

**Local communities in semi peripheral regions of Russia.** The Upper Volga (Verkhnevolzhie) region study<sup>1</sup>.

Verkhnevolzhie – is a chain of oblasts, situated on the Volga river over its confluence with Oka. Verkhnevolzhie includes Tver-, Yaroslavl-, Kostroma-, Ivanovo- and partly Nizhny Novgorod-oblasts. Nowadays this territory is formally known as “Nearest non-chernozem [non-black soil] area”, that differs from all of other non-chernozem areas by more rapid temp of population decrease because of migration outflows to capital and other regions during some centuries. Consequently, this territory became the poorest region of Central Russia. Thereby the territory of Verkhnevolzhie is not uniform, and is characterized by multidirectional socio-economic processes. A number of demographic and economic zones, and new growth points can be marked out.

### **1.1 Demographic prerequisites of current social phenomena**

The population size of Verkhnevolzhie goes down during long time, because that old settlement region has lost significance in country life to a considerable degree. For agricultural needs they use now the territories with more fecund soils. The forest resources are almost exhausted and transport-geographic position on the main water rout of the Central Russia, that make possible to enter Northern rivers, has not big importance now. During some centuries the most active, young and able-bodied people goes out this territories, in result we have long-standing negative “natural people selection” there. Besides, the natural reasons also impelled the population to migrate to more sustainable. Among other reasons of migration are artificial measures, e.g. on the first phases of industrialization in XX cent. the main human resources has been received by authorities, from the countryside of Verkhnevolzhie and neighboring territories.

And if some decades ago population outflow was compensated by high natural increase, from 80’s of XX cent. the countryside has absolute population loss. Moreover, from 90’s the people began come out from even the towns. Just only Kostroma, the power centers (Vologrechensk, Konakovo) and centers of the most called-for industry branches, received people. By 2000’s those towns had some population growth, but now even they lose the population. The population loss temp is approximately equal to 1% per year during last 20 years, and it has decelerated a little in some last years. The most appreciable depopulation is characteristically for Tver-oblast where, in addition to big population losses due to natural reasons, more and more people migrates to Moscow and St. Petersburg.

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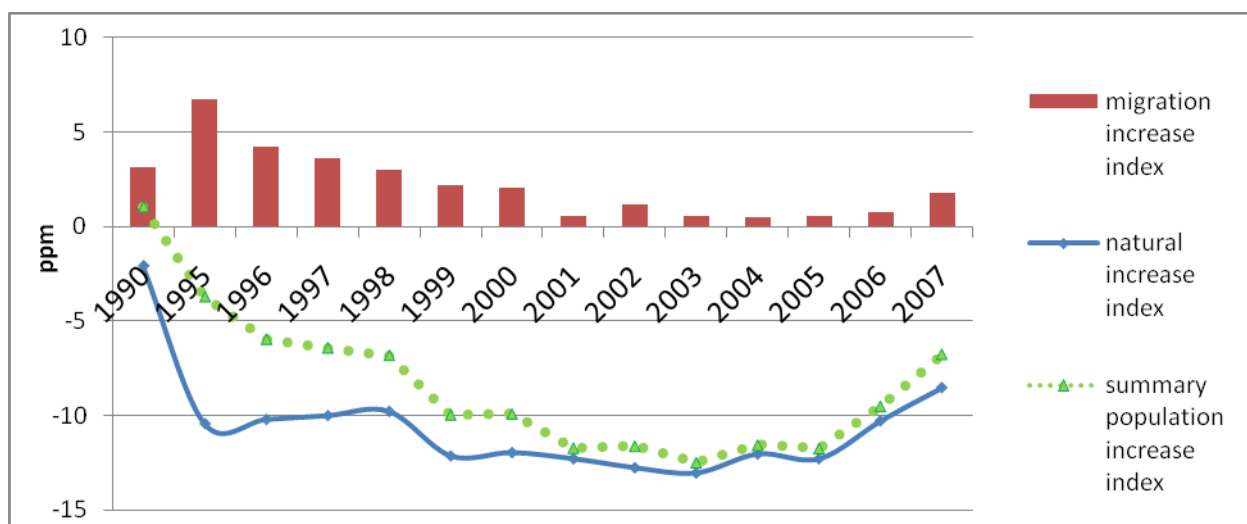
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Demographic environment in Verkhnevolzhie was one of the worst in Russia even before 1991: the mortality has exceeded the fertility in the middle of 80's and the tempo of the natural population loss increased in 90's. The fertility in 1996 was 1,8 times lower than in 1990. This is because the crisis (the people was not sure in material resources) and also because of the new next «war echo». The birth's rate growth began in the early 2000's. In 2007 it became almost at the 1990's level (10.7 ppm in 2007, 11.5 ppm – in 1990). However this was stipulated not only with economy improvement, but mostly with the fact that numerous people, born in 80's, entered the fertile age.

During long time Verkhnevolzhie was characterized by low than average birth rate comparatively to all the Russia and higher mortality rate. During recent 17 years it has almost doubled – to 22,2 ppm, and in some last years it has dropped to 18,5 ppm. Traditionally the most frequent reason for mortality in mortality structure is set of external circumstances (up to 12% in average). In Tver-oblast this index stands in the second place after mortality because of cardiovascular system disease. Up to 1/6 of population has died because of external cause in some years. This makes the evidence of extremely unfavorable social environment and heightened alcoholization level among the population.

These two trends combination – birth rate decrease and mortality increase – significantly slows down the natural population growth. Natural depopulation was typical for Verkhnevolzhie before 1991 too, although some natural population growth still remained on the main Russia's part. From 1995 the population loss in Verkhnevolzhie was twice as much as in the whole in Russia and much more than in neighboring central regions. Nowadays along with contemplated trend of demographic environment enhancement the demographic situation in region stays bad because population natural loss is still 2.5 times much comparatively to Russia in a whole. That is why this unfavorable territory got the unofficial status of “black hole”. But in spite the negative natural population growth during concerned period (1990 -2007) the Verkhnevolzhie was characterized by positive migration balance. The maximum migration inflow was stated in the beginning of 90's, when this territory received repatriates from Commonwealth of Independent States and from northern and eastern regions. Many of them considered the Volga-river region as the place for next relocation in the capitals. This was the reason why by 2000 migration outflow, that almost exceeded migration increase, begun to decrease. The most attractive migration districts are the several territories of Tver-oblast that have advantageous transport-geographical position (Konakovo, Tver, Bologoye, Torszhok districts) and also industrial centers of Yaroslavl-oblast. From Kostroma-oblast, as also from Ivanovo-oblast, the migrants go to other regions, and the migration balance became negative from 2004.

Fig.1 Natural and migration growth dynamics in Verkhnevolzhie, ppm



The statistic data didn't include considerable amount of "shuttle" commuters that go from Verkhnevolzhie to Moscow-oblast (rarely to Leningrad region and St.-Petersburg). It is typical that many people who can reach big towns as Moscow (Tver, Konakovo) go to work and back every day. Citizens living in more distant places often have "shift work" (they works for several days, rarely – for pair of weeks). Migrant workers go to as Russia's capital, and to the towns of Moscow-oblast(Sergiev Posad, Klin, Dubna and other). There is a similar situation on middle-level: citizens of small towns often have "shift work" in regional capitals, and a village citizens look for work in district centers. Big migration mobility is typical for men, that is why along with women predominance in statistics data the real portion of women population is even more. By the way this is typical not only for current Verkhnevolzhie status but also for time before 1917 year. Even in that time it was the main areal of mass outflow, named «womanish land». The women's portion is especially big in Tver- and Kostroma-oblasts as there are much poorer in cense of vacancies for men, and this is a real stimulus to up-to-date middle-term work-journeys.

As for the whole Russia, the population aging process is typical also for Verkhnevolzhie. And as far as mortality level is high, the population portion with age elder than 17 years increased negligible (on 0,6 per cent point). The changes are more noticeable in correlation between younger and elder population: if earlier the portion of 16 years olders was 1/5 from total population quantity, then nowadays there's portion is less than 14 %, and there is a trend to further decrease. In the next years numerous able-bodied population part will move up to "seniors", and a little group of non able-bodied population will move up to able-bodied people. This will come to abrupt rise of demographic load, and population loss process will be more intensive.

## **1.2 Second Factor: “Breaking” the traditional dispersion processes and town net development loss.**

As Verkhnevolzhie is old settlement region, there are several population settlement pattern types. Initially the main population part concentrated along main navigable and floating rivers, and also on portages (where the boats were carried overland), connected this rivers. The heightened population density was also typical for fertile, fecund areas. As the road network begun to form the settlement supporting framework has changed: new space arrangement axis arised (e.g., the road, connected Moscow and St.-Petersburg). From the beginning of XVII cent. the manufacturing settlement system started to form. At this stage it was mainly connected with linen manufacturing development on the territory of Ivanovo region, on the south east of Kostroma region and around Yaroslavl, where manufacturing settlement cluster and home cottage work were formed. In the last of 1890's population settlement pattern was influenced by railway network established in that time. Along the railways aroused spots with heightened population density, and more and more people concentrated around transport nodes. Additional two factors promoted to the population movement from village to towns: the abolition of serfdom, that is why migration from the agrarian overpopulation outflow began, and also large-scale manufacturing industry development in towns required more and more manpower resources. In the Soviet power years to above mentioned population settlement patterns new population aggregation have joined (often the systems population settlement), connected to industrial production development as, for example, peatery, lumbering, series of hydroelectric power plants, jointed in hydroelectric system. The population settlement pattern system significantly changed in 70's, when plan for expansion Non-chernozem was adopted, and kolkhoz enlargement began while no prospects villages were gradually resettled.

After 1991 many peatery and lumbering villages, especially stayed far from the main transport ways, diseased. The villages on the district periphery depopulated; the continuous population settlement framework got more and more fragile and often was replaced by interrupted population settlement pattern. After little crisis population inflow to the country the urbanization process continued with new power and population began to concentrate in district centers. So, many people gradually moved to the region capitals. Nowadays the population distribution in Verkhnevolzhie is extremely uneven: 42,5% of all population concentrated in big and the biggest towns (oblast's capitals and the city of Rybinsk). In Yaroslavl region almost 2/3 of population live in two towns of this region. In spite of some consolidation, rural population density not exceeds 50 men per one village in average, and in regions peripheral parts this index may reach 20-25 human per village, while the one half of it has up to 10 humans per village. Even in suburban areas rural settlements has 70 residents in average. In Verkhnevolzhie the rural

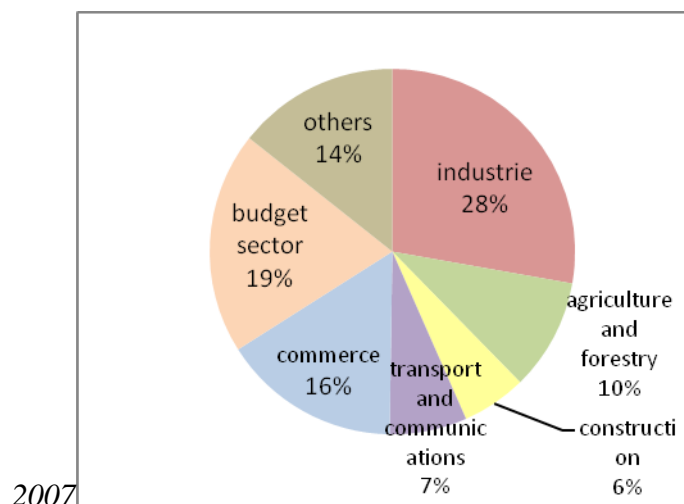
population density is extremely low: 5,9 men/km<sup>2</sup> in average. Though this index a little higher than average for Russia, but it is the minimal index for Central Russia. In the peripheral districts (Soligalich, Kologriv, Zharkovsky, Peno and so on) rural population density equals 1-1,5 men/km<sup>2</sup> – that is extremely low. On the territory of one half of region rural population density not exceeds 5 men/ km<sup>2</sup>, that, in some scientists opinion [11], inevitably comes to the collapse of intensive farming industry and the replacement by extensive agriculture.

One of the problems of Verkhnevolzhie population settlement pattern is extreme deficiency in the towns, that could promote to countryside development. Currently there are only 5 towns with population over 100,000 citizens (towns with minor population has not significant influence on countryside, [5]). As the attraction of “supplementary” population to form big cities uniform grid is impossible, it is reasonable to look for new forms of agriculture and forestry organization on the territories distant from big central towns, but even then part of territories will be still inevitably undeveloped. Besides the deficiency in towns as such, the town development level in Verkhnevolzhie is extremely low: the life mode of the people live in small towns is almost the same as for countryside – the houses are not equipped with service lines, up to 60% of citizens have small holding and population is not strive for the town territory improvements. By formal 77% level of urbanization less than 45% of people live in true urban conditions.

### **1.3 The changes in labor-market – one of the reasons for contemporary social phenomena**

After 1991’s reforms in Russia they have significant decrease of workers employed in economy. For the first years this index has decreased by 15.5% – it is equal to 412,200 persons. If it is taken to consideration that in the same period the population has decreased only by 88,000 men, we can speak about unemployment rise, middle-term work-journeys activation and shadow economy development. The maximum employment decay in economy was registered in industrial Ivanovo region, where employed people number has decreased by 22%. At the same time the shifts in employment occupational pattern began: the basic and secondary economy sectors began to lose the majority, and they have the growth of employment in service, mainly state-financed companies and the commerce. From 2000’s beginning the gradual growth of employed workers was registered, firstly in industrial production and in market services. This data is substantially differentiated around the territory: in outlying districts employment in state-financed services is still predominates, as there is no alternative. Nowadays the employment occupational pattern in Verkhnevolzhie economy is similar to Russia’s average distribution. The difference is they have a little heightened (28% as compared to 21%) portion of employed in the industry.

Fig.2 Employment structure of Verkhnevolzhie,



The unemployed population portion (as for ILO) is not exceed the natural unemployment (5%), and though this index is lower than the average for country, the situation on labor-market is far from successful. In agriculture and forestry they have high level of latent unemployment, especially in the outlying districts. In the 90's beginning, the unemployment level was noticeably higher and this index dynamics for the last 17 years is similar to average for the Russia in the whole. With surplus employment in agriculture and industry, the labor efficiency is still very low. The modernization of agriculture and industry is impeded by the low workers proficiency and predomination of elder workers. As sociologists estimate [9], if the person lived in non-chernozem area, has no job for over half a year, he or she could scarcely return to previous occupation and would have the former efficiency.

It is important to notice that the unemployed people often lose the labor motivation and even when the vacancies with high remuneration appears, few people are ready to work more time. The significant threat for long-term labor-market development is the destruction of professional education system. Even though many educational institutions are still exists, their specialization is not conform to the market necessities, and the education grade is rated by employers as very poor. The most adequate professional education system they have in Yaroslavl region, where it maintained due to leading industrial enterprise existence and their interest in manpower resources attraction. In the whole, non-core specialties (accounting, jurisprudence, computer science) are more popular in agrarian and in engineering colleges, that in the future can lead to manpower resources disproportion,

#### 1.4 Economical prerequisites

By 1990's beginning, this region encountered the economical difficulties, that were typical for the whole Central Russia. Agriculture was unprofitable almost everywhere, except the big enterprises in suburban areas, and also kolkhoses with high labor efficiency. Mostly the

industrial enterprises works stable, but the weakness was that their production was oriented to internal market mainly and had poor quality. Besides, considerable part of industrial enterprises depended primary products delivery and selling the production to another republics of former Soviet Union. In Verkhnevolzhie they had rise of central-peripheral contrasts and the latter revealed notwithstanding the artificial support from the outlying districts.

With such diversified Verkhnevolzhie economy in the whole, each region has scanty economic sector set, and consequently – abundance of single-industry towns. And along with it almost all the economic sectors (and firstly – in the industry) they had significant recession of main indexes. The combination of narrow specialization and lower growth rate in industry leads to hard situation for many towns. The problems are especially sharp in Ivanovo region (the former pretender for «Russian Manchester» name), where the textile industry couldn't reinstated after 1990's crisis and in conditions of contemporary situation on textile world market the quick development of Ivanovo region is unlikely possible. The situation in the towns with engineering industry isn't better. The demand for there production permanently decreases and don't meet competition with technologies of South-East countries. There exist only the enterprises that maintain the needs of respective towns and do the preprocessing of local raw materials, and mainly – the forest.

Agriculture is one of the most important branches of economic sector of the region, represented in this territory. Along with forestry it ensures the rural population and characterizes the level of the land development in this territory. Currently the agriculture development index is indirect indicator of «place disease», as the agriculture breakdown, especially in the outlying districts, leads to inevitable degradation both of production facilities and agricultural tenure, and moreover, – to rural population degradation, that is not ready for another occupation types and independent search for development. Agriculture was not successful also before the transition period. And the main reason for it was the rural population permanent outflow, that is why even significant government support couldn't do the expected results: while the costs were high, outcome was noticeably weaker than that of in other territories with more favorable agro-climatic conditions where they kept manpower potential. This was influenced, partly due to subsidies abolition, that led to dramatic price imbalance and complication of holding company organization, fodder purchases and marketing the production. Besides, the population mentality and mainly, enterprises administrators was such, that they were more producer rather the managers, and that they weren't ready to independently solve not only production targets, but also trade, human resources and other problems that stood in front of this branch in 90's. In result production decay was observed during 10 years and firstly, in collective farm sector,

where they had agricultural and machinery infrastructure outwear. In the sum in the most parts of Verkhnevolzhie inevitably «deagrarisation» process started.

Service economic sector has also low development index, that is clear from statistics data: there are high level of infant mortality and low expected life span. The educational system do not respond the economic demand, and the situation even worsen, because of teacher deficiency growth as the best part of it moves to another regions. The whole situation is worsen also due to all over “optimization” of social infrastructure branch network that leads to continuously decrease the number of rural schools, medical station and Palaces of Culture, that inevitably leads to gradual towns and villages elimination that have not basic services. One of the most perspective types of activity is recreational tourism, because the region has rich historical and cultural heritage. But the recreational tourism development needs the tourist facility maintenance and attendant infrastructure development, however the region inner recourses are obvious insufficient. Therefore currently recreation carries spontaneous character and don't make region's social-economic situation more successful.

## **2. Principal social processes and phenomena specific for the population in the Verkhnevolzhie**

Unfavorable socio-economic situation in Verkhnevolzhie, have been forming for several centuries and most significantly in the past 20 years, led to the exacerbation of specific social problems and negative processes typical for semi-peripheral territories:

(A) Depopulation and “negative natural selection” and, as a consequence, the marginalization of the population. Such processes are typical not only for the oblasts of Upper Volga, although this area most closely interacts with Moscow and St. Petersburg agglomerations, constantly supplying the capital cities with population currently having no alternative development ways. Migration outflow enforced by low standards of consumption and extremely low income (with extremely low pensions for significant aged population) leads to marginal lifestyles.

(B) The loss of professional skills. Long-term structural unemployment in rural areas and especially in single-industry towns led to a loss of skills and working culture. Most of the population have lost the system working abilities and is aimed at temporary quick earnings that only aggravate the situation. Destruction of vocational training (closure of educational institutions, the loss teachers, corruption) does not improve the situation, as media often contribute to the formation of other life priorities ("easy" office job, fast earnings in service industries, "romantics" of criminal world and shadow economy) mental loss of labor values continues.

(C) The “desocialization”. This process includes several components: the gap between traditional and family values, gap between generations, the loss of social solidarity and collectivism (under conditions of survival everyone struggles for himself). This is typical feature of "semi-periphery" phenomenon; in regions distanced from major centers influence and thus not characterized by such a significant migration outflow, i.e. Vologda oblast’, “the collective culture” still kept its positions as people realize that stick together in modern conditions is more favorable for them. In Verhnevolzhie a significant portion of the able-bodied population works outside localities (in closest district centers, regional capitals or in metropolitan agglomeration), returning home not regularly. Thus majority of population wastes time and active force for the way from home to work and back, a psychology of temporary employee is formed resulting in declining of the interest in the local development as it becomes just a temporary place. In addition, values of the rural lifestyle decline, it is becoming similar to those of small towns with spanned generations and escalation in social contradictions. The priority of the working population leaves their native areas, sooner or later, prevent the emergence of new places of employment because of the threat of lack inhuman resource - thus forming the vicious circle.

(D) The above processes lead to social apathy, lack of motivation to improve living conditions, to work. This phenomenon is not new for this area; partly it is inherited from a planned economy era, when the responsibility and interest of each worker and a resident in local development was minimal. Probably, the roots of the problem are deeper – late cancellation of serfdom did not contribute the formation of individual values among the population. Outcome was the preponderance of mentality among the population: people do not seek the ways out of this crisis but wait for new solutions and transformations "from above". Even rare pockets of self-organization arise only when pushed by external forces.

(E) Social and spatial polarization of the population. The level of difference in location and quality of living of the population increases gradually. Peripheral areas most quickly lose population – it is concentrated in district centers. Small town gradually loose the population to the oblast-centers, lack of natural increase does not cover the loss of population – thus space is generally polarized. The territory transfers into a land of relatively major centers and extensive low-populated areas. A similar process occurs and social organization of society: marginal population ability for changing lifestyle decreases, and those who is looking forward for changes prefer just to leave unfavorable environment and find work elsewhere. Thus the new spatial system is forming, where numerous settlements with people "surviving" and a number of relatively major centers, where the economic and social activity is above an average level.

### **3. The expert zoning of Verkhnevolzhie: local communities features in different areas**

The territory of the Verkhnevolzhie is plural and it is obviously too early to speak about the general degradation of population and socio-economic landscape. We can define 3 basic groups of local communities in the Verkhnevolzhie: rural population, population of small towns and population of big cities. These groups of local communities are adjusted by the geographical laws: 1) first of all, by their location relative to Moscow capital and St. Petersburg agglomerations and 2) secondly, by the intraregional central-provincial contrasts.

3.1.1. Features of the local rural communities of the extra-agglomeration area. This is exactly the area where the higher listed processes and events develop strongly. Rural population of the provincial area can be characterized by:

- 1) the maximum trends of natural and mechanical depopulation
- 2) poor life quality and
- 3) social infrastructure disorganization.

All this inevitably leads to marginalization. Major part of people doesn't have regular connections with towns and cities and has to live at the expense of subsistence farming slightly supplemented by the low unemployment benefit or pension. The major part of able-bodied population works outside rural settlements (they are usually having a shift work in towns). Those who stay at the rural area have occasional earnings in the lumbering or during the spring field work. Most of these earnings are usually spent on spirits, which doesn't contribute to labor ethic development. The situation gets more complicated by the fact that agricultural enterprises in rural areas not influenced by towns or cities offer low wages and hard work conditions. Forestry enterprises do not provide the rural population with enough work places and non-agricultural occupation in the Verkhnevolzhie is almost absent.

Phenomenon of social apathy, typical not only for this area, has been existing here in exaggerated form for a long period of time. Explorations in the Kashin district (Tver- oblast) and Galich district (Kostroma-oblast) showed that even in 80's when the socio-economic situation was relatively problem-free, there have already been no domestic resources for development in the countryside: all specialists were invited from towns as a part of a program for Non-chernozem area development. They are the only ones who continue working up to now. Local population still hopes for similar measures to be undertaken by the modern government, yet the practice of young specialists allocation in Russia has been stopped.

Not numerous rural youth deserves special attention. The major part of the young people aim at finding a job in non-agricultural areas. Those who by virtue of different circumstances

have to stay in the countryside don't have any motivation for systematic work in forestry or agriculture and prefer occasional earnings. There are objective reasons for this: work in the primary sector of the economy is very hard though the wages are still very low. At the same time human factors start to play a more important role: rural labor is not rated high anymore. The reason is "cellular globalization" - a process so-called by the Russian sociologists, particularly N. Pokrovsky, which is characterized by the penetration of gloss of global values into the countryside. Because of fast spreading mobile communication and internet, as well as usual mass media, young people can see the best aspects of life in the cities, the advantages of working in the tertiary sector of the economy, as a result rural labor becomes less attractive. Yet, there is still no awareness of difficulties of the urban way of life (they have to get an education, to settle themselves in the city, to pay for the housing and communal services, to buy food which they receive relatively for free in the countryside). An evident example is the share of young specialists working ex professo. Only 3-5 students out of 20 (which is the average number of students in agrarian professions groups) start to work ex professo, that's no higher than 1/4 of all the students. The others prefer low-paid jobs on local enterprises, demanding no special education or get a job as security officers, drivers and so on.

3.1.2. The situation in rural areas under the influence of big cities is not as difficult. That's mainly because of new enterprises established by businessmen from cities or other regions or because of new investments to already existing enterprises. New owners usually offer better labor conditions quite frequently creating close interaction between cities and rural areas, thus allowing the employees to combine urban comfort and work in the agriculture or forestry. Quite often they make replacements of fixed assets, first of all agricultural machinery, that significantly increase the attractiveness of rural labor.

The other reason of a slightly better situation of the rural areas under the influence of big cities is the possibility to sell the agricultural production and forest goods on the city markets. This stimulates the processes of self-organization intended to create the procurement net and establish the work of dealers who are responsible for the transportation. This makes for the development of small farms which is not bad for the rural population, but by no means contributes to the regional economy development as the small farms productivity is rather low and has no room to increase and the whole procurement system doesn't offer any taxes.

The third factor is the presence of summer residents. Recently the so-called "far summer cottages", where you can rest from May to September, became widely popular in Central Russia. Quite often pensioners with their grandchildren and people occupied in spheres, where the employment in summer is minimal, spend the whole summer in the countryside. Their presence give the local population an opportunity to earn extra money: summer residents buy agricultural

products and sometimes need help when building and trimming their houses. It happens that summer cottages set an example for local population – they start to improve their own houses and parcels. But summer residents are a seasonal event and regular disruptions in the work do not contribute to the development of rural communities, do not form the labor culture. We can more likely talk about sustaining of the countryside current level of development and about the conservation of modernization processes.

3.2.1 Another type of local communities is formed in small towns. It is necessary to distinguish small towns in the outlying districts from small towns in the agglomeration zones. Badly organized urban area, major role of small farms and agricultural occupation of the population (up to 80 percent of the town's population, sometimes up to 90 percent), dependence on the town-forming enterprise, high gap between the citizens and government – all this is typical for every type of small towns.

The major part of town-forming enterprises of the Verkhnevolzhie had textile or machine-building specialization. Both sectors endured enormous decline in the 90-s and hasn't recovered since then. This led to long-term structure unemployment which eventually results in loss of qualification and motivation for labor, as there are quite few alternative occupations. Part of the released labor force managed to find new job in the services and commerce, but that's no more than 1/3 of all these workers. Many people were forced to search for shift work in other cities and towns, that is more common among men. The consequences of modern "middle-term work-journeys" are similar to those in the countryside: men are shift working and acquire some negative qualities of "capital" way of life, their families lack care, unfaithfulness happens more often and the misunderstanding among the couple is growing. Individual survival strategies do not contribute to population cooperation, which make difficulties for private enterprises. Entrepreneurs are usually immigrants from republics of CIS, which predominantly leads to interethnic relationship aggravation (conservative, historically mono-ethnic society find itself unready for communication with representatives of other ethnic groups with their different mentality) and that strengthens social conflicts.

The most active people outflow to other cities and regions, bad organized urban area and difficult economic situation of the town-forming enterprises eventually formed the individual survival strategies of the citizen. Self-organization happens more rarely, than in the countryside. Citizens are not ready to solve their vital problems together, fight for their rights – unions are formed only in cultural sphere (society of poets, sport groups, amateur talent activities groups and so on) or in case of extreme dissatisfaction by the actions of the government. The only political mass-meeting that has happened in the Verkhnevolzhie for the past 20 years was

associated with the causeless 300 % growth of utility rate as a part of a state pilot project. In other situations people act individually.

Thus, despite the fact that there are more opportunities to find a job in the town than in the countryside, disproportions caused by the excess of workers over vacancies start the same processes and events as in the rural areas. The town's specificity is in its stronger acuteness because of higher concentration of economy and population.

3.2.2 Towns in the influence zones of big cities and agglomerations are usually remarkable for their higher economical activity as they quite often become the platform for business, that for some reason was moved out of the cities. This leads to the creation of new workplaces usually with higher salaries which strengthen the competition and raises the qualification of workers. Quite often these towns become attractive to tourists that boosts social development and helps to diversify the economy, however, these are usually spontaneous processes that don't have much influence on the social and economic development. On the whole small towns in the influence zones of big cities and agglomerations have the same problems as in other towns of the Verkhnevolzhie, but here these problems are smoothed to a great extent because there are more different workplaces and many people feel the "invisible hand" from the capital they are waiting for.

3.3 Big cities (in the Verkhnevolzhie these are the regional centers and the city of Rybinsk) are remarkable for a more balanced labor market structure, that helps to level many social conflicts. Yet, even these towns didn't manage to escape from the problem of long-term structure unemployment (even in big cities textile and machine-building enterprises that provide the major share of workplaces, were not able to overcome the slowing down of the production) and some of the subsequent problems. Service sector is developed better in big cities – exactly in the service sector many people who lost the job during the deindustrialization of the 90-s could find a new job. Yet, mainly women went to work in the service sector, men had to search for the work outside their home cities – in Moscow, rarely in St. Petersburg or oil-and-gas producing regions.

Usually, the bigger the city – the higher is the individual activity of each citizen. That's why individual enterprises are developed in big cities, and interaction of these cities with other cities helps to make business contacts and develop inter-regional cooperation. Big cities have more chances to receive investments as they concentrate main labor and economic resources. But in general big cities in the Verkhnevolzhie have the same problems as the whole area: depopulation, aging, loss of professional skills and loss of labor culture, insufficient level of social sector development.

In conclusion I would like to say a few words to excuse the Verkhnevolzhie. This territory has been a hostage of history for many years. Development of this region was generally forced, because Slavic tribes couldn't occupy more fertile parts of East European plain – they were held by constant nomad raids. Gradually the direction of Russian colonization shifted towards South and East, population started to leave the southern taiga in search of more convenient conditions for agriculture and comfortable living. Long-term population outflow was aggravated by periodical demographical and economical shocks. Human and nature resources for wars of the XX century were taken exactly from this region, heavy burden of intensive industrialization fell upon the shoulders of population here harder than in other regions. And now during the “ultracentralization” period the Verkhnevolzhie is doomed to stay in the shadow of the capital and only sometimes feel the benefits of their “not-far-from-the-capital” location.

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