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Assessment of the Comfort of the Urban Environment as a Factor in the Social Well-Being of Citizens of the Arkhangelsk Oblast *

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Abstract. Since 2016, Russia has been implementing the priority federal program "Formation of a Comfortable Urban Environment". During this period, significant funds have been spent and hundreds of improvement projects implemented in the urban environment in both large and small cities across the country. How did these improvements affect the subjective assessment of the urban environment among citizens? Are the residents involved in the development of these projects, or are they indifferent to these topics? Is there a difference in assessing the quality of the urban environment by the citizens between small and medium cities, company towns and multifunctional metropolitan areas? The article is a partial analysis of a comprehensive study's data, "The Formation of a Comfortable Urban Environment in the Arkhangelsk Oblast". The survey was conducted among residents of 5 cities of the Arkhangelsk oblast (n = 793). The methodology for assessing social well-being is used. The cities studied are varied in the typology of size and the dominant form of employment. The results of the study demonstrate the interest of residents in implementation projects. Assessment of the current urban environment is recorded as moderately unsatisfied. Moreover, there is no fundamental difference in assessments of the urban environment's current conditions in the opinions of residents of small and single-industry towns and citizens of a large, regional center city.

Keywords: *city, urban environment, social well-being, urban environment quality index, urban transformation, types of cities.*

Introduction

Modern cities are centers of development, accumulating technology, finance, infrastructure, and qualified personnel. One of the factors in attracting these resources is a high-quality urban environment. Comfort of living is one of the most significant factors in ensuring the competitiveness of settlements, regions and the country as a whole. The urban environment is not only landscapes, but also the qualitative state of its natural and man-made components, the level of development of information exchange, the nature of the dominant symbolism [1, Dridze T.M., p. 131]. But if a quarter of a century ago, the famous Soviet sociologist Tamara Dridze believed that people and the urban environment do not occupy an insufficient place in predictive social design, today the situation has changed, despite the fact that perception of the city as an object of management are developing slowly, possessing tremendous inertia. At the same time, the urban envi-

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ronment as the focus of civilization has been evolving for five thousand years, sometimes with stops, often with backward movements [2, Glazychev V.L., p. 259].

In this sense and in this connection, we imagine the city as a social laboratory. According to Robert Park, civilization and social progress in our modern cities have acquired the character of a kind of controlled experiment [3, p. 4].

One of such social experiments is the implementation of the priority federal project "Formation of a comfortable urban environment". The main goal of the program is to create conditions for the systematic improvement of the quality and comfort of the urban environment throughout Russia through the annual implementation (in the period from 2017 to 2020) of a set of priority measures to create a modern comfortable urban environment, the implementation of 400 complex improvement projects and training of 2.000 specialists by 2020[1].

Integral index of urban environment quality

There are various methods and ratings to assess the state of cities as a whole and its individual components, which differ in the degree of differentiation of indicators and an emphasis on social, cultural, political, economic, environmental or other parameters. Global City Indicators Programme, City Blueprint, European Green Capital Award, European Green City Index and others are among the foreign indicators. Among the numerous Russian approaches to assessing and rating cities, it is important to note the general index of cities attractiveness of the Ministry of Regional Development of the Russian Federation (up to 2014) and the integral index of the urban environment quality of the Ministry of Construction of the Russian Federation.

For several years, the Ministry of Construction of the Russian Federation has been determining the quality level of the urban environment of municipalities. The methodology for calculating the integrated index is used for this purpose, based on the indices of the quality of the urban environment [2]. The results of the Index formation are used in the implementation of the provisions of the Decree of the President of the Russian Federation of May 7, 2018 No. 204 "On national goals and strategic objectives of the development of the Russian Federation for the period up to 2024", the national project "Housing and the urban environment", as well as to determine the amount of subsidies from the federal budget to the budgets of the constituent entities of the Russian Federation to support state programs of the constituent entities of the Russian Federation and municipal programs for the formation of a modern urban environment.

[1] Strategicheskoe napravlenie razvitiya «ZhKKh i gorodskaya sreda» [Strategic Direction of Development "Housing and Communal Services and Urban Environment"]. URL: http://www.minstroyrf.ru/trades/gorodskaya-sreda/strategicheskoe-napravlenie-razvitiya-zhkkh-i-gorodskaya-sreda/ (accessed 26 December 2019).

[2] Rasporyazhenie Pravitel'stva RF ot 23 marta 2019 g. N 510-r «Metodika formirovaniya indeksa kachestva gorodskoy sredy» [Order of the Government of the Russian Federation of March 23, 2019 No. 510-r "Methodology for the Formation of the Urban Environment Quality Index"]. URL: http://static.government.ru/media/files/wbRiqrDYKeKbPh9FzCHUwWoturf2Ud0G.pdf (accessed 26 December 2019).

The urban environment is characterized by a combination of natural, architectural, planning, environmental and other factors that form the habitat in a certain territory and determine the comfort of living in this territory. In this document, the concept of "urban environment" is used in relation to cities, urban districts, urban settlements, as well as rural settlements.

The Ministry of Construction of the Russian Federation, together with the state company “Dom.RF” and the “Strelka” consulting bureau, calculated the quality indices of the urban environment of 1.114 municipalities for 2018. The index represents the digital value of the state of urban environment of the settlements, assessed from quantitative and measurable indicators of comfort in the territory concerned.

When calculating the city index, the maximum and minimum absolute values in the data array are determined (in each of the climatic and size groups) and a fixed absolute value is determined for each point. The cities are divided into ten climatic and size groups for the correct compilation of scales for assessing the city index and their correct comparison. Two indicators are taken into account while assigning a city to the corresponding group: the geographical location of the city (constant factor) and the population of the city (updated annually).

Climatic groups are determined by the following parameters: cities located on the territory of a conventionally comfortable climate, and cities located on the territory of an uncomfortable climate.

For several years of using the methodology for calculating the urban environment quality index, the approaches and the number of indicators have changed. The technique has been adjusted and refined several times. Today, the final index includes an assessment of six spaces on six criteria. The spaces include housing, road network, green spaces, public and business infrastructure, social and leisure infrastructure, city-wide space. Each of the spaces is assessed according to the following criteria: safety, comfort, environmental friendliness and health, identity and diversity, modernity and relevance of the environment, management efficiency. Thus, there are 36 indicators with a value from 0 to 10 points; the maximum possible value of the city index is 360 points. Information on 19 indicators is taken from open sources: information from search and information mapping services, data from a geographic information system, space images of territories, social networks. The remaining 17 indicators are taken from statistics agencies and executive authorities.

According to the calculations of the indices of urban environment state of 1.114 settlements made by the Ministry of Construction of the Russian Federation in 2018, the average value of the quality index of the urban environment in the country was 163 points. The share of cities with a favorable urban environment at the end of the year is 23%[3]. That is, 262 settlements are

[3] Minstroy Rossii obnarodoval pervyy v strane indeks kachestva gorodskoy sredy [The Ministry of Construction of Russia published the country's first urban environment quality index]. URL: http://www.minstroyrf.ru/press/minstroy-rossii-obnarodoval-pervyy-v-strane-indeks-kachestva-gorodskoy-sredy/ (accessed 26 December 2019).

characterized by a favorable urban environment, and the environment in the remaining 852 cities is described in the index as unfavorable.

In large cities in uncomfortable climatic zones, a favorable environment has been formed in three cities of the Arctic region — Murmansk (zonal base for the development of the Arctic), Norilsk and Severodvinsk (regional (areal) base for the development of the Arctic), lower indicators in this group of cities are in Petropavlovsk-Kamchatskiy, Yakutsk and Nefteyugansk.

Table 1

Urban environment quality index[4]

Characteristics[5]		Arkhangelsk	Severodvinsk	Kotlas	Novodvinsk	Koryazhma
Population		349.7 thous. — large city	183.3 thous. — large city	61.8 thous. — middle city	38.4 thous. — small city	36.7 thous. — small city
Geographic location		relatively comfortable climate	severe climatic conditions	relatively comfortable climate	relatively comfortable climate	relatively comfortable climate
Spaces	Accommodation and surrounding area	21	32	26	35	42
	Street and road network	32	38	25	25	38
	Green spaces	19	35	24	25	23
	Social and business infrastructure and the surrounding area	22	22	21	19	19
	Social and recreational infrastructure and the surrounding area	25	31	35	28	31
	Citywide space	31	27	23	33	30
Final score		150	185	154	165	183

Among the cities of the Arkhangelsk oblast that participated in the study “Formation of a comfortable urban environment in the Arkhangelsk oblast” [6], two cities, Severodvinsk and Koryazhma, scored more than 50% of the maximum possible number of points, which, according to the methodology, characterizes the environment in these cities as favorable. In Arkhangelsk, Kotlas and Novodvinsk, less than half of the maximum number of points was scored — the environment is characterized as unfavorable.

[4] Rasporyazhenie Pravitel'stva RF ot 23 marta 2019 g. N 510-r «Metodika formirovaniya indeksa kachestva gorodskoy sredy» [Order of the Government of the Russian Federation of March 23, 2019 N 510-r "Methodology for the Formation of the Urban Environment Quality Index."] URL: http://static.government.ru/media/files/wbRiqrDYKeKbPh9FzCHUwWoturf2Ud0G.pdf (accessed 26 December 2019).

[5] Indeks kachestva gorodskoy sredy [Urban Environment Quality Index.] URL: https://индекс-городов.рф/#/regions/3 (accessed 26 December 2019).

[6] The study was carried out in April 2019 within the framework of the RFBR grant 18-411-290010 “Models of communicative management in the development of urban space (on the example of the Arkhangelsk oblast). A survey among the population of the Arkhangelsk oblast over 18 years old (Arkhangelsk, Severodvinsk, Koryazhma, Kotlas, Novodvinsk). A combined method of collecting information: field research in older age groups and an online survey on the NArFU questionnaire platform in youth and middle age groups. The sample size is 793 respondents. The statistical error does not exceed 4.5%.

The main task of the Index is not to rank cities, but to find the problems that need to be solved in order to launch the renewal of cities and track the effectiveness of urban development programs. By 2024, the goal is to increase the average value of the urban environment index by 30% and halve the number of cities with an unfavorable urban environment. It is planned to spend more than 300 billion rubles to create a comfortable urban environment[7]. Thus, the assessment of the quality of the urban environment contributes to an increase in the efficiency of using the city's resources and sets the directions for long-term development strategies. However, the index becomes a real development tool only if it takes into account the needs of the population, the rhythms of cities, which allow us to consider the city as an integral system. When considering a city as an integral system, it is necessary to comprehend the spatial framework with physical elements of the city both natural landscape and created by people, in which all elements of city existence change at different rates.

Analysis of data from a comprehensive study "Formation of a comfortable urban environment in the Arkhangelsk oblast"

In one of the sociological conceptualizations of the city as an independent phenomenon, the key parameter that distinguishes a city from a non-city is its size, expressed in terms of population. It is the number of residents with a number of other characteristics that determines the qualitative transition from rural to urban lifestyle, expressed in a greater number of daily interactions with other people, greater personal independence, etc. The foundation of this tradition was laid by G. Zimmel [4], and then the Chicago School developed it.

The echo of this approach is still being heard in those systems and indexes that rank cities by population. A classic example is the system for assessing cities of the Ministry of Construction and the Integral Index of the Urban Environment Quality discussed above. This method certainly made sense in an era when the status of the city gave certain tax or other privileges; or in the era of the capitalism formation, when the number of workers could unambiguously indicate the role and place of the city in the system of division of labor; or in the Soviet period of the planned economy, when the supply of the city with goods and services was partly determined by its size. However, now studies using big data show, that, for example, the number of phone calls in large cities is disproportionately higher than in rural areas, which indicates some qualitative change with an increase in the number [5, Bettencourt L.M.A., Lobo J., Helbing D., Kuhnert C., West G.B.]

Another characteristic, which is partly complementary, is the form of employment. The urban population is characterized by a variety of forms of activity from commercial, administrative and industrial in the late 19th–early 20th centuries to the service sector and the "creative" economy at the beginning of the 21st century. The general idea that the form of sociality depends on the form of labor can be clearly traced back to Karl Marx and further among the Enlightenment

[7] Sreda dlya zhizni pochti 77% gorodov Rossii priznana neblagopriyatnoy [The living environment for almost 77% of Russian cities is recognized as unfavorable]. URL: https://www.rbc.ru/business/01/11/2019/5dbc369b9a7947df3790d55a (accessed 26 December 2019).

thinkers. However, this logic in relation to cities and urban lifestyles opens the question of whether there is a significant difference between urban sociality, for example, in an oil-producing monotown and a typical multifunctional regional center.

It can be assumed that the ways of life of the urban dwellers of a large administrative and commercial center of the agglomeration will differ significantly from similar markers of a small industrial monotown. Consequently, their requests regarding the urban environment will also differ — the number of social institutions, parks and recreation areas, the state of public infrastructure, etc. The level of satisfaction is expected to be different under otherwise equal conditions.

Nevertheless, the data of the research "Formation of a comfortable urban environment in the Arkhangelsk oblast" did not reveal such regularities.

The complex research focused on residents of several significantly different cities: Arkhangelsk (the largest city of the Russian Arctic, an agglomeration center with administrative, commercial, partly industrial and logistics functions), Severodvinsk (a large city with a predominantly industrial significance, a single-industry town), Kotlas (a small town of administrative importance), Novodvinsk and Koryazhma (small industrial monotowns). The analysis of the results is presented in three groups: Arkhangelsk, Severodvinsk and medium and small towns. One of the markers of social well-being is the satisfaction of urban residents with various indicators of the comfort of the urban environment.

The urban environment is an integral phenomenon that is created due to the action of many factors. An important factor in assessing the quality of the urban environment for the population is the safety of the city (including the safety of its life support and the safety of the urban environment, public and personal safety). The level of satisfaction with the safety of the urban environment among residents of the region capital is significantly lower than among residents of small towns. Only every fifth resident of Arkhangelsk positively assessed this criterion.

Table 2

Safety satisfaction (lack of open sewer hatches, broken street lights, pits on roads, etc.)

	Arkhangelsk	Severodvinsk	Medium and small towns
Yes, satisfied	3.2	5.3	4.2
Rather satisfied	15.7	29.1	43.5
Rather not satisfied	33.7	33.6	31.8
No, not satisfied	46.4	31.4	18.2
Difficult to answer	1.1	0.7	2.3
Index [8]	-61.2	-30.7	-2.3

Environmental safety is often understood as the state of protection of the natural environment and vital human interests from the possible negative impact of economic and other activities, natural and man-made emergencies, and their consequences. At the same time, the ecological safety of the territory is an essential component of public safety, therefore, the municipal authorities, especially in cities with an unfavorable ecological situation, must develop and implement

[8] The indices are calculated according to the formula: k = A–B, where A is the sum of the "positive" rating (upper limits of the rating scale), B is the sum of the "negative" rating (lower limits of the rating scale).

a local environmental policy, linked to the environmental policy of the state and aimed at protecting the environment from adverse technological influences. The survey participants showed low satisfaction with the parameter of preserving and improving the environment: 88% of respondents in Arkhangelsk and 86% of respondents in Severodvinsk are not satisfied and rather dissatisfied with this indicator, the situation in small towns is calmer.

Table 3

Satisfaction with environmental safety (preservation and improvement of the environment)

	Arkhangelsk	Severodvinsk	Medium and small towns
Yes, satisfied	1.7	1.8	3.4
Rather satisfied	8.1	10.7	16.9
Rather not satisfied	30.5	34.9	29.6
No, not satisfied	57.2	51.3	46.1
Difficult to answer	2.5	1.3	4.0
	-77.9	-73.8	-55.4

For the formation of a safe urban environment and the image of the city, the architectural and spatial organization of the security of public facilities and the formation of a “protective space” in the city, which should have clearly defined and identifiable boundaries, are of great importance. Within such a space informal observation of the events taking place in it is conducted [6, Ilyina I.N., p. 74].

Table 4

Satisfaction with having conditions for pleasant, safe, comfortable walks (footpaths, sidewalks, street lighting, benches, etc.)

	Arkhangelsk	Severodvinsk	Medium and small towns
Yes, satisfied	5.6	8.4	10.9
Rather satisfied	19.6	20.4	30.8
Rather not satisfied	26.0	34.1	28.9
No, not satisfied	47.4	36.5	28.1
Difficult to answer	1.5	0.5	1.3
Index	-48.2	-41.8	-15.3

An important contribution to the overall safety of the city is made by transport safety, including the safety of the dangerous goods transport and road safety.

Table 5

Satisfaction with the presence of a developed transport system (road junction, parking, public transport, etc.)

	Arkhangelsk	Severodvinsk	Medium and small towns
Yes, satisfied	10.1	10.5	6.8
Rather satisfied	29.1	32.1	25.5
Rather not satisfied	30.6	30.0	34.4
No, not satisfied	28.5	26.5	28.1
Difficult to answer	1.6	1.0	5.2
Index	-20.0	-13.9	-30.3

The availability and variety of social facilities is one of the competitive advantages of cities over villages and large cities over small ones. When assessing social well-being, satisfaction with the availability of such facilities is an important indicator. Research data of this characteristic are contradictory: on the one hand, the dynamics of satisfaction in all observed settlements has the same direction — a negative index; on the other hand, there are obvious differences in the types of cities: the greatest satisfaction is observed in small towns, the least level is in Arkhangelsk, while Severodvinsk occupies the middle position.

Table 6

Satisfaction with comfort (availability of various social facilities for different categories of the population)

	Arkhangelsk	Severodvinsk	Medium and small towns
Yes, satisfied	4.2	6.5	7.7
Rather satisfied	30.2	37.1	36.3
Rather not satisfied	31.5	36.6	39.3
No, not satisfied	31.2	18.4	11.3
Difficult to answer	2.9	1.4	5.4
Index	-28.3	-11.4	-6.6

One of the main trends in the transformation of cities is the priority development of public spaces, which are increasingly acquiring the status of multifunctional. In modern cities, where the development of the service sector and creative activities is intensifying, public spaces are easily transformed, adapting to given functions (recreation, trade, competitions, social events). Developed public spaces create a high quality of life in the city.

Table 7

Satisfaction with the modernity of the environment (availability of modern street, park, social and leisure, and public and business infrastructure)

	Arkhangelsk	Severodvinsk	Medium and small towns
Yes, satisfied	6.2	4.2	4.1
Rather satisfied	16.4	14.2	17.7
Rather not satisfied	36.2	37.7	43.2
No, not satisfied	38.7	42.3	33.6
Difficult to answer	2.5	1.6	1.5
	-52.3	-61.6	-55.0

The presence of unique cultural sites in the city is an important condition for the successful development of tourism and the building of local identity. Often, but not always, the presence of such places is associated with a long or special atypical history of the settlement. Our data indicate that these assumptions are confirmed in case of the surveyed cities.

Table 8

Satisfaction with the presence of unique cultural objects (monuments, landmarks, art objects, etc.)

	Arkhangelsk	Severodvinsk	Small towns
Yes, satisfied	10.4	4.8	2.2
Rather satisfied	37.4	20.4	26.6
Rather not satisfied	27.8	35.3	32.9

No, not satisfied	20.8	35.4	34.9
Difficult to answer	3.5	4.1	3.4
	-0.9	-45.4	-39.0

According to modern theories, elements of the natural environment, as well as public spaces, are important infrastructural objects in the city. They not only fulfill ecological and recreational functions, but also have the ability to be an infrastructure for grassroots civic engagement. In the case of the studied cities, we see that the satisfaction with the presence of such spaces is inversely proportional to the size of the settlement, which, apparently, is associated with the greater integration of small cities into the natural landscape.

Table 9

Satisfaction with the saturation of urban space with various elements of the natural environment (parks, squares, recreation areas, etc.)

	Arkhangelsk	Severodvinsk	Medium and small towns
Yes, satisfied	4.5	6.7	6.0
Rather satisfied	14.5	14.2	23.9
Rather not satisfied	29.5	32.7	34.3
No, not satisfied	50.2	45.0	32.1
Difficult to answer	1.3	1.3	3.7
	-60.7	-56.8	-36.4

Residents' assessment of the protection of public spaces from harmful environmental factors is not a typical element measured by the social well-being index. However, in our case, this factor must be taken into account, since, on the one hand, it indicates the demand of residents for the presence of such objects, and on the other hand, determine insufficiency if their number.

Таблица 10

Protection of public spaces from harmful environmental factors (noise, dust, gas pollution, etc.)

	Arkhangelsk	Severodvinsk	Medium and small towns
Yes, satisfied	3.2	2.4	1.0
Rather satisfied	10.6	14.9	14.0
Rather not satisfied	31.2	39.2	38.6
No, not satisfied	51.4	41.3	40.1
Difficult to answer	3.6	2.3	6.3
	-68.8	-63.1	-63.8

Conclusion

In all the cases, the answers of the respondents, grouped according to the territory, indicate the presence of common trends. At the same time, the presence of some peculiarities in the observed cities should be mentioned. All indices of the urban environment safety among residents of small towns are significantly higher than among residents of Arkhangelsk and Severodvinsk. Also, residents of small towns are satisfied with the presence of green spaces: parks and squares to a greater extent than residents of Arkhangelsk and Severodvinsk. At the same time, residents of the region capital are more satisfied with the availability of public and business infrastructure and the presence of cultural objects, and residents of Severodvinsk — with public transport.

All this allows us to say that the urban environment in each of the studied cases occupies a similar position in the social well-being of the townspeople. Of course, each city has its own specificity, rather related to its planning decisions, geographical location or historical development. But this does not change the whole picture — residents of cities and towns with different forms of employment impose the same requirements on the urban environment and assess the state of affairs in approximately the same way.

Therefore, it suggests that the emergence of a special form of urban life is proceeding differently than it was during the time of the classics of sociology. The difference between a city and a non-city is, apparently, not in the number of inhabitants and not in the prevailing form of economic activity, but in something else. Following Julie-Anne Boudreau [7, Boudreau J.-A.], one can try to find the foundations of the phenomenon of cities in special political relations and places of their concentration. But it is necessary to abandon a number of classical ideas for this.

One of the main results of the federal project “Comfortable Urban Environment” is that even after the completion of large-scale funding, it will not cease to exist as a trend, and in the long term, ideas for the development of the urban environment as a public space will remain.

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