

Image of regional city: findings from Ekaterinburg

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Abstract—The article analyzes the regional Russian city's evaluative image formed by its inhabitants. The city's image is its representation created to make the most favorable impression and is formed through its perception by both citizens and tourists. In 2018, we conducted a sociological study of the residents of Ekaterinburg with the main purpose of examining how the public evaluates the city landscape. 670 respondents aged 18 to 70 were polled and the method of the in-depth interview was used to survey 18 people living in the city for more than 25 years. In addition, 14 educational and labor migrants were interviewed. The research indicates that the image of Ekaterinburg is associated with the perception of the city primarily as the Ural capital. Respondents consider the operation of medical institutions and transport the main problem areas. In addition, the citizens are unhappy with the quality of street cleaning and a few green areas for walking. These factors reduce the favorable impression of the city. It is important that the city administration considers the historical heritage of the territory when planning the urban space.

Keywords—city, city's image, urban space, urbanization, planning

I. INTRODUCTION

Modern urbanization processes are characteristic of the social development of the last decades and associated with the increasingly complex structure of society and the globalization of humanity as a whole. These processes focus the attention of scientific researchers and practitioners on the problems of modern urban life and the emergence of the city as a socio-territorial entity. The city is humanity's most consistent and generally successful attempt to transform the world they live in [1].

Large industrial and cultural centers are highly attractive to people. Firstly, there are hundreds of enterprises and organizations in need of personnel of various qualifications. This increases the employment prospects for visitors from both the nearest settlements and from different regions of Russia, as well as foreign countries.

Secondly, there are educational institutions which satisfy the need for secondary vocational and higher education. Parents of rural youth view large cities as attractive settlements for their children to acquire the desired profession, and they usually show readiness to pay for their children's studies. The influx of students causes a constant rejuvenation of the composition of the city residents, which is one of the significant factors of its socio-economic and socio-cultural development.

Thirdly, the city is a concentration of highly qualified specialists engaged in science, art, and management, which determines the level of spiritual culture of residents and their proclivity for the constant improvement of living conditions in the city.

Despite the social heterogeneity of the population, the city residents form a single territorial entity which uses the city space to satisfy diverse needs and interests. The city in its sociological interpretation acts as an arena of action and interaction between social groups and communities, as an integrating element in the reproduction of social connections and relationships.

At the same time, the city is a socio-territorial entity with boundaries, which allows us to record the characteristics of life and the specific conditions of functioning and development of its population. The attractiveness of the city depends on a wide range of factors, one of which is its image.

II. MATERIALS AND METHODS

Image is a polysemous concept. In the middle of the last century, during the rapid growth of the USA's cities, K. Lynch addressed the issues of planning and design of the urban environment and drew the attention of architects to this aspect. Impersonal architecture of large cities had to be transformed into the aesthetic landscape of urbanism. In his work, K. Lynch sought to introduce a new design language to architects, revealing the image of the city through a system of universal elements: the node, path, district, edge and landmark [2]. Lynch defined the city as a complete landscape, which means that the city is connected with people's feelings.

There are two directions of study of cities and their image in modern literature.

The first direction consists of the works of city planners and architects who pay special attention to the city building and the architectural and planning decisions [3, 4, 5]. In addition, this direction defines the procedures of measurement of the city's the perception according to various indicators [6].

The second direction consists of the works of sociologists and economists. Economists create mathematical models of cities associated with economic geography [7, 8], empirical models of knowledge transfer [9, 10].

Prominent works of the sociologist J. Jacobs [11, 12, 13] emphasize the connection between the physical environment

of the city and social interactions between various social groups included in the urban environment.

The unifying vector of the two directions is a focus on the image of the city, which is formed through its perception by both citizens and visitors (tourists). Thus, the city can be assessed as beautiful, abandoned, attractive, stylish, lively, modern, inspiring, insensible, typical, etc.

The image of the city is a set of interpretations and associations formed among its residents and guests [14]. It is a collective mental representation shared by a large number of residents; it is an interconnection of a unique physical reality, a common culture and a basic natural landscape [15].

The image of the city can be represented in four ways.

Firstly, the image can be positive and attractive.

Secondly, the perception of the city can be negative. This happens when peripheral zones are the focus of various deviations.

Thirdly, the image can be mixed, i.e. both positive and negative (for example, the city is a cultural and educational center, but extremely dirty and untidy).

Fourthly, the city can have a favorable image for some groups of the population, but a negative one for other groups. In this case, the image of the city is controversial [16].

Modern research of the city image is focused on the study of the impact of new information and communication technologies, such as: representation in social networks [14,17], impact of cultural events and festivals on the city image [18,19,20], and impact of the city attractiveness on the decision to move there [21,22]. Our research is aimed at studying the image of the Russian metropolis, as estimated by its residents..

In 2018, we conducted a sociological study of residents of Ekaterinburg – the capital of the Middle Urals. It is a major industrial and cultural center of the country. It was founded in 1723 by decree of Peter the Great.

A questionnaire consisting of 30 questions was developed. The research questions posed by us were aimed at solving the following research problems:

- identifying the main characteristics of the image of Ekaterinburg;
- identifying contradictions in the modern vision of the city’s image among the population;
- selecting the main activities suggested by residents of the city to improve its image.

670 respondents aged 18 to 70 were interviewed using the quota sampling method. 79% of respondents have lived in the city for a long time, while 21% moved there to study and work from different towns and cities of the country. 52% of respondents are women, 48% are men. The composition of respondents by age is represented by approximately equal groups: aged 18-30 - 34%, aged 31-50 - 36%, aged 51-70 - 30%. The obtained materials were processed using “Vortex”, the program for processing and analyzing sociological and marketing information.

In addition, we conducted in-depth interviews with 18 people living in the city for over 25 years and 14 educational and labor migrants. The questionnaire consisted of 15 open questions. Transcripts of the interviews were made. The interview materials were compiled in accordance with the stated research objectives. The materials were grouped by basic thematic fragments; the system of links between thematic blocks was specified.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study showed that the main characteristics determining the image of Ekaterinburg are: its position in the region, the pace of ongoing changes, the availability of educational and cultural institutions, the level of industrial production, and its place in the history of the country.

TABLE I. THE MAIN CHARACTERISTICS OF THE IMAGE OF EKATERINBURG (% OF THE RESPONDENTS)^A

Characteristics	Permanent residents	Temporary residents
The capital of the Urals	75	70
Dynamically developing city	43	46
Cultural and educational center	40	42
The third capital of Russia	39	23
City with strong industry	37	33
Place of execution of the royal family	36	43
Large trading city	34	52
Many historic buildings	26	28
The city of P.P. Bazhov, the author of the Ural tales	22	18
Criminal city in the 1990s	20	23
The capital of mud	16	13
The city where rock music developed	15	17
The capital of AIDS	13	17

^A The sum of answers exceeds 100%, since the respondent could choose several answers

As the data shows, the city image among local residents and visitors is formed primarily under the influence of stereotypes that have developed over decades. There are two stages of the formation and change of the city image: under socialism and in the conditions of market economy.

Until the 1990s, Ekaterinburg was stereotyped as the largest industrial center with such engineering giants as Uralmash, Electromash, Himmash, as well as dozens of other enterprises which created different types of weapons for the country’s military–industrial complex. The city was closed to foreign tourists because of this.

At that time, the city was developing dynamically due to the active participation of enterprises in the construction of houses, hospitals, kindergartens, schools, and cultural centers. Stereotypes about the city began to change after the transition to market economy. Industry giants turned into medium-sized enterprises (in terms of the number of employees), so they were unable to influence the socio-economic and socio-cultural situation in the regional center.

A stereotype of a large regional center located on the border of Europe and Asia began to form. Ekaterinburg was viewed as a city that satisfied the needs of various organizations in financial resources, transport, trade enterprises, housing for the employees of organizations from the Middle Urals, as well as from other regions of the

country. Local media, implementing the policy of the city authorities to create an attractive image of Ekaterinburg, began to assert that the city was the “third capital” of Russia in terms of its influence on the country’s socio-economic development.

The media also used the fact that the first president of Russia, B.N Yeltsin was born in a village located near Ekaterinburg. Informational and educational centers named after him were built. However, these characteristics of the city do not establish Ekaterinburg as the “third” capital of the country in the minds of the population.

The fact that Ekaterinburg is the site of death of the last Russian emperor is a factor of its attractiveness for people from other regions of Russia. The city guests are invited to visit the "Church on Blood", which was built on the site of the execution of the royal family members, as well as the place where their remains were found.

However, the study shows that the older generation is nostalgic about the former image of Ekaterinburg. *“We used to be proud of having the largest factories in the country. They were known all over the world. And now we only build shopping centers. Youth knows them, but they can’t name a single factory”.* (Male, 63 y.o.).

At the same time, respondents under the age of 30 note such positive characteristics of the modern image of the city as the construction of comfortable housing, and the emergence of places for recreation and entertainment. *“I like the fact that we have a lot of cafes, restaurants, shopping centers, where you can buy everything and relax”.* (Female, 23 y.o.).

The image of the city among its visitors is characterized by contradictory opinions. Some say that *“Ekaterinburg is a very big city. There are many modern buildings, shops, places for entertainment”.* (Male, 21 y.o.). At the same time, it is noted that *“this is a city of paradoxes. Huge, tall, 50-story buildings side by side with unsightly buildings from the middle of the last century. A mix of different styles. The city is almost 300 years old, but few old buildings remain. There is no single image of its historical development”.* (Female, 34 y.o.).

Respondents identify other negative characteristics of the image of Ekaterinburg. The fact that a large criminal group operated in the city in the 1990s is still remembered. Criminals seized factories and commercial enterprises, and the group members sought to get into the legislative bodies of the city and the region. About ten years ago, the media reported on the spread of AIDS in the Sverdlovsk region. The region was third in the country in terms of the number of identified HIV carriers. This information led to the emergence of the idea about Ekaterinburg as the city where this disease was actively spreading. Approximately five years ago, another factor negatively influencing the city image appeared. The city became known as “Gryazburg” (“Mudburg”). Indeed, an effective system of maintaining streets and courtyards in a clean state has not yet been developed. Local authorities are slowly solving this problem.

The combination of positive and negative characteristics determines the contradictory nature of the city image. The polar profile method revealed the following structure of the respondents’ perception of the city. On a scale from 1 to 5,

its external attractiveness and its size are estimated at 4.1; development rate - 4.0; level of hospitality - 3.9, compliance with the requirements for the capital - 3.8; innovation, novelty of appearance, liveability – 3.5; safety, conformity to the image of a European city - 3.2; street cleanliness - 3.0.

In an interview, residents noted that *“the appearance of the city is constantly changing as a result of the emergence of new buildings in the center and entire neighborhoods on the outskirts. They didn’t used to build so much”.* (Female, 37 y.o.). *“The World Cup showed that our city is hospitable. Residents helped foreigners, there was no aggressive action. There have been no conflicts with migrants lately”.* (Male, 47 y.o.).

However, attention is drawn to the problems associated with the convenience of living on the outskirts of the city, as well as with keeping roads, sidewalks and courtyards clean. *“Public transport is bad. You have to wait a long time for trams and buses after 9 pm. This has been going on for many years, nothing has changed. It is impossible to drive through the main streets after work because of the traffic jams. And there is no money for the further construction of metro”.* (Male, 42 y.o.). *“The authorities are trying to clean the streets, but only central streets are cleared of snow sufficiently. Other streets are dirty, courtyards, too... The city is gray, especially in autumn and spring, when it rains”.* (Female, 54 y.o.).

The dissatisfaction of the population results in a system of suggestions to the City Administration, which is aimed at increasing the attractiveness of the capital of the Middle Urals for its permanent and temporary residents.

TABLE II. SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVING THE IMAGE OF EKATERINBURG (% OF THE RESPONDENTS)^B

Suggestions	Permanent residents	Temporary residents
Upgrade the transport system	60	49
Improve the work of medical institutions	59	56
Make the streets and courtyards clean and bright	58	44
Increase the number of places for outdoor recreation	48	33
Increase the safety of living	46	56
Create new squares, embankments	43	34
Organize festivals of different levels	33	34
Implement unique architectural and cultural projects	29	31
Increase the number of places for families with children	26	28
Build new sports facilities	22	29
Open new theaters, museums, cultural centers	21	23
Create new public catering sites	10	13
Open new bars, nightclubs	9	3
Upgrade the transport system	60	49

^B The sum of answers exceeds 100%, since the respondent could choose several answers

Answers reveal general ideas that can increase the city attractiveness in the eyes of its residents and guests, as well as specific ideas determined by the length of the respondent’s stay in Ekaterinburg. There is a consensus about the need to improve the quality of polyclinics and hospitals. Both permanent and temporary residents need specialists who are able to carry out high-quality diagnostics and provide

emergency assistance in case of illness. Personal experience of a significant part of respondents shows that it is not always possible to fully realize the right to receive proper medical care. "If you come to the state clinic, then get ready to stand in line. There are not enough doctors, especially specialists in certain areas. Pay the money, then you get to them. Prices are so high that only those who earn a lot of money can use their services. What about the rest of us?" (Female, 25 y.o., temporary resident).

There are general ideas about the need to diversify the architectural appearance of the city in order to distinguish it from other metropolises of the country. "The last 10 years saw us actively building high-rises in the center, like in Moscow. We build new neighborhoods where the wooden houses used to be. But we also demolish old buildings along with them – buildings that could've been restored. They remind us of the way people lived at the end of the XIX century. The city is losing its face". (Male, 57 y.o., native of the city). Both natives and newcomers noted an acute shortage of places for families with children, as well as museums and cultural centers. "The city has many shops, but there are no modern exhibition and educational complexes, in which both adults and children could learn something new. No one is in a rush to build something that is not profitable" (Female, 43 y.o.).

There are differences in the perception of the city due to the fact that its image for the native residents includes components that are most important for ensuring the comfort of permanent residence. According to the respondents, it is necessary to significantly improve public transport and street cleaning, to increase the number of places for outdoor recreation, and to improve the river embankment in order to increase satisfaction with the living conditions of the city. "The banks of Iset are landscaped only in the city center; they are still in their original state for tens of kilometers. Not like in Moscow or Saint Petersburg. And even smaller cities do it better". (Male, 59 y.o.).

IV. CONCLUSIONS

The study of the image of a large regional center led us to the following conclusions.

Firstly, both native residents and migrants view Ekaterinburg as the dynamically developing capital of the Ural region.

Secondly, the city's residents are dissatisfied with the work of health care institutions and transport enterprises; they criticize the level of cleanliness in the streets and courtyards, as well as a small number of public gardens, parks, and places of recreation for families with children.

Thirdly, residents of the city, as consumers and producers of its image, suggest modernizing the transport system, improving the quality of medical care and channeling available resources to street cleanliness and waste collection services.

The study showed that image formation must be based on the historical and socio-cultural structure of the city space. Imposition of artificially created elements negatively affects the perception of a city by the population and negates its uniqueness. M. Southworth [23] emphasizes the importance

of creating the city image based on its place in history. The city space planning must consider heritage sites.

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