

Social Capital of the Russian Region: State and Dynamics



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Abstract. Social capital is the basic characteristic of the system of social relations arising in a territorial community. In the context of ongoing global transformations, manifested both on a national scale and at the regional level, there is a need to analyze the changing social reality. We consider the concept of social capital as a promising explanatory model in the analysis of ongoing social changes. Based on this theoretical approach, the goal was set to analyze the state and dynamics of the social capital of the territorial community. The object of the study is the territorial community of the Vologda Oblast, the subject is the state and dynamics of social capital. The novelty of the work consists in obtaining analytical data by conducting a unique long-term observation, which has become, in fact, monitoring. The study used the author's methodology for determining the level of accumulated social capital based on its integral index calculated for each respondent, which allows us to identify groups of its carriers characterized by different amounts of social resources that can serve as a factor of noneconomic development. The empirical basis of the study is the results of public opinion polls conducted in 2016, 2019, 2020 and 2021 among the population of the Vologda Oblast on a multi-stage, quota-based settlement and demographic characteristics, a random sample at the stage of selecting respondents. In the course of the study, fairly stable groups were identified that maintain their boundaries throughout the observation period. The changes in the social capital index recorded during the observation period serve as an indicator of its dynamism. The influence of environmental factors, for example, the pandemic, which affected the loss of social capital, was revealed. The analysis showed that various local communities differed both in the volume of losses and in the ability to restore social ties. The least losses and faster recovery were observed

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in rural areas. The results of the study can be used in the activities of federal, regional public authorities, local governments, scientific and educational organizations in the analysis of social processes in regional territorial communities, as well as serve as a basis for further research on the subject under consideration.

Key words: social capital, indicator model, integral index, territorial community, dynamics of social capital, territoriality.

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Introduction

At present, a fundamentally new socio-political and economic situation is being formed in Russian society under the influence of a number of global circumstances, which requires understanding and analyzing the resources available in society including social resources, one of which is social capital.

In recent years, social capital has become a rather popular concept in academic theories and research, gaining influence as a basis for policy decisions necessary to shape everyday practices in order to achieve social inclusion. Widely understood in the context of social ties that influence personal interactions, it is also applicable to explain individual and group differences. It has become possible to use this concept to explain a variety of phenomena in virtually all spheres of social activity. At the same time, it cannot be called definitively established, which gives rise to different approaches to the interpretation of the phenomenon itself and leads either to its extended interpretation or to its reduction to one of the components, i.e. to the rejection of the structural approach.

In the world practice, interest in social capital is quite wide. For example, social capital is included as a sub-index in the calculation of the Global Sustainable Competitiveness Index (GSCI)¹, which

makes it possible to measure the competitiveness of countries not only through GDP. The United States has developed a social capital atlas², which contains data on social capital in every neighborhood, high school and college. Its creators believe that social capital plays an important role in a variety of outcomes, from income to health. The Atlas provides answers to questions related to social mobility. In the UK, data on social capital are collected by the Office for National Statistics³ on an ongoing basis.

The study of social capital is the research of the forms and nature of existing social ties between subjects. Social capital is a characteristic, first of all, of a territorial community, since its carriers are the inhabitants of a particular territory. The very fact that the concept emerged on the basis of the study of behavioral practices in territorial communities (Putnam, Helliwell, 1995; Callois, Schmitt, 2009; Panebianco, 2013) serves as a confirmation. This characterization of a territorial community provides information about its structural properties, about the availability of social resources and their distribution among different social groups, about the existing practices of its emergence and use, about the influence of the institutional environment, political system, religious, cultural and other factors on its condition.

¹ Social Capital Index: Map of the world. Available at: <https://solability.com/the-global-sustainable-competitiveness-index/the-index/social-capital> (accessed: March 9, 2023).

² Social Capital Atlas. Available at: <https://www.socialcapital.org> (accessed: March 12, 2023).

³ Office of National Statistics. Available at: <https://www.ons.gov.uk> (accessed: March 12, 2023).

Theoretical basis of the research

In the conditions of modernity under the influence of the trends of transition from industrial society to post-industrial society structural characteristics of society are undergoing changes (Chernysh, 2019). Social objects begin being perceived not as things, but as processes, not as existing, but as becoming. According to P. Sztompka, science asserts the position that society is not just a dynamic process, but a continuous process of change. Society, according to the scientist, “is formed rather than existing, and at the same time it is made up of events rather than objects” (Sztompka, 1991).

The development of the concept of social capital was a response to a number of accumulated problems and challenges, first of all, to economic theory. The concept of social capital is clearly manifested in the attitude toward the integration of traditional economic concepts with sociological and political science. Its inclusion in the conceptual arsenal of research can contribute to a more adequate understanding of the nature of socio-economic and political development of Russia along the innovation path (Rozhkov, 2009).

Expanding the use of the category “capital” in sociology became possible largely due to G. Becker’s concept of human capital (Becker, 1964). P. Bourdieu’s systematic analysis of social capital was also a significant step in the formation of the concept. He defined it form as “an aggregation of actual or potential resources that are associated with inclusion in strong network or more or less institutionalized relations of mutual obligations or recognition” (Bourdieu, 1985). P. Bourdieu’s approach can be called instrumental because the scientist emphasized the benefits received by individuals due to constant participation in groups in order to obtain some resource. “The benefit that is accumulated through group membership is the basis of possible solidarities” (Bourdieu, 1985).

P. Bourdieu defined social capital as a factor in social behavior. Speaking about the fields of social relations and linking them with forms of capital, he identified economic, cultural, social and symbolic capital, arguing that the distribution of capital in the space of social relations determines the social behavior of people through the formation of appropriate habitus. Habitus, representing an attitude, in relation to social capital is, first of all, trust. In our opinion, this interpretation of trust allows understanding how trust generates practices and perceptions of individuals. Since habitus preserves constancy in change, trust as a habitus is a mechanism of practices of interaction between actors in different structures. Trust enables actors occupying similar social positions to identify each other, interact with each other, build relationships (Guzhavina, 2018). The most important condition for the formation of social capital is considered to be associative activity, the role of which in the life of society was emphasized by A. de Tocqueville (Tocqueville, 1992). Modern researchers compare it to the glue that connects individuals into a single community (Buzgalin, 2011).

At present, there is a number of interpretations of social capital, characterized by methodological diversity. During the formation of the concept, theorists relied on the most significant characteristics of the phenomenon from their point of view. For instance, J. Coleman connects social capital with the organization of society, believing that it is social organization that forms social capital (Coleman, 1993). R. Putnam argues that social capital denotes the functions of social organization (Putnam et al., 1993). It was this approach that allowed him to describe different types of social ties and relations based on them. In addition, the scholar drew attention to specific forms of social organization such as trust, norms, and networks. Emphasizing the importance of networks, R. Putnam wrote that social capital is “the ties

between individuals, social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trust that flow from them” (Putnam et al., 1993).

E. Ostrom connects his interpretation of social capital with the norms and rules of interaction between individuals (Ostrom, 2000). It is these, embedded in repetitive activities, that form collective actions.

Quite often in publicist literature social capital is compared to a lubricant in the mechanism of social interactions. And the authors are not far from the truth because thanks to social capital the interactions between the parties are facilitated. According to the researchers, it happens because personalized mechanisms, such as personalized trust, are activated (Afanasiev et al., 2016).

The diversity of social ties that constitute the very essence of social capital is reflected in the classification of its types. For example, R. Putnam singled out bridging social capital, which is focused on the creation by actors of sufficiently broad ties that expand the boundaries of the group. In this case, people create wide networks of contacts with people of different status positions, which provides them with access to wide resource opportunities. R. Putnam labeled the second type as bonding, oriented to strong group ties, the purpose of which is to strengthen the identity of the group at the expense of its homogeneity (Putnam et al., 1993). The delineation of these types has important semantic significance because each generates very different externalities. F. Pichler and C. Wallace proposed a different structure of types of social capital depending on the source of formation of the latter, distinguishing formal, informal and family types (Pichler, Wallace, 2007).

Another interesting classification was proposed by Russian researchers. When studying social capital, it was typologized as “open” and “closed”, or as “Putnam groups” and “Olson groups” (Polishchuk, Menyashv, 2011). All classifications

are united by one common feature – the degree of strength and stability of ties. Strong ties create certain barriers to contacts, while weak ties expand such opportunities. It is weak ties that ensure the circulation of information in networks, conditions for collective actions of actors, and their facilitation.

The concept of social capital is based on the idea that social relations and social norms can provide access to valuable resources that improve people’s well-being. Nevertheless, the social capital theory is not widely used, in our opinion, as an explanatory model of collective action, despite the fact that an indication of this property of social capital can be found in the works of both J. Coleman and E. Ostrom.

Research methods and methodology

We consider social capital as an integral characteristic of the formed social reality. This category is a concept analytically extracted from the totality of phenomena of people’s life activities. Social capital is a set of relations formed on the basis of norms and values, primarily on the basis of trust. Actually, social capital is concentrated in the variety of social ties that an individual possesses (Afanasiev et al., 2016). In our study, social capital is understood as networks of social relations based on trust and characterized by common norms, values and the level of people’s involvement in them; external effects and results useful for society, social groups, generated by social interaction within these networks and associations (Guzhavina et al., 2018, p. 35). This approach makes it possible to assess the state and dynamics of the community’s social capital using quantitative methods. In the study, we used our methodology for determining the level of accumulated social capital based on its integral index calculated for each respondent, which makes it possible to distinguish groups of its carriers characterized by different amounts of available social resources. We obtained the analytical data in the course of a unique multi-year observation,

which has become, in fact, a monitoring one. We used the results of several surveys carried out on the territory of the Vologda Oblast using a comparable methodology and identical tools⁴.

The indicator model of social capital measurement was built to quantitatively assess the phenomenon of social capital (Afanasiev et al., 2016). It allows calculating the integral index of social capital I_{sc} :

$$I_{sc} = (I_{trust} + I_{nets} + I_{values\ and\ attitudes})/3.$$

Based on the indicator model, the integral index of social capital is calculated for each respondent, which allows identifying groups of its carriers and assess the level of accumulated social resources. Respondents who mainly chose the position of the type “I do not trust” / “did not participate” / “I cannot influence in any way”, etc., were included in the first group, which was labeled as owners of minimal social capital ($I_{sc} < 2$; conventionally – Type 1). The second group included respondents with a higher index; they were labeled as possessors of low social capital ($I_{sc} \geq 2$ and < 2.5 ; conventionally – Type 2). The third group included respondents with medium-level social capital ($I_{sc} \geq 2.5$ and < 3 ; conventionally – Type 3). The fourth group included carriers of relatively high level of social capital ($I_{sc} \geq 3$ and < 3.5 ; conditionally – Type 4). Respondents with a high level of social capital were categorized in the fifth group (Claim > 3.5 ; conditionally – Type 5) (Guzhavina et al., 2022).

⁴ The 2016 survey conducted under the RSF-RFBR grant no. 16-03-00188-OGN “Regional social capital in the conditions of socio-economic crisis”, sample size – 1,500 people; the survey conducted in 2019 under the RFBR grant no. 19-011-00724 “Barriers to civic participation and mechanisms for overcoming them at the regional level”, sample size – 1,900 people; the surveys conducted in 2020 and 2021 within the framework of the RFBR grant no. 20-011-00326 “Collective actions and social capital in the Russian society”, sample volume 2020 – 1900 people, 2021 – 1,550 people. The sample is multistage, quota, random at the stage of respondent selection. Sampling error does not exceed 3%.

The distinguished groups include respondents who demonstrate quite close life positions and have similar values and attitudes to a certain extent. The conducted research has shown that the groups are quite stable in their quantitative composition, although they are subject to the influence of external factors. The analysis shows the diversity of socio-demographic characteristics. The carriers of social capital of different levels are people irrespective of their education, age or sex. There is no clear dependence on material status. It is worth noting that the study did not cover the extreme income groups due to the difficulty of their attainability. Thus, we can state that social capital is not strictly linked to socio-demographic and economic characteristics of a respondent.

The novelty of the work consists in obtaining analytical data by conducting a unique multi-year observation, which has become, in fact, a monitoring one. The value of the obtained analytical data lies in the possibility, first, to observe the processes of formation and concentration of social capital among carriers; second, to identify differences in the volume of accumulation of resources, the sources of which are social ties and contacts of an individual; third, to assess the dynamics of these processes under the influence of external factors, in particular, the coronavirus pandemic. Diagnostics of the state of social capital in the territorial community allowed assessing the nature of its distribution among the population. Taking into account the recorded fluctuations, we assume that the targeted management impact will positively influence the process of restoration and accumulation of social capital, which may have certain social effects in the form of increased trust in the community both between individuals and in relation to the governing structures, activation of civil society structures, in particular, through the activation of various forms of civic participation.

Results and discussion

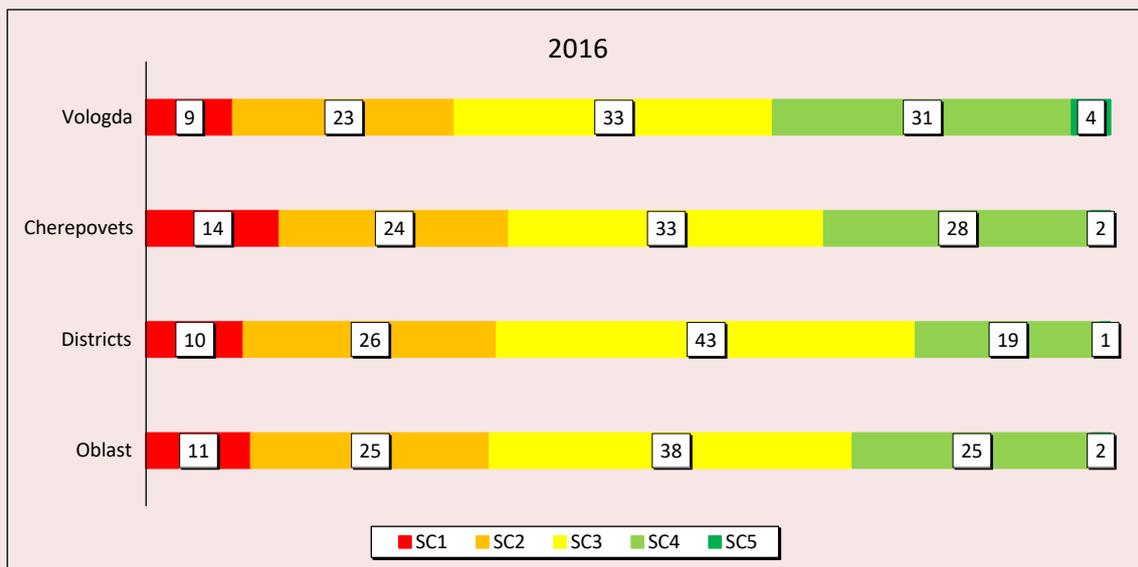
The Vologda Oblast is considered to be one of the most developed among the regions of the Northwestern Federal District⁵. To fully assess the situation in the regional community, it is important to have an idea not only about economic indicators, but also about intangible resources, which include social capital (Guzhavina, 2016). In order to study the social capital of the Vologda Oblast population, let us turn to the five-year observation experience, during which the level of accumulated social capital of respondents was regularly calculated. Taking into account the research model, we analyze the distribution of social capital depending on the territorial affiliation of its carriers (within the region).

Territoriality as a characteristic of social capital is based on the fact that people as physical beings, for the most part, have a certain attachment to the territory of residence and place of work. Each

locality is a local community. It is in such local communities, where individuals undergo their socialization, are included in the existing systems of contacts and ties, enrich them with new ones or get rid of the unclaimed ones, that the formation of social capital takes place.

The research conducted for the first time in 2016 revealed relatively high indicators of social capital. In large cities of the Vologda Oblast (Vologda and Cherepovets), about one third of respondents possessed social capital of high or above average level, but in rural areas this category includes about one fifth of residents, due to which the average share of people with social capital of high or above average level in the Oblast amounted to only a quarter of the population. The total number of owners of social capital of the minimum and below average level is approximately the same in all districts of the Vologda Oblast (Fig. 1). The situation is somewhat worse in the large industrial

Figure 1. Distribution of respondents by level of accumulated social capital in the Vologda Oblast in 2016, % of respondents



Source: VolIRC RAS survey data, 2016, N = 1500.

⁵ Rating of socio-economic situation of the regions. Available at: <https://riarating.ru/infografika/20200602/630170513.html>

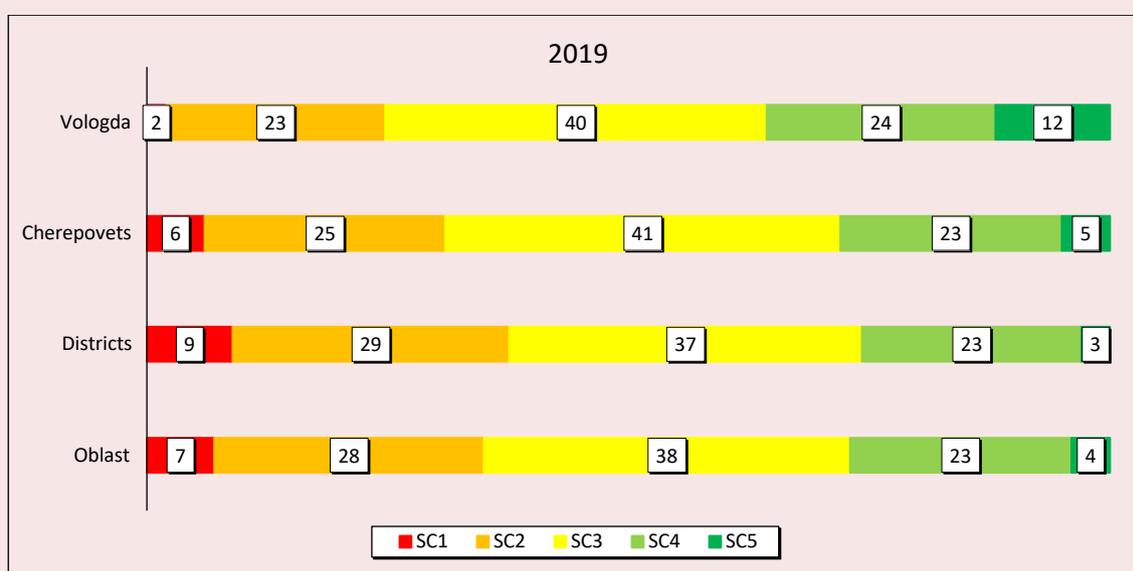
center – in Cherepovets. The share of its residents with minimal social capital amounted to 14%, which exceeded the values of this indicator typical for other territorial communities of the region.

The 2019 measurements revealed a positive trend toward an increase in the share of carriers of social capital of high and relatively high level. In the Vologda Oblast, the share of carriers of social capital of the first (lowest) level decreased by 4%, while the number of holders of social capital of the fifth (high) level became more by 2% (Fig. 2). Consequently, the region has the potential to further improve the situation. Positive changes have also occurred in Cherepovets, where the share of respondents belonging to the group with minimal social capital has significantly decreased.

As in 2016, in 2019 Vologda demonstrated the best indicators describing the state of social capital.

One of the reasons for this, in our opinion, lies in the opportunities existing in the city for the formation of new connections and relations, which act as a kind of environment for the formation of social capital. Vologda, being an administrative, cultural, educational center of the region, creates more opportunities for the formation of a wide network of relations. Here are concentrated management centers of regional, city and district levels, headquarters of political parties and public organizations, such as trade unions, the regional branch of the Red Cross, the Regional Organization of the All-Russian Society of the Disabled, etc. In addition to the regional headquarters of such structures, there are their city branches in the city. For example, we note that in Vologda there are almost three times more organizations registered in the register of SNPOs than in Cherepovets⁶.

Figure 2. Distribution of respondents by level of accumulated social capital in the Vologda Oblast in 2019, % of respondents



Source: VoRC RAS survey data, 2019, N = 1900.

⁶ Vologdastat. Register of SNPOs. Available at: https://vologda-oblast.ru/vlast/pravitelstvo_oblasti/strukturnye_podrazdeleniya_pravitelstva/ (accessed: June 23, 2023).

Cherepovets, as an industrial center, does not require from its residents such a high level of activity and does not provide such opportunities for it. Residents of small towns and rural areas have fewer opportunities for social activity. In addition, informal contacts and kinship ties are more important for rural areas. It is through these channels that information flows, many issues are solved within the framework of established practices that are traditionally informal in nature.

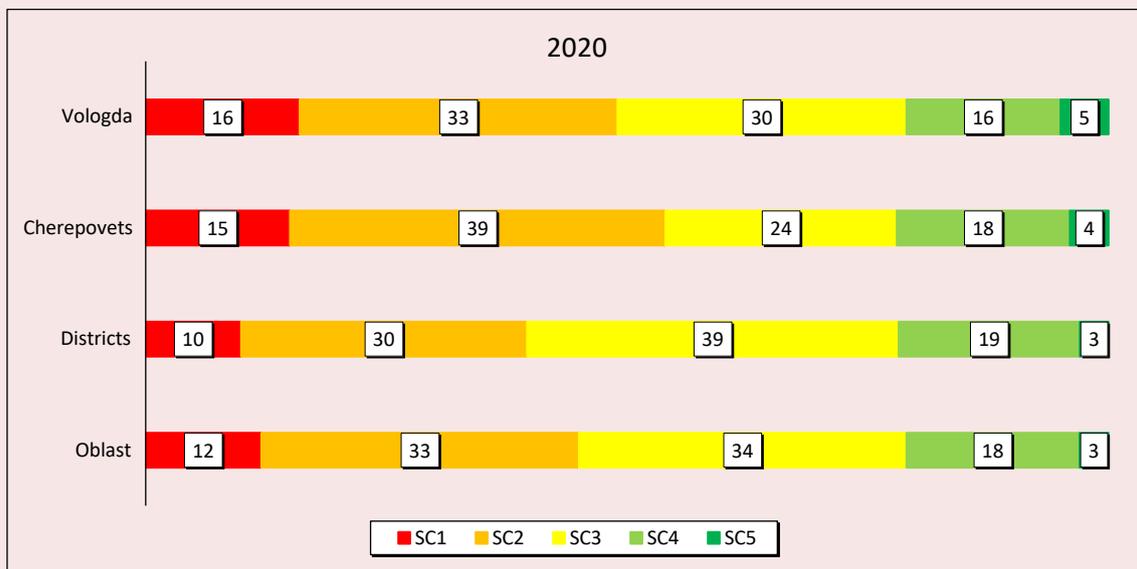
The study reveals such a distinctive feature of social capital as its uneven distribution among its holders. We emphasize the territory of residence and the scale of settlement as influence factors in this case.

In 2020, the analysis recorded a slight drop in the level of social capital of the Vologda Oblast population compared to the pre-coronavirus 2019. First of all, there was a decrease in the share of

carriers of relatively high (group 4) and maximum (group 5) level of social capital. Accordingly, the shares of carriers of low and minimal levels of social capital increased including almost half of the respondents (45%). It is obvious that the pandemic year has caused serious damage to social capital. Self-isolation, contact restrictions, and distancing led to tangible losses in social relationships. Wariness, psychological tension increased, which was reflected in a significant increase in negative judgments (*Fig. 3*).

The obtained data allow drawing another conclusion characterizing social capital. The restriction of connections and contacts leads to a significant drop in the level of social capital and demonstrates the role of social connections and relationships for its production. The pandemic helped provide strong evidence of the social nature of social capital.

Figure 3. Distribution of respondents by level of accumulated social capital in the Vologda Oblast in 2020, % of respondents



Source: VoRC RAS survey data, 2020, N = 1918.

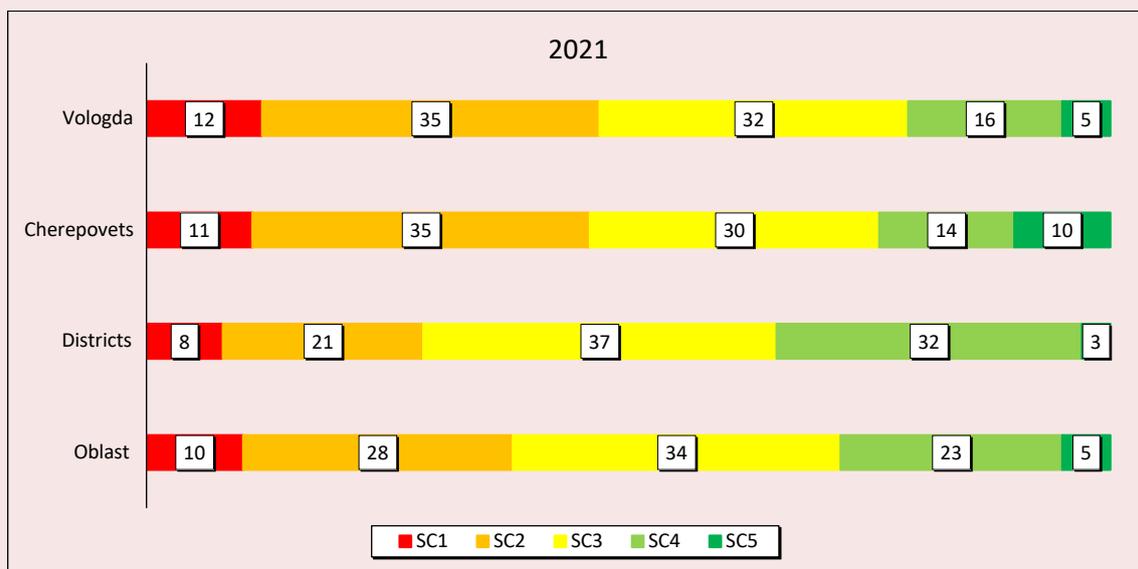
In 2021, a trend toward the recovery of social capital was recorded, but the “pre-pandemic” level was not reached. The number of carriers of social capital of the minimum and low level, although significantly reduced, still exceeded the indicators of 2019 (Fig. 4). Almost a tenth of the Vologda Oblast residents had a minimum level of social capital. In the answers of respondents in this category, the choice of alternatives containing negation prevailed, i.e. statements that they cannot trust anyone (neither people nor institutions), cannot turn anywhere for help, are not ready to unite with other people, do not consider themselves capable of influencing their own lives on a significant scale, etc. Slightly more than a quarter of respondents demonstrated possession of high and relatively high level of social capital. Representatives of this category are characterized by a fairly high readiness to unite, confidence in the ability to influence their lives, positive experience

in the issue of interpersonal and institutional trust.

The positive dynamics in comparison with the crisis year 2020 allowed making an optimistic forecast about the future social capital of the region’s residents. Having survived the first year of the pandemic, in 2021 the Vologda Oblast population began gradually restoring the lost ties, but at the time of the new study it was not yet able to reach the pre-pandemic indicators. We should note that this fact applies to a greater extent to the residents of large cities.

In the districts, on the contrary, the situation has changed for the better due to both a lower level of social capital decline during the pandemic (compared to large cities) and higher rates of its recovery in the post-ovoid period. In 2021, residents of the Vologda Oblast districts were able to improve their social capital indicators, surpassing even the pre-pandemic 2019 level (see Fig. 4).

Figure 4. Distribution of respondents by level of accumulated social capital in the Vologda Oblast in 2021, % of respondents



Source: VoRC RAS survey data, 2021, N = 1550.

The possibility of restoring relationships with the end of the lockdown situation led to an increase in social capital (see Fig. 3). As it turned out, investments in the form of support for personal connections and relationships matter and cannot be completely replaced by contacts through information channels. The positive dynamics revealed in the indicators for 2021 compared to the crisis year 2020 allows making optimistic forecasts about the future state of social capital possessed by the region's residents.

Conclusions

The results obtained make it possible to draw several conclusions regarding both the research methodology and its outcomes. First of all, it is worth saying that the social capital concept has a significant heuristic potential and helps to build explanatory models. The authors' methodology of constructing the integral index, which is the basis for its measurement, has been repeatedly tested in the course of a number of studies and confirmed its validity. The integral index of social capital reveals wide opportunities not only to measure social capital as a latent variable, but also to identify its interrelations with other objects of the social continuum. It is important to understand that in addition to the interpretation of the obtained index value, its changes over time and fluctuations depending on the socio-political and economic events taking place in society are analyzed. This opens up the possibility of making various forecasts, which is one of the most important functions of science.

The analytical data obtained on the basis of the integral index construction methodology allow assessing the state of social capital of the regional community, and determining its characteristic features. Such characteristics as territoriality, uneven distribution and dependence on the type of settlement are fully manifested. Each settlement

is a local community, and it is in such local communities, where social capital in the form of ties and relations is first formed and then realized, that differences in the structure of the population by the level of accumulation of social capital are found. This is largely due to the opportunities available in the place of residence for the inclusion of actors in networks of relations, as well as in the activities of various public organizations, i.e. with the development of civil society structures in a particular territory.

The data collected during the observation period lead to the conclusion that there are quite stable groups in the territorial community, differed in the level of accumulated social capital. This indicates the formation of a certain structural organization of the local community. Differences between groups with various amounts of social capital are, first of all, differences in the available ties and relations that allow an individual to turn to the group's resources to solve their own or the group's tasks or to become a source of resources for the participants of their network. We see variations in access to benefits, but social capital is not a private good, it is classified as a public good, which makes it a rather flexible criterion.

The structural characteristic of the territorial community, revealed on the basis of the social capital index, is a dynamic formation. The boundaries of the identified groups are poorly structured and subject to change under the influence of environmental factors. Nevertheless, the observation covering the period from 2016 to 2020 shows the presence of quite stable groups of social capital holders in terms of the share of respondents included in them. The fixed changes do not lead to the disappearance of the group as such. Fluctuations take place both in the direction of increasing the number of identified groups and in the direction of their decrease, while maintaining

a certain number of members. The dynamism was particularly pronounced during the pandemic. The observed dynamics serves as evidence of both a certain stability of groups and their variability under the influence of significant external factors. The very factor of the dynamics of indicators allows talking about a possible managerial impact on the process of formation of social capital.

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