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**COUNTRY FOLK IN RUSSIA:
SPECIFIC OF SOCIAL INTEGRATION**

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Abstract. The article presents the analysis of social integration factors of the country folk, living in four rural areas in Belgorod region (Russia). The study had two stages and included quantitative as well as qualitative research methods: first of all, the survey ($n = 715$) of country people aged 18–70 in order to explore the specific features of their social integration process; secondly, the expert survey ($n = 23$) devoted to study the activities of main social agents, managing regional social policy and including government and non-government organizations. As a result, the main factors, influencing the effectiveness of social integration of the country folk have been identified: 1) the maintenance of traditions and an active participation in rural community's life; 2) the infrastructure's development and the transportation accessibility; 3) the economy's type; 4) the type of settlement (town, village); 5) the degree of trust in local authorities and the assessment of local social services' activities. It is essential to take into account that the current processes of social integration of the country people, on the one hand, are due to the consequences of urbanization as a world trend and, on the other hand, it is due to the influence of a new, reverse process of de-urbanization. The results of the study conclude that current state social policy should be more effective to bridge the gap between the social conditions of people living in cities and rural areas, especially with regard to the access to education, health and social services, transportation, employment, etc. The improvement of quality of life of villagers allows to revive the most of rural settlements and attract youth to village.

Key words: country folk, social integration, rural environment, regional social policy, Russian Federation.

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СЕЛЬСКОЕ НАСЕЛЕНИЕ РОССИИ: СПЕЦИФИКА СОЦИАЛЬНОЙ ИНТЕГРАЦИИ

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Аннотация. В статье представлен анализ особенностей и факторов социальной интеграции сельского населения, проживающего в четырех сельских районах Белгородской области. Исследование включало в себя как количественные, так и качественные методы исследования: во-первых, анкетный опрос ($n = 715$) жителей сельской местности в возрасте от 18 до 70 лет с целью изучения особенностей их социальной интеграции в условиях низкоурбанизированной социальной среды; во-вторых, экспертное интервью ($n = 23$), посвященное изучению деятельности основных социальных агентов, осуществляющих региональную социальную политику (включая государственные, муниципальные и общественные организации). В результате исследования были выявлены основные факторы, влияющие на успешность социальной интеграции населения, проживающего в сельских регионах страны (на примере Белгородской области, приграничной, расположенной в западной части страны): 1) сохранение традиций и активное участие в жизни местного сельского сообщества; 2) развитие инфраструктуры и транспортная доступность; 3) тип экономики, существующий в регионе; 4) тип населенного пункта (город, поселок городского типа, сельское поселение); 5) степень доверия жителей местным органам власти и участие граждан в оценке деятельности органов управления и локальных социальных сервисов. Важной особенностью является то, что современные процессы социальной интеграции сельского населения Белгородской области, с одной стороны, обусловлены последствиями урбанизации как мировой тенденции, а с другой – предопределяются влиянием нового обратного процесса – дезурбанизации. По итогам исследования сделан вывод, что реализуемая на местах государственная политика должна стать более эффективной и направленной на преодоление разрыва между экономическими и социальными условиями людей, живущих в городской и сельской местности, в особенности в том, что касается доступа к образованию, здравоохранению и социальным услугам, транспорту, занятости и т. д. Улучшение условий жизни сельчан может способствовать развитию большинства сельских поселений и привлечению молодежи в сельскую местность.

Ключевые слова: сельские жители, социальная интеграция, сельская среда, региональная социальная политика, Российская Федерация.

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Introduction

Over 53% of the world's population live in rural localities and more than 70% of the poor population reside in rural areas [Hazelman web]. The modern Russian society is characterized by disintegrated processes due to economic, social and cultural differences between urban and rural

population, the needs of different social groups, the transformation of a common consumption ideology [Naberushkina, Volkova, Besschetnova 2017; Volkova et al. 2018; Getzner 2022; Huang 2022]. On the one hand, the cultural environment of Russian rural settlements is affected by globalization and urbanization processes, and on the other hand, it is a result of diverse cultural

traditions of the multinational population. At the same time, social integration factors of the population, living in rural settlements, have not been fully studied. All these facts make the issue of social integration of the population living in rural settlements relevant.

According to Rosstat, in 2022 the population of Russia was 145.6 million people, including 108.9 million people (75%), living in urban and 36.7 million people (25%), living in rural areas respectively [Rosstat web]. The average hourly wage of workers employed in agriculture, hunting and logging in 2021 was 294.1 rubles, including in crop and livestock farming – 259.6 rubles, compared to 780.3 rubles in fishing and fish farming; oil and natural gas production – 1,064.2 rubles; production of tobacco products – 855.5 rubles [Rosstat 2022]. The lower level of hourly wages is only in the production of textiles, clothing, furniture and leather goods. Statistical data show a significant level of inequality in the wages of the rural population in comparison with other areas of production, which leads to an increase in social inequality, a decrease in the level and quality of life, consumption and purchasing power of the inhabitants of rural areas.

The purpose of the article is to investigate the main factors of social integration of the population living in rural settlements in order to take them into account when developing social policy measures. The research's objectives are focused on the analysis of the literature review regarding various aspects of social integration of the population living in rural cultural environment; the identification of factors contributing to social integration of people living in rural settlements.

According to A. Brydsten and co-authors, "social integration is regarded as a multidimensional concept, which describes the capacity of people to participate in social, cultural, economic, and political life in the local community" [Brydsten, Rostilam, Dunlavy 2019, 2]. The social integration of the population living in rural settlements is due to the following factors: 1) the rural cultural environment as a necessary condition which helps to reproduce significant social values that are shared by the majority of peasant community members and play the lead role in countering the disintegration processes; 2) the global trend of mass labor migration due to economic crisis, unemployment, low income,

dissatisfaction of people's social and cultural needs leads to the decline of rural social infrastructure; closing educational [Tokareva 2021] and cultural institutions; weakening integrative ties inside the rural community itself as well as between rural and urban communities in the whole society; 3) the cooperation of local government authorities' efforts and the local community itself are the key factors of successful social integration.

The study is based on the following approaches, including the concept of cultural turns [Beschorner et al. 2004; Bachmann-Medick web; Bezuglova 2016]; the practical, integrated approach to achieving success in the development of rural areas [Janvry web]; social and system integration theory [Lockwood 1964; Mouzelis 1997; Anipkin 2010]; the model of social integration of the population in rural community [Mikheev 2007]; the idea of state power as an instrument of social integration [Kvachev 2016].

In classical sociological theory, integration is viewed in some different ways: as a union of the differentiated parts into a whole, representing the movement from simple to complex [Spencer 1891]; as an interaction between individuals [Giddens, Taveira 1993]; as a strong sense of human dependence from the society [Durkheim 1997]; as a fundamental characteristic of the social system, ensuring solidarity and the necessary level of loyalty of members of the society to each other and to the system as a whole [Parsons 1964]. P. Sorokin and C. Zimmerman express the idea about urban and village conjugation, which is important for studying the issues of integration of the population living in rural settlements [Sorokin, Zimmerman 1929].

"Most scholars measure social integration from the aspects of economic integration, political integration, cultural integration, and psychological integration. Studies found that economic integration is considered as the starting point of social integration, which plays a fundamental role, while psychological integration, established on the dimensions of economic and political integration, is considered as the advanced and final stage of social integration" [Gu, Yeung 2020, p. 199]. In modern Russian sociological studies, the category of social cohesion is analyzed, based on the domestic concept of social integration [Aleshina 2012; Pechenkin, Yarskaya-Smirnova 2014].

Data and methodology

In Belgorod region, the ratio of urban and rural population has remained virtually unchanged over the past three years (Table 1).

The study was conducted in four rural districts of Belgorod region (Russia): Belgorodsky, Prokhorovsky, Rakityansky and Yakovlevsky. The choice of places is determined by two criteria: by the distance from the regional center and by the predominant type of local economy. Like other rural areas in the world, for example Europe (Italy, Finland, Germany, United Kingdom), rural settlements of Belgorod regions face several challenges such as labour shortage and demographic change (depopulation, ageing), as well as poor infrastructure and access to education and health care services. So, one of the ways to make the integration process of the country folk more easily is to facilitate access to public services, workplace and training, and health services (e.g., hospitals, specialized doctors) [Gruber, Zupan 2022], especially if travel times are long due to the location in rural and peripheral areas, using digital technologies as well. All over Russia, young people are continuing to leave their villages and towns for education and working opportunities in larger cities. They also tend not to return after earning their diploma, seeking better opportunities for employment, an anonymous private life, leisure and recreation.

There are 463,642 people in Belgorodky rural district which is located near Belgorod-city. The most developed sectors are industry and services. The majority of its population works in Belgorod-city. Internal migration is a part of Belgorod region's economics. Unlike European countries, where flows of external international

migration prevail, Belgorod region as well as China, is more characterized by internal migration from rural areas to cities and metropolitan areas, in this regard, instead of talking about the diversity of racial, cultural, religious, ethnic, linguistic or social differences, we focus on the possibilities of realization, achievement and limitations in the process of social integration and realizing one's human potential [Xie et al. 2022].

We fully agree with the statement that "whereas rural areas situated next to the urban centers have profited from rapid metropolitan development (job opportunities, infrastructure, access to essential services, etc.), other communities that are far from these centers suffer substantial and structural unemployment, lack of basic services or the permanent tendency of the younger population to leave the rural communities" [Şerban, Brazienè web].

Prokhorovsky rural district with the population of 18,514 people is located far from the regional center. The agrarian sector and tourism are mainly developed. Rakityansky district (the population of the rural population is 15 447 people) is located far from the regional center. The mostly developed sectors are agriculture, agrarian industry and tourism. Yakovlevsky district (the population is 22,388 people) is located near the town Stroitel. The most developed sectors are industry and services. Two-thirds of the population of the district works in Belgorod. In 2023 the subsistence minimum in the Belgorod Region totaled 12,075 rubles/month, including 13,162 rubles/month for the able-bodied population; for persons of retirement age – 10,385 rubles/month; for children – 11,713 rubles/month. The average wage level in Belgorod region for a five-year period from 2017 to 2021 tends to slightly increase (Table 2).

Table 1

The ratio of urban and rural population in the Belgorod region

	Urban population			Rural population		
	2018	2019	2020	2018	2019	2020
Population of Belgorod region, %	67,5	67,5	67,6	32,5	32,5	32,6

Note. Source: [Rosstat 2022].

Table 2

The average per capita cash income of the population in Belgorod region

	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Average per capita cash income, rubles per month	30 342	30 778	32 398	32 884	35 612

Note. [Rosstat. Average per capita ... web].

The methodological design of the present study included quantitative and qualitative methods. A quota, multi-stage sample was used to collect data. The sample of quantitative study consisted from 715 participants of different backgrounds (students, employees, workers in the industrial and agricultural sectors, unemployed, and pensioners), who had been living in the mentioned above rural districts. The research was conducted in February-March 2022.

At the first stage, quotas were made for the district (Belgorodky, Prokhorovsky, Rakityansky and Yakovlevsky) according to the ratio of the general and sample totality; at the second stage, the type of settlement (small town, village) was determined; at the third stage the sample was divided into five main groups regarding to participants' age and gender: 20–29 years; 30–39 years; 40–49 years; 50 and 59 years; 60 years and older. The maximum accepted error was no more than 3%.

In addition to that, the expert survey ($n = 23$) was used for collecting data material. The experts were representatives of researchers from Belgorod National Research University (Belgorod), Pedagogical State University named after T.G. Shevchenko (Tiraspol, Republic of Moldova), practitioners working in government social service agencies, public organizations, NGOs, as well as employees of the Department of culture, Department of sport of Belgorod

region. All participants were informed about the research objectives beforehand and gave a written agreement to participate at the research.

Data were analyzed using the SPSS V.22 SPSS Inc., IBM Corporation, Chicago, IL, USA. The results of the one-dimensional analysis were presented as the mean \pm standard deviation for continuous variables [Antoniou et al. 2016]. The relationship between the variables was analyzed using multiple linear regression.

Empirical results

The data obtained from both quantitative and qualitative methods were analyzed using compiling comparative tables and typologization. As a result, we identified the main factors that contribute to the social integration of the population living in rural environment: 1) following traditions and an active participation in rural community's life; 2) the development of infrastructure in the place of residence as well as the transportation accessibility; 3) the type of local economy; 4) the type of settlement (small town, village); 5) the level of trust in local authorities as well as the assessment of local social services' activities.

Based on the factorial data analysis, we compiled a matrix of social integration factor indicators (Table 3). The rows of the matrix correspond to the initial variables, the columns to

Table 3

Matrix of factorial indicators of social integration

№	Criteria of social integration	Factors				
		1	2	3	4	5
1.	Power	V				V
2.	Awareness of socially significant events, rights and benefits		V		V	V
3.	Collective socially significant activity	V				V
4.	Common interests			V	V	
5.	Common problems		V	V	V	
6.	Common goals	V		V		V
7.	Similar life style	V		V	V	
8.	Belonging to a social group			V		
9.	Belonging to the social community				V	
10.	Acceptance of a person by other people	V				V
11.	Shared social norms	V				V
12.	Shared beliefs	V				V
13.	Shared values	V		V		V
14.	Similar functions in the labor system			V		
15.	Traditions, agrarian culture	V		V	V	
16.	Satisfaction with the "attractiveness" of the territory of residence		V		V	V
17.	Satisfaction of needs	V	V		V	V
	Total	10	4	8	8	10

factors affecting the process of social integration of the population living in rural cultural environment. The intersection of the row and column indicates the presence of direct correlation.

The analysis of primary data and the matrix of social integration factor (Table 3) allow us to construct a factor model of the criteria for social integration of the population living in the rural cultural environment (Fig. 1).

The model presents the factors of the first level: traditions and an active participation in rural community's life (10 points); the development of infrastructure in the place of residence as well as the transportation accessibility (10 points). Below are the factors of the second level: the type of local economy (8 points); the type of settlement (8 points). Then there is the factor of the third level: the level of trust in local authorities as well as the assessment of local social services' activities (4 points). Thus, the higher the level which a particular factor is related, the more it influences the social integration of the population, living in the rural cultural environment.

The preservation of traditions and the agrarian culture is impossible in situation of social disintegration. According to the results of the questionnaire, the consent in society is important for 92.8% of respondents ("very important" – 51.3% and "quite important" – 41.5%); the equity – for 94.4%; patriotism – for 92.5%;

respect of other people – for 90.3%; public recognition – for 88.5%; help to others – 88.8%. Also, 49.8% of respondents consider religion is important; 10.6% give the answer "not very important"; 2.8% – "not important at all"; 7.8% can't answer the question. The majority of respondents (80.1%) profess Orthodoxy. The need of communication is more satisfied among urban residents (90.6%) than people from rural areas (76.4%).

Urban and rural residents assess the factors related to the development of infrastructure in their places of residence in different ways. For example, from 63.6% of urban respondents' as well as 48.2% of the villagers' opinions, the quality of life has been improved in their districts for the last decade; 69.2% of the townspeople and 54.1% of the villagers are satisfied with the number of cultural and recreational facilities.

At the same time, 74.3% of respondents from rural areas and 59.7% of cities and towns have fully benefited from housing and communal services, which can be explained by the cost of utilities (in rural areas payment is cheaper than in urban areas), the availability of private houses with all conveniences and garden plots.

The state of human health directly affects the degree of its integration into society. However, the main medical resources are concentrated in large and medium-sized cities which make it

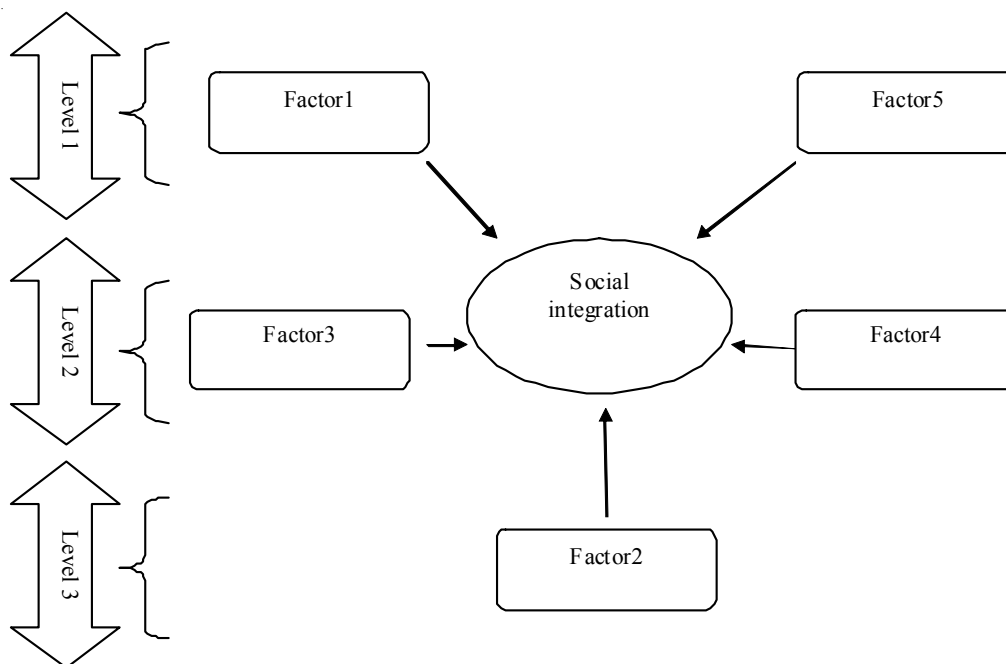


Fig. 1. Factor model of criteria for social integration of the population, living in rural environment

difficult to diagnose diseases in time and provide qualified medical care to inhabitants of rural settlements. In this regard, the overwhelming number of respondents in both rural (84.7%) and urban (77.1%) areas are not satisfied with the quality of medical care in their districts; the lack of full information about medical care provided in the region is a matter of concern for 30.3% of people living in cities or towns and 53.4% of those living in rural areas.

In general, in the case of a difficult life situation, the main subjects of social support are the family – 76.7%; the assistance of relatives – 42.1%, friends – 30.8%, colleagues – 11.8%; law enforcement bodies – 4.7%; neighbors and local community – 2.2%; sponsors – 2.2%; members of social networks – 0.6%. Almost one-third of respondent (29.1%) rely on themselves. It is a certain a surprise that only 13.7% of respondents rely on the help of local authorities.

A correlation is established between remoteness from the district center and the quality of services rendered to the population. So, in Belgorodky and Yakovlevsky districts which are located near Belgorod-city, people are more satisfied with the quality of social services (80.9% and 89.3% respectively) than in Prokhorovsky and Rakityansky districts (49.1% and 68.6% respectively) which are further from Belgorod-city; 87.0% of representatives of Yakovlevsky district is satisfied with the repairing of roads in comparison with 38.5% of Belgorodky district's inhabitants.

Over the past three years 70.4% of respondents from Belgorodky and 89.3% of people from Yakovlevsky districts respectively confirmed that they did not participate in any public activities organized by government organization or NGOs in comparison with 21.7% of the population of Rakityansky district. Most residents of Belgorod region note the improvement public areas of cities (82.6%), rarely villages (64.3%).

For example, in the empirical research, conducted in 2014 by Chinese researchers P. Xie,

Q. Cao, X. Li and co-authors based on the sample of 15,997 migrants across eight cities in China, social participation is positively linked to social integration is analyzed. The Chinese researchers pay attention to the fact, that “social organizations are a platform for migrants to obtain useful social resources, especially for rural migrants who face many disadvantages and prejudice brought by the ‘urban-rural distinctions’. This prejudice often places them on the passive side of social integration. In order to change their passive status in the local community, it is necessary for the migrants to adapt to the host environment and then expand their social resources. For obtaining development resources and establishing social ties, individuals actively participate in organizational activities and attempt to cultivate contacts with other people” [Xie, Chen, Xu 2023].

According to the results of our survey, five circles of trust, typical for the inhabitants of urban and rural settlements are distinguished (Fig. 2).

The first circle of trust is the family and relatives; the second one is friends, neighbors, colleagues; the third circle consists of colleagues and people who the person works with; representatives of local authorities and public organizations; the fourth circle is represented by the church, and in the fifth one includes media and members of virtual networks.

Table 4 includes the respondents' opinion about factors which contribute the social integration of the population, living in rural environment.

77.6% of respondents confirm the involvement in public activities of the village or the district for the last year period. Also this fact supports the expert's answers.

“If we have some activities, for example, cultural or sports events, then we all go out... is this not an indication of a solidary society?” (Male, 46 years old, a member of a public organization).

“Cultural and recreational facilities are all refurbished, equipped with high-tech equipment.

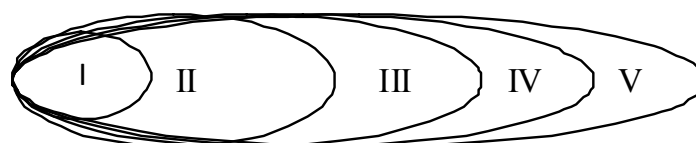


Fig. 2. Circles of inhabitants of urban and rural settlements' trust

The inhabitants have the opportunity to use the Internet. We have such a high quality of life that we have a second pool in the village... As for the cohesion of the population, we managed to create 55 choirs only in our district” (Female, 40 years old, employee of the culture department).

Conclusion

The results of the research could indicate the main factors, influencing the effectiveness of social integration of people, living in rural environment: 1) following traditions and an active participation in rural community’s life; 2) the development of infrastructure in the place of residence as well as the transportation accessibility; 3) the type of economy; 4) the type of settlement (small town, village); 5) the level of trust in local authorities as well as the assessment of local social services’ activities. The results of the study allowed us to state that the current processes of social integration of the population living in rural areas, on the one hand, is due to the consequences of urbanization as a world trend and, on the other hand, it is due to the influence of a new, reverse process of de-urbanization.

Summary

Current state social policy should be more effective to bridge the gap between the social

conditions of people living in cities and rural areas in regards to the access to education, health and social services, transportation, employment, etc. The improvement of quality of life of villagers allows to revive the most of rural settlements and to attract youth to village.

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Table 4

Factors contributing to the unification of rural residents

№	Statements	Index, %
1.	Collective socially significant activity	49,7
2.	Accepting a person by other people	27,3
3.	Similar life style	26,3
4.	Common goals	25,2
5.	Common interests	24,3
6.	Common problems	24,1
7.	Belonging to a social group	18,2
8.	Belonging to the social community	17,4
9.	Traditions, agrarian culture	33,3
10.	Satisfaction with the “attractiveness” of the territory of residence	14,2
11.	Similar functions in the labor system	10,8
12.	Shared values	6,7
13.	Shared beliefs	6,6
14.	Power	5,2
15.	Satisfaction of needs	4,7
16.	Shared social norms	2,3
17.	Awareness of socially significant events, rights and benefits	2,1

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