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The Logic of Development of Civil Society Studies at VolRC RAS



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Abstract. The article presents the formation and development of a research field dedicated to the study of civil society at Vologda Research Center of the Russian Academy of Sciences (VolRC RAS; previously known as VSCC CEMI RAS, ISEDТ RAS). The Center's research tradition, originating in 1993 with the launch of a public opinion monitoring, has allowed for the creation of a unique long-term empirical database. Building upon this foundation in the 2010s, under the leadership of Doctor of Sciences (Economics), RAS Corresponding Member, Professor V.A. Ilyin, a systematic study of civil society from a regional perspective was initiated. The formation of this research field is revealed through three key research vectors. First, the analysis of civil society through the lens of social capital. The research team developed and tested an original indicator model for its quantitative measurement, enabling the study of the dynamics, structure, and characteristics of the bearers of this resource. The social capital of a regional

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community is considered a condition for civil society development. Second, monitoring and assessment of one of the key institutions of civil society – the non-profit sector – is conducted, and its role in the socio-economic development of the region is investigated. Methodologies for assessing its contribution to the gross regional product and balanced regional development have been developed; models of economic behavior of organizations and key barriers to their functioning have been identified. Third, the phenomenon of civic participation is conceptualized, external and internal barriers to its realization are identified, and mechanisms for overcoming them are proposed, including in the context of digitalization. Overall, the research approach of VolRC RAS staff to the study of civil society can be characterized as an applied, empirically rich, and regionally-oriented school. The principal value of the team's scholarly work lies in translating abstract philosophical and political science concepts into the language of concrete social indicators and practices applicable to Russian realities, especially at the regional level. The accumulated body of data and the developed methodological tools for assessing elements of civil society create a basis for evidence-based analysis and the formulation of practical recommendations for public authorities.

Key words: monitoring, region, public opinion, research field, civil society, social capital, civic participation, non-profit sector.

Introduction

The establishment and formation of Vologda Research Center of the Russian Academy of Sciences (VolRC RAS) occurred in the 1990s – an era of radical change that affected all spheres of society, but was especially pronounced in the economy and politics. Based on the liberal management model adopted at that time, the transition to a market economy was declared incompatible with the previous Soviet system, which was built on a planned economy. Management began to rely exclusively on market mechanisms, which resulted not simply in a worsening crisis, but in a deep systemic decline in the country's and its regions' economic and social spheres (Uskova, 2020). A sharp decline in living standards, rising unemployment, delays in wages and social benefits, as well as the criminalization of society, caused feelings of hopelessness and alienation from the authorities among the population (Shabunova et al., 2015). Under these circumstances, there arose an acute need for an in-depth understanding of society's reaction to the ongoing transformations. Consequently, in 1993, the first monitoring surveys of public opinion on the assessment of the

political and economic situation in the country and region¹ were initiated in the Vologda Region. The initiator and organizer of this project was Doctor of Sciences (Economics), Professor V.A. Ilyin. Thus, the foundations for sociological research at VolRC RAS were laid, with significant contributions to its formation made by staff of the Institute of Socio-Political Research of the Russian Academy of Sciences (ISPR RAS) and personally by its Director, Academician G.V. Osipov. The methodological and procedural framework developed by ISPR RAS specialists laid a solid foundation for organizing and conducting independent sociological monitoring studies in the region.

¹ The first public opinion measurements were conducted in 1993 in the cities of Vologda and Cherepovets and three municipal districts of the region. Since 1996, a region-wide sample has been constructed: regularly, once every two months (6 times a year), 1,500 people aged 18 and older are surveyed. The surveys are conducted in Vologda, Cherepovets, and eight districts of the region. The sample is purposive and quota-based. The representativeness of the sample is ensured by maintaining proportions between urban and rural populations, proportions between residents of different types of settlements (rural settlements, small and medium-sized towns), and the gender-age structure of the adult population of the region. Approximately 9,000 residents of the region are surveyed annually.

Under the leadership of Doctor of Sciences (Economics), Professor V.A. Ilyin, a comprehensive, systematic approach was formed at VolRC RAS, encompassing not only conducting research on public opinion in the region but also publishing the monitoring data. Starting in 1994, the results of population surveys were presented in the form of the print publication “*Monitoring obshchestvennogo mneniya*” (Public Opinion Monitoring). From 2013 to the present, the information-analytical bulletin “*Effektivnost' gosudarstvennogo upravleniya v otsenkakh naseleniya*” (Efficiency of Public Administration as Assessed by the Population) has been published regularly six times a year. Its issues, prepared based on the results of each population survey, contain illustrative materials and an analysis of public opinion dynamics in the Vologda Region on various topical issues. The popularization of monitoring results is facilitated by their regular publication in VolRC RAS journals: “*Ekonomicheskie i sotsial'nye peremeny: fakty, tendentsii, prognoz*” (Economic and Social Changes: Facts, Trends, Forecast), “*Problemy razvitiya territorii*” (Problems of Territory's Development), and “*Sotsial'noe prostranstvo*” (Social Area).

In line with the demands of the time and research objectives, the monitoring toolkit was gradually expanded, incorporating new thematic blocks. To date, the study covers more than ten key topics, including assessments by the population of the political and economic situation in the country and region; levels of support for federal and regional authorities and local self-government bodies; levels of social tension and the potential for protest activity. Regular public opinion surveys help to understand how citizens perceive current social problems, their own material well-being, and the prevailing social sentiments. Furthermore, the state of social capital and the potential for civil society development are examined, the work of law enforcement institutions and the sense of personal security are analyzed, and the population's attitude toward the media and prevailing cultural orientations are identified.

Thanks to decades of experience in conducting monitoring studies, it has become possible today to perform a multifaceted analysis of public life in the region, examining retrospective dynamics over more than thirty years of observation. It is important to emphasize that the sociological data obtained from the study are analyzed across 14 socio-demographic categories of the population. The ability to study social well-being and social perception within specific social strata allows VolRC RAS to provide authorities with concentrated information about the most pressing problems concerning representatives of a particular category, as well as their reactions to various events occurring in the country and the region.

The creation of extensive databases from surveys accumulated over a long observation period became an impetus for identifying new independent research directions. One such high-demand direction became the comprehensive study of the phenomenon of civil society and its institutions. However, the interest in this topic is driven not only by a unique empirical base but also by demand from society and the state. A unique combination of scientific and public interest, as well as attention from authorities at various levels, can be observed, creating favorable conditions for in-depth scientific analysis.

This article provides an overview of research on various aspects of civil society development conducted by scholars at Vologda Research Center of RAS.

The evolution of understanding the phenomenon of civil society

Before addressing the contribution of Vologda scholars to the study of civil society, it is necessary to trace the evolution of this concept. As one of the central and most debated concepts in the social sciences, it is not a single dogma but a “fluid concept” whose content has changed depending on historical context and political challenges (Diskin, 2024). In Russia, the evolution of civil society studies is not merely a shift in academic paradigms but a direct reflection of the country's profound political,

social, and economic transformations, as noted in the works of VoIRC RAS scholars (Ilyin, 2012).

Until the 1990s, the term “civil society” was scarcely used in Russian scholarship in its Western liberal sense – as a sphere of private life autonomous from the state – which is undoubtedly linked to the history of Russian statehood. During the Imperial period, concepts such as “*obshchestvennost*” (the educated public), “*zemstvo*” (local self-government assemblies), and “*obshchina*” (peasant commune) were discussed. Russian philosophical and social thought (e.g., the debates between Westernizers and Slavophiles) engaged in discourse on the relationship between the state and society. The paradigm of a strong, paternalistic state predominated. In the Soviet period, the concept was almost never applied, as it was considered an attribute of bourgeois relations (Shamshura, 2017). However, real social activism existed in two forms: official structures such as trade unions, the Komsomol (Young Communist League), and voluntary people’s patrols, which were part of the state apparatus, and informal practices/dissidence (unsanctioned literary, human rights, and environmental circles).

The collapse of the USSR and the transition to a market economy and democracy triggered an explosive interest in the topic. The 1990s can be described as the “golden age” or a period of liberal-democratic idealism in civil society studies. Research was marked by euphoria over “liberation” from the state and faith in the rapid construction of Western-style democracy. Civil society was viewed as an integral and unquestionably positive part of the democratic transition. This was an “import” of Western theories without serious adaptation to Russian realities. Study was primarily reduced to analyzing the growth of the “third sector” – non-profit organizations (NPOs), which were and still are considered the main actors of civil society (Kosygina, 2022a). By the mid-1990s, researchers began to note that the predicted boom in civic activity had not materialized. Key reasons cited

for this phenomenon were, firstly, historical legacy, manifested in the lack of self-organization traditions and the prevalence of paternalistic attitudes. Secondly, the economic crisis played a crucial role, forcing people to focus on survival problems at the expense of public activity (Gorshkov et al., 2018). Finally, many NPOs of that period existed on grants from foreign foundations, which often detached their activities from the real needs of the population.

In the 2000s, with the rise to power of Vladimir Putin and the beginning of the “strengthening of the vertical of power” policy, the context began to change radically. Against the backdrop of economic stabilization and the strengthening of the state’s role in all spheres of life, a paradigm shift occurred in civil society studies. A state-centric approach began to prevail (Ilyin, 2012). In the 2000s–2010s, “new” public structures such as Public Chambers began to be established in Russia and its regions. Furthermore, public councils were formed at all levels under government bodies, state-oriented public movements (e.g., “*Molodaya Gvardiya*” [Young Guard] of United Russia) emerged, and non-governmental organizations began to receive more active state funding.

Systematic study of civil society development issues at VoIRC RAS was initiated by Doctor of Sciences (Economics), Professor V.A. Ilyin in the 2010s. Two key factors facilitated the start of these studies: firstly, a substantial empirical base of sociological surveys accumulated by Vologda scholars since 1993, and secondly, the active involvement of VoIRC RAS in analyzing the state of regional civil society. The personal experience of V.A. Ilyin, who served as Chairman of the Public Chamber of the Vologda Region from 2009 to 2013, played an important role in this process. With his direct involvement, Center staff participated annually for five years in preparing reports on civil society development in the region. These documents were presented to federal and regional authorities, as well as to the Public Chamber of the Russian Federation.

Some of the first works on the theoretical conceptualization of the civil society phenomenon were carried out by staff of the Laboratory of Socio-Economic Research (Cherepovets) in cooperation with the Department of Sociology and Social Technologies of Cherepovets State University. In 2011, T.A. Guzhavina, a laboratory staff member, prepared and defended a Candidate of Sciences dissertation titled “*Sotsial’no-filosofskie osnovaniya grazhdanskogo obshchestva (obshcheteoreticheskie podkhody i regional’naya praktika)*” (Socio-Philosophical Foundations of Civil Society: General Theoretical Approaches and Regional Practice) in social philosophy, based on VolRC RAS public opinion monitoring data. In it, civil society is viewed as a specific social space where individuals interact as actors independent of each other and the state, united by principles of freedom and voluntariness, self-organization, and self-governance. Based on a deep analysis of theoretical models, the work introduces the concept of “regional civil society,” which represents a polyvariant system of interactions and interrelations arising between social, economic, ideological, and cultural actors and institutions of a given region². A number of publications substantiate the conclusion that civil society in its modern form is actively forming primarily in the regions (Grazhdanskoe obshchestvo..., 2015).

An important step in studying civil society from a regional perspective was the collective monograph by Vologda scholars “*Regional’noe grazhdanskoe obshchestvo: dinamika razvitiya*” (Regional Civil Society: Development Dynamics) (V.A. Ilyin, A.A. Shabunova, D.V. Afanasiev, T.A. Guzhavina, T.P. Kozhina, I.N. Dementieva, D.A. Lastovkina). An undoubted merit of the work is that it presented

² Guzhavina T.A. (2011). *Sotsial’no-filosofskie osnovaniya grazhdanskogo obshchestva (obshcheteoreticheskiye podkhody i regional’naya praktika)* [Socio-Philosophical Foundations of Civil Society (General Theoretical Approaches and Regional Practice)]: Cand. Sci. (Philos.) Dissertation Abstract. Arkhangelsk.

a comprehensive characterization of civil society at the regional level (using the Vologda Region as an example). The work utilized official statistics and sociological measurements, which allowed for an analysis of public institution activities, identification of population categories constituting the core and periphery of civil society, demonstration of the specifics of institutional and interpersonal trust, and identification of features of the population’s protest behavior. It is noted that characteristic features of civil society in Russia and its regions include: imperfection of the legislative framework; poor awareness among the majority of the population about the activities of various public organizations; lack of conviction in the effectiveness of such activities; low levels of interpersonal trust among citizens, who do not consider themselves capable of significantly influencing social development; and an absence of a sense of responsibility for events outside the family sphere. The authors conclude that the institutionalization of new forms and mechanisms of civil society activity in Russia at the present stage of development occurs primarily “from above” (Regional’noe grazhdanskoe obshchestvo..., 2015).

A subsequent result of research on regional civil society was the collective monograph “*Grazhdanskoe obshchestvo – obshchestvo grazhdan*” (Civil Society – A Society of Citizens), prepared by a team of scholars and staff of VolRC RAS under the scientific guidance of RAS Corresponding Member, Doctor of Sciences (Economics), Professor V.A. Ilyin. The main idea the authorial team sought to convey is that the primary factor of development and foundation of civil society is, above all, the civic consciousness and civic activity of broad segments of the population, rather than the number and diversity of existing civil society institutions. In this regard, the authors paid increased attention to the problems of contemporary, post-Soviet society: psychological, socio-economic, cultural-moral, and others (Morev et al., 2018).

A significant place in VolRC RAS research is occupied by the analysis of civil society as a factor promoting social consolidation. In the monograph *“Sotsial’naya konsolidatsiya regional’nogo soobshchestva”* (Social Consolidation of the Regional Community), prepared under the scientific guidance of Doctor of Sciences (Economics) A.A. Shabunova by a team of authors (M.V. Morev, O.B. Molodov, T.P. Kozhina, I.N. Dementieva, E.O. Smoleva, V.S. Kaminsky), an important conclusion was drawn that two countervailing processes are occurring simultaneously in Russian society: on the one hand, an improvement in social mood and growing life satisfaction is observed, and on the other – a narrowing of citizens’ interests to private, family matters. This duality underlies social atomization. Consequently, in a society with high levels of atomization and deconsolidation, problems of social inequality and injustice become a key factor shaping a high level of latent social tension (Morev et al., 2017).

A productive approach proved to be viewing civil society through the lens of sociocultural analysis, the foundations of which were laid by P. Sorokin. This allowed civil society to be considered both as a form of organizing social life and as a result of a system-forming process, accomplished evolutionarily with the active participation of various actors. From this perspective, civil society can be viewed as a special area of social space, emerging at the stage of industrial development in Western and Eastern countries and creating real cultural, personal, and socio-organizational preconditions for the dynamic, balanced interaction of the “systemic” and “lifeworld” realms of modern society. The spatial metaphor allows for delineating the boundaries of civil society and distinguishing it from other spheres, which is highly productive for analyzing this phenomenon³.

³ In 2014, 2016, and 2022, the results of VolRC RAS research concerning the state of regional civil society were presented at the International Scientific Conference “Pitirim Sorokin and Paradigms of Global Development in the 21st Century (on the 125th Anniversary of his Birth)”.

Research devoted to the phenomenon of trust has been an important aspect within the study of civil society. Studies on trust have been conducted in a monitoring mode since 1996 and continue to the present day. The phenomenon of trust is a crucial fundamental element for the very existence of civil society. Based on ongoing observations and analysis of accumulated data, it was concluded that “the most important characteristic of the state of civil society is the degree of the population’s trust in government bodies” (Ilyin, 2012, pp. 9–10). Speaking about possible prospects for civil society development at that time, V.A. Ilyin noted: “The formation of an effectively functioning civil society is ensured only when its elements are structurally organized both vertically and horizontally, when it is strong both by the state and by its civic foundation” (Ilyin, 2012, p. 11). Developing this direction, T.A. Guzhavina examines the problem of the role and significance of trust for the development and functioning of civil society. Prioritizing trust in abstract systems, and based on an analysis of public opinion monitoring data, the author identifies the institutional structures that enjoy the greatest trust among residents of the Vologda Region (Guzhavina, 2012).

Research on trust has also examined its role in the modernization development of the region. It has been shown that trust shapes the economic environment, influences economic processes, and serves as a basis for developing state policy (Guzhavina, 2014). Trust (both at the institutional and interpersonal levels) is a non-economic factor of development. Its role increases during crisis periods (Shabunova et al., 2015a).

Analysis of the state of trust in the regional society has allowed for the identification of factors that generate it, as well as the characterization of groups of individuals differentiated by their level of trust. Particular interest was drawn to the “distrustful” group, identified during empirical studies at VolRC RAS. A special methodology for creating a sociological portrait

was developed to characterize this group, making it possible to highlight the significant features of its representatives (Guzhavina, Silina, 2018).

Overall, the research approach of VoIRC RAS scholars to understanding civil society can be characterized as an applied, empirically rich, and regionally-oriented school. The principal value of the team's research work lies in translating abstract philosophical and political science concepts into the language of concrete social indicators and practices applicable to Russian realities, especially at the regional level. Among the key indicators of civil society development that have received the most attention in VoIRC RAS research are social capital, assessment of the non-profit sector's activities as an institution of civil society, and the potential and actual practices of civic participation.

Civil society and social capital

The study of civil society – its structure, functions, actors, and its understanding as a social space where fields and the habitus that form them intersect – has generated interest in examining the deeper structural foundations of regional society. Scholars became interested in the topic of social capital, which began to appear in scientific publications in the early 2000s and later evolved into a full-fledged research direction with grant-funded studies and unique monitoring measurements in society. This is especially relevant since the concepts of civil society and social capital occupy special positions in attempts to describe and define the informal and often immaterial social structures and interconnections that can help solidify democratic practices. Social capital is a necessary condition for the normal functioning of civil society, democracy, and economic relations.

Analytical research of a theoretical nature on social capital issues enabled researchers to make a certain contribution to the concept by proposing their own authorial approach to measuring social capital. Within this framework, an indicator model for measuring social capital was developed and methodologically substantiated. An indicator

model is a set of indicators formed on a specific conceptual basis, allowing for systematic information about the phenomenon under study and revealing interconnections between its components (Afanasiev et al., 2016).

When constructing the indicator model, a methodologically crucial point was recognizing it as an integral-type indicator and as a generalizing concept encompassing a set of operational concepts such as trust, networks, values and norms, solidarity, and the ability to influence the state of affairs. To measure an indicator like trust, metrics were used that characterize respondents' state of mind regarding trust in the actors and institutions around them with which they interact. These types of trust are commonly characterized as interpersonal and institutional. Indicators of embeddedness in social networks are statements characterizing respondents' state of mind regarding agreement, solidarity, and readiness to unite. Measurement of network interaction is possible based on indicators of inclusion, responsibility for the state of affairs, and solidarity. The sufficiency of the selected indicators is determined by their ability to assess the state of the identified metrics (trust, networks, solidarity, influence) characterizing a certain type of social capital.

The algorithm for constructing the indicator model of social capital includes the following analytical steps: identifying the generalizing concept containing a set of operational concepts, delineating these concepts, selecting the necessary number of indicators determined by the research hypothesis, and applying analytical mathematical methods (Guzhavina, Vorobyeva, 2017). The empirical base for the first analysis was data from a survey conducted in June 2016 within the framework of the Russian Foundation for Humanities grant "Regional Social Capital in Crisis Conditions".

Based on the indicator model, an integral index of social capital is calculated for each respondent, which allows for identifying groups of its bearers and assessing the level of accumulated social resources.

All respondents are distributed into five groups – from the minimum to the maximum level of social capital accumulation. These groups are sufficiently stable, providing insight not only into the state and dynamics of social capital and its susceptibility to external factors but also into the structure of regional society, which opens possibilities for social forecasting. The methodology has been tested and has demonstrated its validity. The relevance of studying regional aspects of social capital is particularly noteworthy, which is important for countries with significant territorial and ethnic diversity. The results of the research were published in the collective monograph “*Regional’nyi sotsial’nyy kapital v usloviyakh krizisa*” (Regional Social Capital in Crisis Conditions), edited by T.A. Guzhavina (D.V. Afanasiev, I.N. Vorobyeva, A.A. Mekhova, M.V. Morev, I.N. Dementieva) (Guzhavina et al., 2018).

The developed methodology has enabled the study and analysis of the state of social capital across various social groups: urban populations (Guzhavina, 2018a), rural populations (Guzhavina, 2018b), and youth (Yasnikov, 2019). Through the lens of social capital, it has been possible to examine the value system of the region’s population (Guzhavina, Vorobyeva, 2018), volunteering practices (Guzhavina, 2019), social participation (Vorobyeva, Guzhavina, 2022), digital practices (Guzhavina, 2021), and a number of other aspects.

Further study of social capital focuses on its interrelation with collective action. Within this direction, the grant project “*Kollektivnye deystviya i sotsial’nyy kapital v rossiyskom obshchestve*” (Collective Action and Social Capital in Russian Society) was implemented with support from the Russian Science Foundation (RSF) (T.A. Guzhavina, K.E. Kosygina, I.N. Dementieva, Yu.V. Ukhanova, D.V. Afanasiev, N.N. Yasnikov, D.A. Lastovkina). Collective actions are considered the basis of social interaction, representing a system of organized actions by individuals in groups.

Virtually every person is involved in them in one form or another. At the same time, social capital acts as a key factor determining the intensity, effectiveness, and scale of these actions, while itself being formed and strengthened under their influence. During the research, based on theoretical analysis, an indicator model measuring actors’ readiness for collective action was developed. This model was tested using the example of the territorial community of the Vologda Region, which made it possible to identify the dynamic characteristics of social capital and collective action. Comparative analysis of survey data from Kaliningrad, Murmansk, Petrozavodsk, Vologda, and Cherepovets helped determine territorial specifics in the formation of collective actions. An important result of the work was a detailed characterization of the subjects and practices of collective action, as well as an analysis of the impact of the pandemic on them. The research findings are presented in a monograph (Guzhavina et al., 2022).

Civil society in socio-economic dimension: The role of the non-profit sector

Within the framework of civil society studies conducted at VolRC RAS, monitoring and assessment of one of its key institutions – the non-profit sector – has been carried out since 2017. An important result of this work was the successful defense of two Candidate of Sciences dissertations: in 2021 – K.E. Kosygina’s “*Razvitiye nekommercheskogo sektora v ekonomike regiona*” (Development of the Non-Profit Sector in the Regional Economy) (supervisor: Doctor of Sciences (Economics) A.A. Shabunova); in 2025 – A.S. Artamonova’s “*Sotsial’no orientirovannyye nekommercheskiye organizatsii kak instrument upravleniya sbalansirovannym razvitiyem regional’nykh ekonomicheskikh sistem*” (Socially Oriented Non-Profit Organizations as a Tool for Managing Balanced Development of Regional Economic Systems) (supervisor: Doctor of Sciences (Economics) E.V. Bazueva).

In her research, K.E. Kosygina employs a comprehensive approach, forming a systemic vision of the role of the non-profit sector in the regional economy. A central contribution of the author is the proposed interpretation of the non-profit sector as an economic subsystem of the region. It is defined as a set of non-state, non-profit organizations whose activities are aimed at achieving common goals of socio-economic development. The main results of this authorial approach are presented in the monograph “*Nekommercheskiy sektor v ekonomike regiona*” (The Non-Profit Sector in the Regional Economy) under the scientific editorship of A.A. Shabunova (Kosygina, 2022a).

The works analyze trends, features, and patterns of this sector’s development. In particular, they reveal a significant unevenness in its development across Russian regions (Kosygina, 2018; Kosygina, 2019a), a high level of territorial differentiation in the presence of the non-profit sector within a single region, and its narrowing scope in small territorial units (Kosygina, 2023). For quantitative analysis, the author adapts business demography methodology, proposing the calculation of birth and death rates applied to non-profit organizations (Kosygina, 2019b). Within the research, a methodological approach was developed for the comprehensive assessment of risks and development factors of the non-profit sector, based on a combination of expert surveys and mass sociological studies. According to a survey of heads of socially oriented NPOs in the Vologda Region, key problems include insufficient financial and economic resources of organizations, a shortage of qualified personnel, internal fragmentation of the non-profit sector, and dysfunctions in the system of interaction with authorities (Kosygina, 2018). Mass population surveys helped identify additional social barriers: low public awareness of NPO activities; insufficient level of trust in them; weak involvement of residents in the work of non-profit organizations (Ukhanova, Kosygina, 2019; Ukhanova et al., 2020; Kosygina, 2022b).

Of particular practical interest is the developed methodological toolkit that allows for assessing the role of socially oriented non-profit organizations (SONPOs) as economic actors and determining their contribution to the regional economy. It is based on three models of economic behavior of organizations: “SONPO as a Consolidated Philanthropist”, “SONPO as a Social Entrepreneur”, and “SONPO as a Volunteer Center”. It has been determined that the contribution of SONPOs to the gross regional product (GRP) of subjects in the Northwestern Federal District varies within 1.5% (Shabunova, Kosygina, 2019a). The developed methodological toolkit can be used in public administration practice. Its application allows for comparative measurements of the sector’s economic contribution across different territories, identifies which of the three models predominates in a region, and can serve as a basis for regional authorities in developing measures to support and engage non-profit sector organizations in addressing regional development issues.

Research in the field of civil society and the non-profit sector has been expanded through the analysis of interactions between the state, business, and the non-profit sector. As a result, the main forms of cross-sector partnerships have been systematized, and a key trend has been identified: cooperation is actively expanding to the regional and municipal levels, which allows for effectively combining the resources of all parties for territorial development (Kosygina, 2020b). It has been shown that the state has generally created legal conditions and organizational-economic tools to attract new service providers – socially oriented non-profit organizations – into the social sphere, including in the regions, although the share of state funding remains insignificant. It has been proven that SONPOs are not recipients of state support but rather act as donors, accumulating funds from various sources to address social problems, which confirms their economic significance (Shabunova, Kosygina, 2019a). Based on the analysis, practical

tools have been developed to improve state management of the non-profit sector in Russian regions through mechanisms of cross-sector social partnership (Kosygina, 2021b).

Issues regarding the role of SONPOs in ensuring balanced territorial development were examined in the works of Candidate of Sciences (Economics) A.S. Artamonova and Doctor of Sciences (Economics) E.V. Bazueva. The authors conclude that the participation of the non-profit sector in socio-economic processes contributes to solving a number of key tasks, such as reducing inequality (involving SONPOs helps diminish imbalances in the accessibility of socially beneficial services for the population); enhancing efficiency (the activities of SONPOs increase the overall efficiency of the regional economy); and mitigating differentiation (in the long term, engaging the non-profit sector leads to a reduction in spatial differentiation within the national economy) (Artamonova, Bazueva, 2022a). The analysis showed that SONPOs focus their work on such priority areas as education, healthcare, and social support. These areas address the basic needs of the population, which the state is not always able to fully satisfy, especially considering territorial remoteness and individual citizen demands. When evaluating the effectiveness of their activities, SONPOs primarily focus on their social significance, applying targeted mechanisms to address the pressing problems of specific target groups. The research also identified and detailed a set of potential socio-economic effects from the systemic and long-term work of SONPOs in their key areas of activity (Artamonova, Bazueva, 2022b).

A.S. Artamonova and E.V. Bazueva developed and tested an authorial approach to assessing the influence of SONPOs on the balanced development of the regional economy. Unlike existing methods, it views SONPOs as active economic agents performing a wide range of functions. Econometric models were constructed based on the Mankiw –

Romer – Weil model of economic growth. Modeling that accounted for spatial structure and time lags showed that the direct influence of SONPOs on economic growth is diminishing. However, their contribution to the social sphere is significant: on average, they increase a region's Human Development Index by 0.3 points. Since the analysis confirmed the high importance of human capital for economic growth, it can be concluded that SONPOs exert an indirect yet important influence on the economy (Artamonova et al., 2025).

Based on their ability to diversify funding sources and the spectrum of tasks they address, conventional types of SONPOs were identified. For their sustainable development, measures to optimize their external and internal environment were proposed, along with an organizational-economic mechanism. Its key features include cyclical stimulation and the adaptation of management methods according to the organization's lifecycle stage (Artamonova, Bazueva, 2024).

Thus, while the non-profit sector is an integral and economically significant institution of civil society, makes a direct contribution to the regional economy, and plays an important role in ensuring balanced development by reducing social inequality, enhancing economic efficiency, and fostering human capital development, it also serves as an associated form of civic participation (Kosygina, 2020a).

Civic participation

The level of civic activity and population engagement in the activities of civil society institutions largely depends on the model of its formation – “from above” or “from below”. As V.A. Ilyin emphasizes, the emerging trend toward the development of grassroots civic activity or civic participation is particularly important for Russia. This phenomenon finds expression in a wide spectrum of initiatives – from local improvement projects to participation in federal competitions (Ilyin, 2017).

Active research in this area has been conducted at VolRC RAS since 2018. During this time, a group of researchers has successfully implemented a series of projects supported by leading Russian scientific funds⁴. These projects cover both fundamental theoretical and methodological aspects of the phenomenon and applied problems, including the digitalization of civic practices and the resolution of social contradictions.

During the implementation of the 2020 grant project “*Fenomen grazhdanskogo uchastiya v nauchnom diskurse: teoreticheskiye i metodologicheskiye osnovaniya issledovaniya*” (The Phenomenon of Civic Participation in Scientific Discourse: Theoretical and Methodological Foundations of Research) (Yu.V. Ukhanova), the theoretical and methodological approaches to studying civic participation presented in the works of foreign and domestic scholars were examined. Civic participation is interpreted as a process through which public organizations or individuals engage in relationships with the state (vertical interaction) and other socio-political institutions (horizontal interaction) to solve socially significant tasks (Ukhanova, 2020).

The conclusions and results obtained from the conceptualization of the term “civic participation” served as the basis for new research projects. As part of the project “*Bar'yery grazhdanskogo uchastiya i mekhanizmy ikh preodoleniya na regional'nom urovne*” (Barriers to Civic Participation and Mechanisms for Overcoming Them at the Regional Level) (Yu.V. Ukhanova, K.E. Kosygina, T.A. Guzhavina, E.O. Smoleva, I.N. Dementieva, A.S. Artamonova),

⁴ Projects supported by scientific foundations: “The Phenomenon of Civic Participation in Scientific Discourse: Theoretical and Methodological Foundations of Research”; “Barriers to Civic Participation and Mechanisms for Overcoming Them at the Regional Level” (RFBR, 2019–2021); “Digitalization of Civic Participation: Progress in Achieving Social Effects vs. Imitation of Socially Beneficial Activities” (RFBR, 2021); “Overcoming Social Contradictions in Small Territories: Participation of the Local Community” (RSF, 2023–2024).

the research team developed and tested a methodological approach for the comprehensive study of civic participation, taking into account the specifics of its forms of manifestation, barriers to its realization, and ways to overcome them at the regional level.

The project involved: a comparison of the conditions for the development of civic participation in Russia and foreign countries; a study of factors influencing citizen and public organization participation in solving socially significant problems in global and Russian practice; identification of features of the civic participation environment at the regional level; and an assessment of the impact of civic participation practices on the development of urban space in the studied regions.

A conclusion was drawn that for the development of civic participation in the regional community, the active use of information resources is timely. A comprehensive methodology for measuring barriers to civic participation was developed. As a result of typologization, external barriers to participation were identified, which are of an institutional (normative-legal, organizational, informational, socio-technological) and sociocultural nature, and internal barriers, directly related to the value-motivational and socio-psychological orientations of the subjects of participation and interpersonal communications in the implementation of socially beneficial activities.

Based on the typology of civic participation barriers, mechanisms for overcoming them at the regional level were developed. Their implementation will contribute to enhancing the effectiveness of realizing the potential of civic participation in addressing pressing local population problems (Ukhanova et al., 2022).

Within the project “*Dizhitalizatsiya grazhdanskogo uchastiya: progress v dostizhenii sotsial'nykh effektov vs imitatsiya obshchestvenno poleznoy deyatel'nosti*” (Digitalization of Civic Participation:

Progress in Achieving Social Effects vs Imitation of Socially Beneficial Activities) (Yu.V. Ukhanova, K.E. Kosygina, M.A. Gruzdeva, A.V. Popov, E.O. Smoleva), the research field regarding the specifics of civic participation was expanded. The work involved: assessing digital inequality as a key threat to the digitalization of civic participation at regional and municipal levels (Gruzdeva, 2020); analyzing the potential for adapting foreign experience in digital civic participation to Russian conditions (Popov, 2022); identifying main trends and regional features of civic participation in Russia's digital space (Smoleva, Popov, 2022); evaluating the applicability and effectiveness of information and communication technologies in the work of non-commercial organizations as a form of civic participation (Kosygina, 2021a).

The focus of the next research phase was civic participation at the municipal level, within the framework of the project “*Preodoleniye sotsial'nykh protivorechiy malykh territoriy: uchastiye mestnogo soobshchestva*” (Overcoming Social Contradictions in Small Territories: Participation of the Local Community), implemented with the support of the Russian Science Foundation (Yu.V. Ukhanova, K.E. Kosygina, E.O. Smoleva, E.D. Kopytova). The work not only systematized existing methodological approaches to studying social contradictions in small towns and settlements in contemporary scientific discourse but also proposed original methods for their diagnosis. A comprehensive measurement of the socio-economic development level of small territories was conducted. Tested on 96 small towns across seven regions of the Northwestern and Central Federal Districts, the authorial methodology helped identify key problems and determine potential growth points (Ukhanova et al., 2024). A meticulous analysis of the dynamics of the Urban Environment Quality Index, supported by sociological survey data, provided a clear picture of main social contradictions, including those seen through

the eyes of the residents themselves (Smoleva, Kosygina, 2024). As a result, existing mechanisms for engaging local communities in the development of small territories were summarized, and the contribution of such participation to resolving social conflicts was analyzed in detail. The outcome of the research was the development of individual development trajectories for small territories, based on the principle of active involvement of the local community in transformation processes.

On the prospects of the research field development

Overall, the scientific contribution of VoIRC RAS lies in forming a holistic and evidence-based picture of civil society development in Russian regions. A comprehensive interdisciplinary approach, integrating sociology, economics, philosophy, and political science, has allowed not only for describing the structural components and dynamics of civic institutions but also for developing practical tools for their assessment and support. The accumulated unique body of data and the developed methodologies create a foundation for further research, including in the field of interconnections between culture, values, and civic activity, which defines promising directions for future scientific work within the study of civil society.

Of particular significance in this context is the moral fabric of civil society, the study of which is becoming not merely one of the future directions of analysis but a key element in understanding its essence. Civil society is not only a network of institutions and organizations but, above all, a community of citizens united by shared values. These include solidarity, mutual respect, trust, a sense of personal and collective responsibility for events in the country and region, and a commitment to the principles of justice. Essentially, civil society is an environment where moral and ethical norms and values are born and sustained.

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