

## **ETHNIC IDENTITY AND ETHNO-CULTURAL NEEDS OF THE MODERN RUSSIAN RURAL POPULATION OF TATARSTAN (BASED ON ETHNO-SOCIOLOGICAL RESEARCH)**

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The relevance of the problem under investigation is determined by the following correlation activity: the degree of actualization of ethno-cultural needs and the overall level of ethnic mobilization define a comfort / discomfort level in the ethnic field. The paper aims at analyzing the degree of actualization of ethnic identity among the Russian rural population, identification and structuring of ethno-cultural needs, and the subsequent determination of the general level of ethnic mobilization of the given group. A polyparadigmatic approach is used to study the problem as the basic approach, supplemented by certain provisions of the theory of cultural boundaries and the theory of social construction, taking into account the historical and cultural component of a particular social reality. The following field methods are implemented within the study: mass semi-formalized interview and structured in-depth interview. The paper identifies “de-materialisation” of ethnic culture and its reformatting into a social construct with symbolic capital as the main content of modern ethno-social processes. In the meantime, these processes are less intense and have their own characteristic aspects in rural environment. It is proved that ethnic and cultural needs of the Russians living in Tatarstan are stable and have no tendency for further expansion. In this regard, one can speak of the absence of significant motivators of ethnic mobilization in the group. Data discussed in the paper can be useful for social anthropologists (ethnologists), sociologists, demographers, regional ethnographers when studying local and regional communities.

**Keywords:** social anthropology, identity, ethnicity, ethno-cultural needs of Russian rural population, multicultural region, ethnic history

### **INTRODUCTION**

“De-materialisation” of ethnic culture and its reformatting into a social construct with symbolic capital become the main content of modern ethno-social processes. At the same time, the intensity of these processes within the more conservative rural areas is somewhat lower than in the city and has its own characteristic aspects, which are as well associated with regional characteristics of different territorial groups of Russian rural population residing in Russia (Titova, 2014; Khayrutdinov, 2015; Khayrutdinov & Karimov, 2015).

One of the key objectives set by the authors within the study is to determine symbolic and meaningful content of the concept of ethno-cultural needs, as well

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as to identify the degree of actualization of these needs among Russian rural population of Tatarstan. As a basic approach to the study of the problem used multiparadigmatic character approach (Drobizheva, 2006), supplemented by certain provisions of nationalism theory (Gellner, 2009; Hobsbawn, 1983), socialization (Berger, 1995; Barth, 1989), a regional approach to minority study, are in surrounded by other nationalities (Titova, 2007). To study the problem polyparadigmatic approach is used as the basic one (Drobizheva, 2006), supplemented by certain provisions of theories of nationalism (Gellner, 2009; Hobsbawn, 1983), *socialization* (Berger, 1995; Barth, 1989), and regional approach to the study of the minorities, residing in non-indigenous environment (Titova, 2007).

## **METHODS**

In recent years, the construction of a research program based on the combination of quantitative and qualitative methods has become a common trend in domestic sociology (Sadokhin, 2002). The methodology of the study is based on a combination of quantitative (mass survey) and qualitative methods (in-depth interviews, focus groups, expert interviews). The outlined data is based on the materials of ethno-sociological study, conducted by the team of contributors in the period 2012-2013. The study uses the following methods: mass semi-formalized interview, in-depth structured interview, as well as qualitative and quantitative method - content analysis of mass media resources. The total number of respondents is 1,500. The ratio of men and women: 45.1% and 54.9%, respectively. Thus, the aforementioned sampling frame, from the point of view of the authors, is sufficiently representative for the solution of the research tasks.

## **RESULTS**

### **Key concepts**

Identification of motivational and meaningful content of ethnic identity is carried out through the study of ethnic and cultural needs, declared by the respondents, as well as the degree of satisfaction due to the realization of these needs. It is essential to determine the meaningful content of the concept of ethno-cultural needs, as well as the semantic boundaries of its use in relation to the current study. Regarding the former, the authors proceeded from the existing definitions of two derived concepts – ethnic culture and need, treating them as follows: ethnic culture is the set of cultural elements and structures with well-defined characteristics and ethno-differentiating functions. The need is the internal state of psychological or functional sense of insufficiency, which appears depending on situational factors. Referring to the semantic boundaries of the concept within the study, the authors are guided by the approach, formulated by the famous Norwegian explorer F. Barth, which consists in the following: “the features that are taken into account are not the sum

of 'objective' differences, but only those which the actors themselves regard as significant" (Barth, 2006). In this case under consideration it implies the inclusion of the concept of Russian culture and the phenomena that formally have a different essential basis, e.g. religious identity, into phenomenological domain. With regard to Tatarstan, where ethnic boundaries are largely imposed on the confessional ones – it also presumes that religious identification will be an integral part of common cultural identification for the majority of the reference group representatives with high degree of probability, which has been confirmed in the earlier studies. Proceeding from the aforesaid, the authors have organized the process of ethno-cultural needs analysis of the Russian population of Tatarstan on the basis of the following thematic blocks allocation – determination of the overall level of ethno-cultural needs actualization, structuralization of the most actualized ones and, finally, the analysis of the peculiarities of their representation in the information space of the Republic.

#### **The degree of actualization of ethnic identity**

Within the analysis of ethnic identity actualization the authors analyzed the respondents' answers to the following questions: "How important is it for you to be Russian?" and "What do you find the greatest need?". Data obtained during the field survey shows that ethnic identity, declared by the respondents, is sufficiently actualized in their environment. Thus, for 68.9% of the respondents ethnic identity is an important part of their lives. As the case stands, in the majority of cases ethnic identity is based on the needs of cultural and language identity. Generates interest and. Aside from that, the data reflecting both civil and religious identities arouse special interest. Obviously, it is the civil identity in terms of regional and all-Russian (14.1% and 14.7%, respectively) that is significantly more actualized among the Russian population than religious one (3.7%). With the assumption that 70.7% of the respondents classified themselves as believers in varying degree, 69.3% of them regarded themselves being Orthodox Christians. We assume that there is no contradiction in the data presented, with regard to almost full match of the level of declared actualized ethnic and religious identity in the form of Orthodoxy (68.9% and 69.3%, respectively). In our opinion, this is due to the identifying stereotype rooted in the minds of the majority of the Russian population: Russian – means Orthodox, where the religious component, as noted previously, is incorporated to the extent of its merge into ethno-cultural one. The low need for religious identity proper, which has been demonstrated, is linked to its interpretation by the respondents, primarily as the church-going and strictly observant level, which is insignificant among the majority of the Russian respondents: i.e. it has been noted that only 7.6% of the respondents follow all the ceremonies (ritualize). To obtain a more accurate understanding of the situation, we have compared the answers of the respondents to the aforementioned questions in terms of their social

and demographic characteristics, which could help to determine the degree and nature of the impact on the overall ethnic and cultural background of various social factors. Comparative analysis, conducted within the selected groups, which are distributed according to the categories of gender, age and education level, showed that the above mentioned tendencies have a general group character. Identified correlations between social characteristics of the respondents and assumed attitudes in relation to particular aspects of the issues are not systemic in nature on the whole, and, in the authors' view, have not affected the overall picture. In particular, women have shown a higher level of declared religiousness (79.4%) in comparison to the male respondents (62.4%) (the category includes the respondents, who have chosen the following answer option: "I am a believer and follow all the ceremonies (ritualize)" and "I am a believer, but I do not follow all the ceremonies (rituals)"). In turn, men have more frequently chosen the option "not interested in these issues" (12.9%) in comparison to women (5.4%). In addition, women have shown more need in the free use of their mother tongue than men: 16.2% and 11.8%, respectively. According to all other aspects of the issues under consideration, distributions in both groups are comparable in nature and did not go beyond the the scope of statistical error. The above referred differences may testify to the gender peculiarities of social activity of the representatives in both groups within specific areas of life. In particular, a higher degree of declared religiousness among Russian women in comparison to men has been traced in the results of other studies. A higher degree of actualization in linguistic domain within the group of women is associated with their traditionally greater involvement into the education of children. The age criterion has also had no fundamental impact on the respondents' answers.

Finally, only in one case the respondents' education level had a clearly defined relationship with the assumed attitude, which is in the question about the degree of actualization of ethnic identity, and was characterized by inverse relations with the education level. Thus, in terms of the following answer option: "awareness of being Russian is very important", the degree of such associativity decreased with the increase in the level of education among the respondents. Quantitatively, it is as follows: from 38.9% for people with primary and incomplete secondary education, to 23.1% for people with higher education.

However, despite the given examples of individual differences revealed among the representatives of the groups, we emphasize that the vast majority of the received responses reflect the similarity of the assumed attitudes. Thus, we can speak of a high level within the ethnic consolidation of ethno-cultural issues.

### **Ethno-cultural needs**

Upon the availability of such intraethnic background it is critical to assess how freely the respondents can meet their needs in the process of inclusion into Russian culture. The answer to the question: "Please rate how freely you can satisfy your

ethno-cultural needs?” showed that the vast majority of respondents (50%), living in the Republic of Tatarstan, do not experience difficulties in enculturation into the Russian culture. For a comprehensive assessment of the situation, we have appealed to the data obtained from in-depth interviews, carried out within the study with the leaders and activists of the organizations and associations, involved in the support and development of the Russian culture in the land. From the conversations it became clear that there is no any organized movement in support of the Russian culture in the Republic; it mainly constitutes a set of various more or less successful initiatives. The more successful projects are those which have cultural and educational or folk character. The most striking example is the history of the Russian folk culture festival “Karavon”, which began in the late 1980ies as a revival of the local festive traditions of a particular village, but with support of the authorities of the Republic by now it has gained the status of the all-Russian festival of the Russian folk culture. From the above given example it is clear that the Republic is trying to demonstrate its attention to the revival of the local Russian folk tradition, but as it has been mentioned by the informants, it often takes the form of governmentalized stylization, implying the emasculation of national component. Therefore it is interesting to clarify the meaningful content of the so-called traditional components of ethnic culture, to which we have assigned the ritual and festive culture. The analysis of the responses to the open questions in which they were asked to name the holidays on their own, as well as songs and dances, which they considered traditionally Russian, showed the following: 56.8% of respondents mentioned objects of the traditional way of life and culture which they have in the house, at the same time among such objects the majority of them (62.2%) named religious items, such as icons, cross, etc. When asked the question, whether you knew your folk dances, the respondents mentioned that they knew (45.9%), and 50.6% said they did not know. The following were mentioned among the folk dances: quadrille, waltz, karavon, yablochko, tsyganochka, barynya, podgornaya, tango, tap dance, berezka, etc. National dress has been worn permanently or on occasions by 25.1% of the respondents, while 73.4% of them haven't worn it at all. Among the national dress elements the following were mentioned: cross, sarafan, trousers, kokoshnik, bast shoes, beads, headscarf, pants, boots, embroidery, dress, apron, skirt, cap, valenki, etc. 60,5% of the respondents mentioned the following amongst the traditional Russian holidays, which they regularly celebrated: Easter, the Feast of Theophany, Christmas, Trinity Sunday, Kupala Night, Maslenitsa, Semik, etc. With respect to ritualization related to the ceremonies of the life cycle, associated with birth, marriage and burial, the absolute majority of the respondents answered in the affirmative: 86,2%, 74,1% и 85,9%., respectively. At the same time, 52.5% of the respondents expressed their willingness to follow the ceremonies in full and 31.7% - partially. With regard to the willingness to use folk culture samples, these figures were significantly lower – the desire to know their folk

dances was expressed by 36.1% of the respondents, folk songs - 52.7%, the willingness to wear the traditional dress elements was confirmed by 19.3%. Obviously, the modern Russian population in the bulk have a rather amorphous idea of the folk culture, which includes religious Orthodox elements, as well as international cultural samples, which have proliferated many decades ago, and for this reason, apparently, are perceived already as a part of the traditional folk culture, e.g. waltz, tango, tap dance, cap, etc. At the same time, the general need to use the elements of the traditional Russian culture has a different actualization in various areas of life which is the highest in relation to the life cycle rituals, average and low applied to the leisure aspect of everyday life.

### **DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSION**

The Russian population of Tatarstan, despite the long-term residence on the territory of the region (within the present-day administrative boundaries of the Republic), has lately become an object of a special research interest of ethnologists. The most intensive study of the Russian population was conducted from the 1940s till the end of the 1970s by the ethnologists of Kazan University, whose research issue was lined up around a central theme - the study of the Russian population of the Middle Volga region. This allowed not only to carry out a comprehensive study of the Russians in the whole region, to introduce a new ethnographic category – the Russians of the Middle Volga region into a fairly conservative ethnographic zoning, but also to shape a strong understanding of the specific nature of inter-ethnic cooperation in the region within the scientific discourse. Since the 1980s, the emphasis shifted from the study of the Russian population to the study of modern ethno-social processes, discussed in the general context of ethnic processes within the region, as well as the historical and ethnographic study of the urban population of the Kazan Volga region.

The post-Soviet period was characterized not only by the decrease in intensity of the “field” research expeditions of the Russian population of the Republic, but also by the displacement of traditional ethnographic perspectives into the area of interdisciplinary research, using sociological and ethno-psychological methods. The Russian population of the Republic was to a larger extent considered as ethno-social group, while such cornerstone issues as the transformation of the material, social and spiritual culture, which took place during this period, were, as a rule, outside the scope of research. Current tendencies in the study of Russian villagers are inseparable from a common theme – the study of ethno-cultural and ethno-social space of the Russians as a historical and social community. Thus, the wide range of research issues in relation to the modern Russian rural population is apparent; at the same time comprehensive studies, covering the above mentioned subject-matter, are rare. In our view, the aforesaid makes the research not only relevant, but virtually necessary for the formation of an overall objective picture of the state of the Russians as an ethnic community in the modern world.

Summing up the overall results of the study, it should be noted that the analyzed data allows to state that ethnic and cultural needs of the Russian population of the Republic of Tatarstan are quite stable and do not have a clear tendency towards a further expansion within different social groups. Main actualized ethno-cultural needs are freely implemented, whereas distinguished dissatisfaction is concentrated around the problem of the Russian language teaching within the educational system of the Republic, and more likely reflects the public perception of a potentially negative prospect of having the unbalanced language policy, which is taking place, according to their opinion. Thus, one may talk of the absence of significant motivators of ethnic mobilization in the group, which makes socially destructive actions of its representatives highly unlikely.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

Data discussed in the paper can be useful for social anthropologists (ethnologists), sociologists, demographers, regional ethnographers when studying local and regional communities.

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