

# Mental Inequalities in Russian Province

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**Abstract**—Current paper analyzes the role of mental inequalities in the formation of social inequalities in Russian province. Mental inequalities are persistent differences in the cognitive-value patterns of individual and collective consciousness. The authors attempt to identify mental inequalities of the Russian province inhabitants, as well as the influence of certain mental features on status parameters and dispositions of the respondents. Based on the results of a sociological study, mental characteristics differentiating provincial society are revealed: life goals, subjective criteria for success in life, a planning horizon, a set of mobility and entrepreneurial activity, work motivation. The identified mental inequalities make it possible to predict further stratification of provincial communities into an active minority, increasingly losing touch with regional societies, and a conservative majority experiencing social discomfort and feeling ineffective in the habitual forms of social behavior.

**Keywords**—*mental inequalities, social polarization, social exclusion, sociocultural factors of development, patterns, mass practices*

## I. INTRODUCTION

Social inequalities imply a varying degree of accessibility (up to exclusion) for individuals and groups of a set of social resources that are essential for their existence, without significant chances of changing the situation. In explaining this complicated and multifactorial public phenomenon, as a rule, socio-structural, economic, political, geographic, and institutional factors are usually involved.

Thus, the role of socio-structural factors of social inequalities is in the difficulty of overcoming barriers associated with prescribed social statuses, in positive or negative influence on possibilities of the individual, his advantages or burdens arising from his origin, place of residence and occupation in the amount of collective social capital. Economic factors of social inequalities are determined by the specifics of the individual's position in a system of production and exchange, the fulfillment (or non-fulfillment) of

exclusive economic functions by him and the effectiveness of a public system of converting financial resources into various social benefits. Political factors of social inequalities operate in societies with the presence of the ruling class or corporation, which builds the management system in such a way as to maximally capitalize its leading role in a decision-making system. Geographical factors of social inequalities are characterized by sustainable advantages or deprivations associated with living in certain localities, regions and countries, in varying degrees possessing or not possessing natural resources, social infrastructure. Institutional factors are identified by the rigidity of social and state regulation of social relations and their interest in preservation and reproduction of social inequalities (as the caste system in India).

But along with the indicated factors of social inequalities, there are others, whose influence is not so obvious. Since, on the one hand, it is mediated by socio-structural, economic, institutional and other factors, and on the other hand, it is legitimized by dominant cultural values. These factors are related to individual and collective consciousness and can be designated as mental (from the Lat. "mens" and "mentis" - mind and thinking, respectively).

The action of mental factors is manifested at the level of basic values and patterns (cognitive-emotional structures) of individual and collective consciousness, which determine attitudes towards reality and form a certain type of social behavior. These values and patterns largely define educational, professional, civil-political, marital, reproductive, consumer, leisure strategies and practices. And along with the social context, they form the way of life of individuals, contribute to or impede their success in life. Certain configurations of patterns can determine the degree of economic activity of an individual, his civic position, the amount of human and social capital and, therefore, positions in the system of distribution of socially significant resources (wealth, power, information, etc.). A.Z. Baglieva identifies such basic components as constants, stereotypes and "world view" in the structure of mentality [1].

L.F. Malinovskii operationalizes mentality in parameters of the way of perceiving the world, perception depth, predominance of certain interests, norms of interaction between economic entities (equality/inequality at interaction), stereotypes of the relationship between society and the individual (independence or collective nature of problem solving), stereotypes of consumption (prestigious, demonstrative behavior or psychology of the subsistence minimum) [2].

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

In various elitist concepts, starting with Plato, differences in moral attitudes and intellectual abilities were an indispensable basis for legitimizing social differentiation and distinguishing into power and control: “a state based on nature would be entirely wise because owing to a very small part of the population that is headed and controls, and its knowledge” [3].

P. Burde N. Luman Iu. Khabermas noted that inequality in access to cultural capital forms new manifestations of inequality and thereby enhances social polarization [4-6]. Communicative capital accumulated by individuals and groups as part of cultural capital allows them to dominate in the virtual space of social networks [7], as well as in the information and social space. The amount of cultural capital largely determines the amount of social (individual and collective) capital (a complex of contacts, connections and relationships that allow solving problems) to form and aggravate social inequality [8, 9]. V.A. Anikin, considering the heuristic potential of the concept of “life chances” (M. Veber, E. Giddens, R. Darendorf, and others), notes that “with the transfer of Western societies to a service economy ... the stratifying role of life spheres associated with non-material side has happened, and there has also been an increase in the diversity of these life chances not related to material consumption” [10]. T.Z. Adamiants, describing communication processes, introduces the concept of “sociomental”, which characterizes “features of orientation in sociocultural environment, expressed in the degree of understanding of the intentionality of the communicator (author), the ability to adequately inform about their own motives and goals during communication and interaction, regarding social background, historical, political, sociocultural and other realities and trends in their dynamics” [11].

Thus, inequalities can be formed at the mental level - in the form of patterns - of relatively holistic cognitive-value or even emotional structures, the content of which is relevant to reality and its place in it, and representing a complex configuration of values, attitudes, norms and assessments. The phenomenon of mentality consists not only in its correlation with consciousness (mass or individual), but, above all, it represents deepest elements of consciousness - values and stereotypes (or “archetypes”, if to use Jung’s terminology) [12]. Often they are extremely difficult to diagnose, but this does not negate their role in the formation of behavioral patterns.

A.L. Andreev, analyzing the research results of the Institute of Sociology of Russian Academy of Sciences “Social inequality in sociological dimension” (2006), as cognitive patterns that set life strategies and socially effective or ineffective behavior, notes: the value of collectivism/individualism, the attitude to fatalism/initiative,

the presentation about justice (equality of income or opportunity), success (living standard and well-being, spiritual harmony, education, mutual understanding with close people, upbringing of children, prestigious job, career, having friends) and other mental characteristics [13].

Operating the category of economic mentality and considering it as a non-formalized institution of economics, G.S. Tsvetkova emphasizes its role in differentiating the economic development of regions [14]. A number of works by foreign researchers prove the existence of a certain connection between the mentality model dominating in society and the main production and distribution types (Uskul, Kitayma (2011); Uskul, Kitayma, Nisbett (2008) [15, 16].

To a certain extent, we can even speak about mental inequalities, which are persistent differences in cognitive-value structures (patterns) of individual and collective consciousness, forming images of social reality, a specific attitude to it and affecting the social status, the amount of human and social capital of an individual and groups, their place in the system of distribution of socially significant resources. At the same time, the formation of mental inequalities is influenced not only by endogenous - sociocultural factors, but also by socio-structural and institutional characteristics of society: “there is actually a two-way relationship between institutions as structures of society and individuals as carriers of mental models” [17].

## III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this paper is to identify mental inequalities - persistent differences in cognitive-value structures (patterns) of individual and collective consciousness of Russian province residents, as well as the influence of some mental features on status parameters and dispositions of respondents.

## IV. INSTRUMENT

The empirical basis of the article is the results of a sociological study “Mental inequalities as a factor of social polarization of Russian province”, conducted in May-June of 2018 in Belgorod and Voronezh regions (N=1200 respondents) under the guidance of the author, with financial support from RFBR. The sample set was formed according to the quota sampling methodology, considering the age and gender and settlement structure of the population of Belgorod and Voronezh regions. At the same time, regional subsamples in quantitative respect were the same.

## V. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

In accordance with the author's concept, mental inequalities are persistent differences in cognitive-value constructions (patterns) of individual and collective consciousness, forming images of social reality, a specific attitude to it and affecting the social status, the amount of human and social capital of an individual and a group, their place in the system of distribution of socially significant resources.

Interpreting mental inequalities as persistent differences in cognitive-value patterns, it should be borne in mind that, firstly, not all differences in values and attitudes can be interpreted appropriately. Value differences are a natural consequence of

the specificity of family education and life experience; they can even manifest in relatively homogeneous social groups. Interpretation of such differences as mental inequalities or, speaking carefully, its factors is possible only if there is a sufficiently pronounced connection. Firstly, it is evident that the constitutive features of social inequality are income, professional status, access to the decision-making process, etc., and secondly, their internal unity, integration into a kind of cluster (for instance, clustering of achieved mobility settings in the areas of income, education, career). In addition, it must be borne in mind that inequality can be diagnosed not only on the basis of the dominance of certain social (or mental) attributes or their clusters among their carriers. To achieve empirical validity in the study of mental inequality phenomenon, it is advisable to use some form of scaling inequality. Of course, unlike objective characteristics (income, nature of employment, etc.), the scaling of the severity of values and attitudes will always be subjective. Moreover, this subjectivity, speaking about using survey methods for collecting data, is due, firstly, to the level of reflexivity of the respondent himself and, secondly, to the methodological and technological delights of the researcher.

Nevertheless, despite the fragility of subjective assessments and interpretations, they remain the only direct source of knowledge about a mental set of respondents. In addition, cross-grouping and correlation analysis of sociological data may reveal statistically significant differences in the dispositions of respondents belonging to different categories, selected on the basis of objective (gender, age, type of settlement, income, occupation, etc.) or subjective (other dispositions) parameters.

To diagnose key indicators of mental inequalities, both traditional closed and semi-closed issues were used to identify key values and attitudes, and the technique of raising closed opposition-questions, with a five-point scale is between bordering variants of values or attitudes.

Social and interpersonal trust is not only an important indicator of the social situation in community, but also a marker of a certain type of attitude, an expression of optimism, openness to communications, or, conversely, a predisposition to stress, closeness from society [18, 19]. The data obtained in the course of the study do not allow an unequivocal conclusion about a low or high level of generalized interpersonal trust. The only fact that is unequivocally interpreted is that the share of those who trust "the majority of people" (40.5%) is smaller, although not essential, than the share of those who do not consider it possible to trust this hypothetical "majority" (46.7%) (Table 1). Thus, the setting on generalized interpersonal trust is a factor differentiating regional communities almost in half.

Existence in a state of uncertainty is now increasingly becoming the norm rather than a deviation. Accordingly, short-term planning strategies begin to dominate among citizens for their future. Regardless of the positive or negative nature of uncertainty connotations and risk in mass consciousness, there is another consequence of their influence - planning horizon approximation, erosion of long-term strategies from the human life worlds.

TABLE I. GENERALIZED INTERPERSONAL TRUST

Do you think it is possible or impossible to trust most of the people?				
Valid	Values	Frequency	% respondents	% those who answered
1	Impossible	560	46.7	46.7
2	Possible	486	40.5	40.5
3	Not sure	154	12.8	12.8
	Total answered:	1200	100.0	100.0
Gaps	Empty cells	0	0.0	
TOTAL:		1200	100.0	

Long-term (over 10 years) planning of the personal future turned out to be characteristic only of a small minority of respondents - 6.3%, another 4.9% plan their future for a period of 6 to 10 years. The prevailing planning dates are 1-2 years (24.9% of respondents plan their future for this period), or a complete lack of planning, "life for today" (21.6%). 18.4% of the respondents plan their future for a period of less than a year, 18.1% - for 3-5 years (Table 2).

Long-term strategies are most characteristic of respondents aged 30-39, who, unlike young people, are already fully engaged in work and for the most part have their own family, and at the same time, unlike older age groups, they have much more time in stock to realize life goals. However, "life for today" setting among respondents aged 30-39 is also common, but not so common as among young people aged 18-29. But to the greatest extent, "life for today" turned out to be characteristic of older people, which is largely explained by the life period, not connected with expectations, but with summing up. However, no clear linear relationship between these variables has been found.

TABLE II. FUTURE PLANNING STRATEGY

For what period do you plan your future?				
Valid	Values	Frequency	% respondents	% those who answered
1	For 1-2 years	299	24.9	26.4
2	I do not plan future, I live for today	259	21.6	22.9
3	Less than a year	221	18.4	19.5
4	For 3-5 years	217	18.1	19.2
5	More than 10 years	76	6.3	6.7
6	For 6-10 years	59	4.9	5.2
	Total answered:	1131	94.3	100.0
Gaps	Empty cells	0	0.0	
	Not sure	69	5.8	
TOTAL:		1200	100.0	

Ideas about life success factors, their grouping depending on the internal or external locus of control is, on the one hand, an important parameter of an individual disposition, strength or weakness of his achieved orientations and, on the other hand, an important sociocultural principle of differentiation of regional (and country) communities, to a large extent predetermining their chances of accelerating social economic development, modernization, going beyond traditionalist and paternalistic relations.

Survey results show that the internal locus of control is predominant in understanding the factors of life success - 60.3% of respondents consider personal efforts and activity as key to achievement/non achievement of wealth and success. The

second most important factor is the nature of immediate environment of an individual, peculiarities of socialization by the microgroup, expressed by a parameter of “family education, help from family and relatives”. 40.2% of respondents noted it. The extra-social factor takes the third place that is coincidence of circumstances, fate (22.8%). The factor of social injustice, which strongly expresses the external localization of life success and social inequality, is in fourth place (18.8%). The initial inequality of abilities, inherent in nature itself, also reflecting the role of circumstances beyond the control of the individual, was noted by 15.2% of respondents (Table 3).

Contrary to expectations, in mass consciousness of regional communities, the internal locus of life success factors and the achievement of favorable status positions turned out to be dominant. At least at the level of perceptions, the achievement of life by the majority of the population is associated with personal efforts and activity, and not with extra-personal circumstances that are not subject to self-regulation. At the same time, a clear feedback of the respondents’ age and the subjective role of personal efforts in achieving life success is observed. If 44.2% of respondents among 60 years and older, indicated the importance of this factor, then among young people aged 18-29 years old - 78.6%.

TABLE III. IDEAS ABOUT THE FACTORS OF LIFE SUCCESS

What do you think is the main reason why some people achieve wealth and success, while others do not?				
Valid	Values	Frequency	% respondents	% those who answered
1	No, I do not	634	52.8	52.8
2	Yes, I want	379	31.6	31.6
3	Not sure	127	10.6	10.6
	Total answered:	1200		100.0
Gaps	Empty cells	0		0.0
<b>TOTAL:</b>		1200	100.0	

The interpretation of life success clearly traces traditionalist connotations, orienting a person, primarily, to privacy, individual life, non-interference, and contemplation. The main criterion of life success is family happiness, significant for 64.3% of respondents. Material well-being (41.5%) takes the second place. But this parameter testifies neither in favor of traditionalism, nor of achieved self-developing orientations, since the desire for material well-being can reflect both a desire of a person to take a certain self-sufficient position and withdraw into satisfying his material and other needs, and be a criterion of life success, motivator to achieve new life positions. Professional self-realization characterizing life guidelines outside private sphere, is declared as a criterion of life success by a quarter (26.5%) of respondents. 14.8% of respondents are focused on a quiet, peaceful life - these are purely “contemplators”, for whom internal balance is fundamentally more important than relations with society. Career, which can be attributed to achieving characteristics, is important for 13.8% of the respondents. This also includes the motivation of public recognition, which is significant for 8.9% of respondents. The criterion of vivid impressions being significant for 7.3% of respondents takes the last place among life success item (Table 4).

Thus, while achieving success in life, respondents demonstrate proactive, person-oriented attitudes, and then in its

very interpretation, they mostly remain in traditional positions, limited to the private sphere.

There are no significant age differences in priorities, with the exception of two positions - a career and a quiet peaceful life. The first position is markedly more important for respondents aged 18-29 - 21.0% versus 13.8% for the sample as a whole. Well, a quiet peaceful life, on the contrary, is mainly chosen by older people (24.9% versus 14.7% in the sample as a whole).

TABLE IV. UNDERSTANDING OF LIFE SUCCESS

What do you primarily associate an understanding of life success with?				
Valid	Values	Frequency	% respondents	% those who answered
1	With family happiness	771	36.2	64.3
2	With material well-being	498	23.4	41.5
3	With professional self-actualization	318	14.9	26.5
4	With quiet, peaceful life	177	8.3	14.8
5	With career	166	7.8	13.8
6	With recognition, approval from surrounding people	107	5.0	8.9
7	With vivid impressions	88	4.1	7.3
	Amount:	2132	100.0	177.7
	Total answered:	1200		100.0
Gaps	Empty cells	0		0.0
<b>TOTAL:</b>		1200	100.0	

An orientation toward entrepreneurial activity is among active life strategies focused on development and conducive to overcoming social infantilism is. According to the survey, this installation has almost a third (31.6%) of the sampling aggregate, despite the fact that 5.0% of respondents are already entrepreneurs. 52.8% of the respondents expressed denial of such a life trajectory. The remaining 10.6% found it difficult to answer (Table 5). Despite rather difficult economic situation, the entrepreneurial potential of the population of Russian province is at a relatively high level - especially among young people, where 69.4% of respondents demonstrate an entrepreneurial attitude, and 1.4% say that they are already entrepreneurs. At the same time, real entrepreneurial status is more pronounced among respondents aged 30–39 and 40–59 years (7.3% and 7.6%, respectively), but only 33.3% and 21.3% show readiness for entrepreneurship in these groups.

TABLE V. ENTREPRENEURSHIP ATTITUDE

Do you want to become an entrepreneur, start your own business?				
Valid	Values	Frequency	% respondents	% those who answered
1	No, I do not	634	52.8	52.8
2	Yes, I want	379	31.6	31.6
3	Not sure	127	10.6	10.6
4	I am already an entrepreneur	60	5.0	5.0
	Total answered:	1200	100.0	100.0
Gaps	Empty cells	0	0.0	
<b>TOTAL:</b>		1200	100.0	

To diagnose key indicators of mental inequalities, the technique of posing closed question-oppositions was used, where a five-point scale is placed between bordering variants of values or attitudes. Accordingly, the respondent choice of position on this scale meant acceptance of status in the system of mental inequalities on the following features: 1) a tendency toward financial risks; 2) focus on labor mobility; 3) desire to improve the level of education; 4) orientation to civil activity; 5) purpose of professionalization; 6) importance of career.

As a result, on the basis of a tendency to financial risks, the choice of respondents turned out to be slightly shifted in the direction of guaranteed, albeit small salary as opposed to the possibility to earn a lot, but without any guarantees. Here and below, the share of respondents who chose the bordering two positions on the “left” scale and the two bordering positions “on the right” were compared. The share of respondents focused on a small guaranteed income amounted to 39.3%, and those who agree to risk for big money - 26.8%.

In orientations on labor mobility, conservative strategies have become dominant. The share of those who are more likely to work in one place amounted to 60.2% versus 12.2% of supporters of a frequent change of job.

In “life experience-education” dichotomy, the orientation toward the first turned out to be less significant (27.4%) than the setting to improve educational level (47.4%).

The orientation on private, family sphere of life is more pronounced than the orientation on civil activity: 47.1% versus 15.5%.

Such a motivator of professional activity as salary turned out to be predominant for 34.6% of respondents, while 27.1% chose a vocation.

26.6% of respondents demonstrated the weakness of career claims, their severity - 39.0%.

Thus, in the system of mental inequalities, provincial society is quite clearly segmented into groups of different size, with values and attitudes expressed by varying degrees of force.

The structure of inequalities on the basis of labor mobility is characterized by the greatest homogeneity - only a little more than a tenth of the population has a clear focus on it. The structure of “privacy – citizenship” is almost as homogeneous, with 15% of civic activists.

Somewhat stronger, the provincial society is segmented by features of guarantees and the size of earnings (with a predominant orientation towards guaranteed, albeit small income), key motivation for professionalization (dominated by material motivation of work versus vocation motive) and recognition of the education importance in life trajectory of a person (with predominance of supporters of education).

The segmentation is most pronounced in the measurement of mental inequalities on the basis of career orientation - here the share of career adherents is not much greater than the share of those for whom it is not important.

## VI. CONCLUSION

Thus, the results of sociological diagnostics allow us to conclude that mental polarization of inhabitants of Russian province is quite noticeable. It cannot be said that the inhabitants of Russian province are passive and mostly prone to paternalism - shifting responsibility for the fate of a person to external circumstances, authority, state, etc. As shown by the survey results the majority of people believe that personal efforts and activity are a key factor to life success. And this life position, like the ones presented above, centers the individual activity of a person on labor and economic activity connected with earning money for himself and his family, and is extremely weakly transformed into social activity. To tell the truth, high subjective significance of personal efforts in achieving wealth and life success is combined with extremely careful attitudes towards labor mobility. Working in one place throughout life has significant value for more than half of the sample. Young people take a more active position in this respect - as well as business orientation, but there is a conceptual question - to what extent these settings will be transformed into practices. So, carriers of real entrepreneurial status are mostly representatives of the “middle” age groups. Existence in a state of uncertainty is increasingly becoming the norm rather than a deviation. Accordingly, citizens are dominated by short-term planning strategies for their future.

The forms of mental inequalities and tendencies of their development revealed in the course of the study make it possible to predict further stratification of provincial communities into an active minority, increasingly losing contact with regional societies, and a conservative majority experiencing discomfort as a result of the growing sense of inefficiency of habitual forms of social behavior.

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