order to clarify forms and methods of collective self-preservation of the populations, we chose the villages with the old-time Russian population located along the roads under construction. Here the changes are characterized by the greatest dynamics: traditional forms of social life coexist with the “fruits of civilization” that suddenly became available due to the presence of roads and fiber optic lines that are laid along them and that provide the village with the Internet and mobile communications.

The study of **the level of demand for historical collective experience in the modern conditions** was conducted by interviewing the population using a specially compiled questionnaire. Respondents answered questions regarding their historical memory about the past forms of intercommunity solidarity, about the way of its maintenance in the 1990s and at present.

Of course, it was difficult to expect full analogies – social experience gets differentiated depending on the “challenges” of reality. And yet, the destruction of social and economic stability existing in the 1970s – 1980s was obviously similar to the events of the post-revolutionary years of the early 20th century.

It seems doubtful to regain the lost stability due to the economic decline of the Northern village, its depopulation in the natural-demographic aspect and in connection with the rising trend of geographical and social mobility, which takes the form of forced “abandonment” because of unemployment; and also – in connection with the futility of the village in the eyes of economists and politicians. However, the village continues to live, and, in the opinion of its residents and migrant city dwellers in the first generation, it could partially save its human potential, if there was employment there.

We can say that pensions that are quite high in Northern areas, child allowances and unemployment benefits are a good help for the villagers, given the fact that their needs are rather modest. The activity of small business contributes to the opportunities to earn money in summer and autumn through organized procurement of mushrooms, berries, and other “gifts of nature”. The livestock products (milk, meat) remain in demand, though to a lesser extent. The need to help children who live in town and certain “fashion” to improve rural life are important driving forces for the production of products not only for their own consumption but also for sale. Laminated floors, plastic windows are now common in many traditional rural houses. Washing

machines, water pumps and plumbing are now common things; there is frequently a local sewer. We should make reference to the historically established tradition of the Northern village, when samples of “urban” life (before the revolution – samovar, crockery, clothing, etc.; in the late Soviet time – urban furniture and the layout of the house, bed linen, wallpaper, painted floors) won over the tastes of the population faster than economic and social innovation.

The modern dissemination of cultural and social innovation is linked to the influence of external “fashion”. This is the influences not so much of the “city” as of the standards of living that are brought by new “seasonal workers”. Most often it is men who do not want to leave the village and work in shifts. As a rule, they earn much money and aim to equip their rural life according to the urban fashion. Local entrepreneurs (usually from the district center) respond quickly to such requests and provide the necessary goods and services. Unfortunately, the requests are different. In some villages, where “seasonal work” (in modern language – “shift work”) is not common and the fashion for beautifying the house interior has not become widespread, there retained to a greater degree the need for alcohol, which is brought “on commission” by “businessmen” from the nearest large settlement.

Shift work, which is becoming widespread, leads to significant property stratification of the population. If the household has an initiative and industrious man as a breadwinner, then the family prefers to stay in the village (even if it has a city apartment, which is usually occupied

by adult children), it is well-off and its life is prosperous. Nowadays, some men can find work even in the village. But in addition to specific professional skills that are usually acquired through the experience of urban life (knowledge of electricity, mechanics, construction), in this case, it is necessary to have some “start-up capital” like a tractor, car, boat or snowmobile. With these vehicles, rural residents can be employed by the administration to remove snow from the roads, for example. Due to the fact that districts have almost no internal municipal transport, people who have their own boats and cars can take their fellow villagers to the district center or regional center, to the railway station, hospital or shop.

It is well-known that there is a significant gender and age imbalance in the northern village. Compared to the 1970s, when this imbalance has become particularly evident in the conditions of rapid urbanization, the modern village has fewer people of senile age (they are taken to town by their relatives, and those who do not have any relatives are often placed in old people’s homes) and fewer children. Although in recent years, with the introduction of the “maternity capital”, many women whose children grew up and left the village to study in the city decided to give birth to another child, because life without children “is boring in the village”. And this has become a trend: according to the informants, they are motivated by the “maternity capital”, which can be used, for example, in helping their older children to purchase housing; they are also motivated by privileges granted by the government and local authorities to large families.

Many rural residents would like to take the children in foster care or adopt them, but due to the lack of schools in their villages, the departments of custody and guardianship do not satisfy their requests.

There remains a higher rate of male population in the village observed in the 1970s. In the 1990s, it even increased due to the fact that the men who were less able to adapt to new socio-economic conditions returned from cities to their home villages. In addition, men find living in the countryside more attractive than women who find the weight of domestic work burdensome and resent unsettled domestic routine.

The circumstances create a problem caused by the narrowing of traditional social contacts. If young people, when going to the city to study or work and using online dating sites can find themselves a “date”, then for middle-aged people it is not so easy. However, in rural areas, a lonely person or single-parent family find it difficult to live. It is usual practice when middle-aged women (single, divorced or widows) “take home” a man who does all the necessary men’s work. When the man “falls off the wagon” (starts drinking), the housewife “throws” him out and “takes home” another one. It is difficult to say that in this case “loose morals” are to be blamed or that there is a “consumer” attitude toward the man-worker. It is possible to refer to the explanation of similar processes in the environment of the Nenets-nomads made by ethnologist A.V. Golovnev: in his opinion, the ease of family transformations is a way of social maneuvering of the residents in relatively closed societies aimed at saving precious

family resources and the need to get rid of interference in this regard by terminating the failed marriage partnership [9, p. 43].

At the same time, in the villages there are quite a lot of “decent” single men who are not able to bring a wife from another place and do not wish to enter into marriage or cohabitation with their female neighbors, who are often their distant relatives. The old marriage tradition was broken, and currently it is new men rather than women who come to live in the village after their marriage. It happens that the potential rural “bridegroom” meets a woman by correspondence (on their own initiative or with the help of friends and relatives); in this case, women prefer to bring him back with her rather than move to a village that is unknown to her. The reason is not only difficult living conditions that primarily affect women, but also the absence of employment for women, and they cannot risk it, especially if they do not rely on their husbands in this matter. Even 15–20 years ago, when the kolkhoz-sovkhoz system was collapsing, in the villages there mostly remained paid employment for women that was related to services (salesperson, nurse, teacher, postal worker, librarian, club worker). Now these institutions are closed in small settlements. Education workers supply cadres for the local administration (the head and employees of the village administration and village chiefs are mostly former teachers). Centralization of schools, medical institutions and social security institutions deprives the village of jobs.

Thanks to the fruits of civilization, primarily television and the Internet, people can on their own resolve many questions and also those that

concern additional education for children and basic medical care. Almost every home has a blood pressure monitor; the injections are also made by common people (possibly, it is former health care workers who make them, but they do not have a license and do not have the right to exercise these procedures, that is why the villagers “cover” them). According to inhabitants, television programs on medical topics help them in making a diagnosis and in the initial treatment of those who fall ill.

Women do each other’s hair, men use hair clippers. Postal services are now in low demand. People prefer to use the landline, or mobile phones and Skype. The letters are conveyed to the addressee by hand, without any formalities.

The usual village care for older people in remote areas in the framework of “employment policy” is becoming an occupation. The person who takes care of four seniors (three – in the areas equated to the Far North) receives wages as a full-time “social worker”; thus, if he/she takes care of one person, then he/she receives wages on a third or a quarter of the rate. Consequently, rural residents of working age do not lose their working experience; besides, the problem of elderly people who do not want to move to relatives or to a retirement home is resolved.

Trade in remote villages is carried out by mobile shops, and not in every area (if there are not many residents in a remote and isolated little settlement, then it is unprofitable for the entrepreneur to send the transport there). In such circumstances, many purchase a bread machine and ask their fellow villagers to buy food and manufactured goods when they

go shopping in the city. In the 1990s, when trade companies began to close, the situation reminded that of the late 19th century, when merchants began to be distinguished among the uniform peasant masses. First, they sold the products produced by their fellow villagers and brought them necessary products from town; then they began delivering to the village small wholesale goods that, in their opinion, could be easily sold, and they did it in their houses. Then there emerged “shops” and “stores”. In the Soviet times, after a short period of stagnation in this issue, public and “consumer” trade was re-established. After trade was terminated, shops were empty because of the high cost of the rent. Again, like a century ago, the trade was carried out on orders and there was small wholesale trade, as well as trade “at home”.

Currently, rural trade is carried out by district consumer cooperatives (where it has been preserved) or private owners. The attitude of villagers toward the latter is negative (“the kulaks, they are profiting at our expense”); in remote villages, the attitude is positive, because entrepreneurs help people sell their products and deliver necessary goods. In private shops, the goods are often given “on the record” and it is allowed to bring the money later. If there is no trade outlet, then an entrepreneur carries out trade, including exchange (special request for berries, mushrooms, fish) through the person he/she can trust; such person is usually a relative who lives in this village.

The liquor traffic is under the conditional ban: almost every village has a group of active members consisting mainly of women and

seniors (forms may be different: “women’s committee”, “veterans’ council”, “territorial public self-government”), which hampers the uncontrolled sales of vodka.

In almost every village there are persons who sell low-quality alcohol “on tap”, their fellow villagers deal with them in other ways. For example, persistent rumors are being spread that all those involved in the underground wine trade, “end up in a bad way”: they die from cancer, or in accidents. Few believe in such “horror stories”, because the profit from this business is too great. And it is difficult to cope with these sellers officially. According to an employee of the village administration, they managed to catch one such seller red-handed; however, during the trial, none of the villagers dared give testimony against his neighbor.

Nowadays, the elements of “collective responsibility” are still present in the village. It is very difficult to identify specific cases, as the population, guided by the very “collective responsibility”, does not give away the information. They traditionally “cover” their fellow villagers from the traffic police and state agencies for hunting and fishing. They try not to bring small and household crimes to the attention of the police. If children do something wrong, people “talk with their parents”. If there are fights in the family (the husband beats his wife), their fellow villagers can “talk” to the perpetrator; sometimes they express collective “contempt” and “do not greet” this person.

Socially dangerous acts, especially thefts, committed by adults, as a rule, are not subject to social control, and in this case, police

intervention is sought. In the Soviet times, minor crimes were considered by “comrades’ courts”; in the event of more serious offenses, mobile court sessions were held, that satisfied the needs of the population in the openness of these procedures. Now, however, such appeals to the public are not applied; on the other hand, embezzlement becomes a criminal offense if the value of what was stolen is above a certain amount. This creates problems in those settlements where there are such thieves: it is not always possible to deal with them with the use of traditional or administrative measures.

In some villages, including small villages, there are hostile relations between neighbors, sometimes they become open. But they do not go beyond threats. As a rule, group psychological pressure is experienced by local entrepreneurs, sometimes by individuals “in power” – in cases when, in the opinion of the villagers, they do not act in the common interest.

If material wealth became higher thanks to the help of children or due to the shift work, the village community perceives it as normal. Moreover, there is a growing trend of reproaching those who failed and who are “poor”. In some cases, individual and collective help (to fire victims, large families with low incomes, the elderly) is provided in response to a request for such assistance and on the basis of traditional solidarity. Regarding the latter, there is a flexible transformation of the help that until recently was compulsory and irrevocable. Currently, the elderly have money (retirement benefit, assistance from urban relatives), the government funds the assistance given them, and the relationships become money-based.

In the absence of proper control, there develop “informal” economic systems, often built on the principles of moral economy [28]. They include obtaining income that is not taxable or that is not approved by the local community (for example, trade in alcohol); provision of mutual services; distribution of job orders according to cronyism (usually, a husband or other relative of the headman gets the best job order to clean the streets or a transport service job). Often there are dummy unemployed who receive benefits and at the same time have profitable informal jobs or a profitable household. It should be noted that all these are types of activities that are based on the collective, and sometimes personal experience (including that obtained in town).

Summing up the observations made, the following should be said.

Russian people are characterized by rather intensive integration into national space. This is corroborated by the fact that the population, the number of which is rather big for the vast territories, has lost its pronounced dialect features and regional-cultural identity (that are present due to cultivation in much more densely populated countries such as Germany, France, UK) thanks to school education and particularly the influence of the media. However, group communities remain at the local level due to the need for collective existence in remote areas. Thus, as government support increases, so does people’s confidence in power structures, and people quite easily abandon local forms of life support.

Initiative groups become a kind of moderators between the government and

population. These groups consist mainly of the most authoritative seniors and local intellectuals, who become involved in active community work, because the schools, clubs and other institutions in which they work are closed, and also due to the fact that educated people of retirement age remain in the villages. The government provides assistance to such groups through various structures, and these groups not so much affect the change in the economic life of the village, as maintain social control and necessary order there.

At present, external penetration is rather limited. As a rule, those who come from outside are enterprising people involved in buying local products, sometimes for business (it is trade or, more seldom, farming), which corresponds to the interests of the population. In those villages that are close to federal highways and to relatively large settlements, their dwellers are suspicious about strangers (“visitors used to be treated well, but now we are cautious about them”); in remote and inaccessible places, the attitude towards them is generally positive.

However, the increasing property stratification in traditionally tight-knit societies cannot but arouse concern. The most enterprising people leave the village for the city or are engaged in seasonal work. Along with the process of individualization, all this leads to alienation of people from community interests. Active people “of the old school” pass away, and their functions may shift into the hands of subpassionarians who remain in the village.

Apparently, it is useless to count on local societies, as “communities” that exist in some European countries (socio-territorial communities historically established and maintained at the cultural and economic level) in terms of functions, aimed at the development of life scenario for the community in general. Community-based activities noted by the author of the paper are purely social in nature, they are based on traditional solidarity based on neighbor and family feelings. Economic “basis” of cohesion is absent; in order to save the Northern village, it is necessary to offer a specific form of collective economic activities to the population.

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