

The New Quality of Life as a Trend of Social Development: The Experience of the Bryansk Region

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ABSTRACT

Ensuring a new quality of life is one of the most debated issues in modern management science and practice of public administration. The article's research object is social indicators that characterise the quality of life in a particular region of the Russian Federation – the Bryansk region. The authors of the article set themselves the task of analysing whether it is possible to assert that the quality of life in the Bryansk region has reached a level that can be described as "new quality of life", as well as the legality of using this concept – "new quality of life" in strategic planning documents at the state level. The authors come to the following conclusions: a) at this time, the concept of "new quality of life" has not yet been conceptualised, which indicates that it is undesirable to use it in the preparation of strategic planning documents; b) for the Bryansk region at this stage of development, indicators of a new quality of life have not yet been achieved, although the region has certain resources for such achievement.

Keywords: *New quality of life, Demographic indicators, Economic indicators, Social indicators.*

1. INTRODUCTION

The terminological group "new quality of life" was used as the name of one of the areas of development and implementation of state programs of the Russian Federation in 2020 [1].

According to the data presented on the portal of state programs, a new quality of life will be provided by implementing a sufficiently large number of state programs aimed at ensuring "...the availability of education and health services of the required quality, the necessary level of housing security, access to cultural goods, conditions that allow citizens to engage in physical culture and sports systematically.

This area will also be implemented as a social policy to support vulnerable populations and conducted a policy aimed at integrating migrants, provided high standards of personal and environmental safety, etc."

Within the framework of this direction, more than 10 state programs have been developed, developed and implemented, each of which contains a list of social indicators to be achieved, and a system of indicators to determine this achievement's degree.

When getting acquainted with these data, a natural question arose about the content of this concept – "new quality of life", what does it mean in the case of building this state into a particular trend of social development of the state in general, the Russian state in particular, and a separate subject (Bryansk region) in the local dimension?

As far as this category is already sufficiently conceptualised within the social Sciences, and how it is operationalised in the research space, for example, sociological science, that enables practitioners to use it as a base for the development of social standards and, at their base, social indicators and indicators by which to measure quality (and especially the new quality) of life for these indicators to develop strategic documents focused on achieving these standards.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

When developing the research methodology, the following logic was chosen:

1st direction of research: analysis of the sociological reflection of the concept of "new quality of life".

2nd direction of research: development and justification of a system of indicators that will be used to illustrate the Bryansk region's experience in implementing the developed indicators.

Within the framework of the 1st direction of the study, the conceptual foundations of the quality of life as a scientific category were considered.

Summarising the sociological reflection on the concept of "quality of life", it is necessary to note two relatively stable groups of researchers who have studied this concept - these are "optimists", which include such scientists as D. Bell, P. Draker, R. Aron et al., and "pessimists", in the ranks of which T. Adorno, G. Marcuse, Yu. Haberman, E. Fromm, B. Skinner, et al.

The differences in the views of scientists representing these two groups are in interpreting conditions that indicate the transition of the social system to the reproduction of a new quality of life, or, conversely, the deterioration of this quality's ability to improve. For example, optimists associate the transition of a society to a new quality of life with technological progress and believe that the possibilities of a super-industrial society (the change to which this progress guarantees) they can create conditions for solving social problems, and therefore for psychological satisfaction of the needs of the individual. Optimists, on the contrary, consider scientific and technological progress as a threat to the quality of life, since they believe that the main results of this progress are environmental pollution, excessive technologisation of social space, the cultivation of a consumer attitude to the world, i.e. everything that negatively affects human life.

Since the 80s of the 20th century, these two groups' boundaries begin to blur, as many authors appear who introduce new views on the interpretation of the concept of "quality of life". This is, for example, the position of E. Giddens writes that a person can achieve a new quality of life only by changing himself, and the theory of A. Campbell, F. Converse and U. Rogers, who believe that quality of life is directly related to a person's subjective perception of such a state as the well-being of life [2], and the concept of "perceived" quality of life [3], and many other concepts and theories, many of which are closely interrelated with the concepts of human capital and sustainable development [4].

Thus, we can state that scientific discussions about the quality of life's content and characteristics have been conducted for more than one decade. Notable is the fact that the option is not even "quality of life", and "new quality of life" first appears as a literary metaphor for the creation of such social conditions that would contribute to new opportunities of the individual, and only after a while attached as a scientific term in the discourse of social Sciences.

"Quality of life" as a scientific category is presented in the terminology dictionary of various scientific fields: economics, sociology, philosophy, psychology, demography and others. Each of the sciences, determining this category's content and its characteristics, develops its system of measuring indicators and indicators.

Among the most complete and generalised definitions of this scientific category are the following:

Quality of life is a sociological category that expresses the degree of satisfaction of a person's material and spiritual needs, covering a wide range of objective and subjective indicators, an empirical characteristic of living conditions, an integral indicator of the country's socio-economic development [5].

Quality of life is a complex synthetic category that accumulates all the essential conditions of the individual's existence and development [6].

Quality of life is an integral characteristic of people's life, revealing not only indicators of life activity, life support, but also the viability of society as an integral social organism, social qualities [7].

An integral characteristic of people's lives reveals life activity indicators, life support, and society's viability as an integral social organism, social qualities.

Improving the quality of life is also considered by scientists as a mandatory function of the social state.

As a prerequisite for forming a new quality of life, modern scientists also call a change in all social development mechanisms. Authors Yu.P. Averin and V.A. Sushko [4], for example, argue that such a change has already occurred, which was the impetus for the active use of this term in Russian scientific and managerial discourse.

At the same time, as the researchers note, "...we must admit that there is no universally recognised unified approach to the method of measuring the quality of life, as there is no single definition of the scientific concept of "quality of life", and even more so – "new quality of life". There is a certain inconsistency in conceptual developments in theoretical studies of quality of life, building a system of indicators and practical calculations in studying the quality of life [5].

It is precisely because of the existing discrepancies, and summarising the scientific reflection on the category "new quality of life," scientific category "new quality of life," the authors of this article proposed to interpret in the following way: "a new quality of life" is the level of the social system in which social opportunities of the individual and society as a whole, and most systems exhibit a strong tendency to increase, which allows to raise social standards and to open new horizons of possibilities (primarily in the areas of education, employment; environment; health; human

rights; income; infrastructure; national and public security; self-development; housing), harmonising the interests of the individual subject (person) and subject the system (state), and providing a high level of social comfort.

2nd direction of research: development and justification of a system of indicators that will be used to illustrate the Bryansk region's experience in implementing the developed indicators.

Before describing the system of indicators that were used in the analysis of the experience of the Bryansk region, it is necessary to focus on several important milestones in the history of the operationalisation of the concept of "quality of life" and the development of systems of indicators of quality of life (and a new quality of life – including).

The American sociologist S. McCall, presenting the concept of "quality of life" to the sociological public), wrote in his works that the presence of this concept contributes to the development of such "units of measurement" of compliance of the provided social opportunities with the social needs of the individual, the use of which to assess this compliance will contribute to achieving the maximum effect of the individual's realisation of his human resource [8]. Although, as we know from the history of sociology, not all sociologists agreed with this assessment of the potential of the concept of "quality of life". "We don't have," wrote the American sociologist E. Toffler, "no units of measurement for "quality of life" [9]. But we need to clarify that E. Toffler wrote this phrase before 1980.

Now, we can list more than a dozen methods (several of them – over the past decade), with which scientists measure the quality of life of the population.

For example, this is the integrated approach presented in the works of such scientists as M. Haggerty, R. Cummins, E. Ferris, in which scientists analyse 22 indices, which are the most used in the world to measure the quality of life of the entire state or its regions [10].

This, for example, the prosperity index (The Legatum Prosperity Index – LPI), developed by the Legatum Institute (UK), index to measure the well-being of countries under the generally accepted norms and standards of human development, developed by the Money Matters Institute, the triangular index of the wealth of Nations (Wealth of Nations Triangle Index), index, actual development (the Genuine Progress Index - GPI), an international index of happiness (Happy Planet Index) which was developed by the New Economics Foundation (NEF), reflecting the well-being of people in different countries of the world International index of happiness (Happy Planet Index) (developed by the New Economics Foundation),

reflecting the well-being of people in different countries, etc.

But, despite such many research methods, the question of forming a system of standards remains open.

In the HSE report "National Social Development Goals: challenges and solutions" [11], a direct list of standards of the new quality of life is not presented, but several positions are given, which are designated as "national goals" aimed at improving the level and quality of life of the population. This are:

- ensuring sustainable growth of real incomes of citizens;
- reduction of poverty by 2 times (compared to the indicators of 2017).

It should be noted that the authors of the report when describing the national goals, relied on the nine national development goals of Russia, which were defined until 2024, and for the implementation of which national projects were developed [12].

In July 2020, the decree of the President of the Russian Federation adjusted the goals to five: preservation of the population, health and well-being of people; opportunities for self-realisation and development of talents; a comfortable and safe environment for life; decent, sufficient work and successful entrepreneurship; digital transformation [13], but the targets did not change.

Accordingly, the steady growth of citizens' real incomes and poverty reduction can be called indicators of a new quality of life. But if we start from the definition, according to which "...the quality of life, as a comprehensive assessment of people's life activity, is a system of indicators that characterise the level of realisation of human needs, the degree of satisfaction with his sense of his life plans, correlated with minimum social standards and with the resource capabilities of society" [14], then these two indicators, of course, is not enough, especially for determining the "new" quality of life.

In all the presented and many other developments, the following logical chain can be traced: the priority and most developed areas of any state involvement in forming a new quality of life should be education, health, culture, ecology, etc.

The article volume does not allow for a full in-depth analysis of all the indicators, so the analysis of the experience of achieving a new quality of life in the Bryansk region will focus only on the most basic: health care, demographics, the subsistence minimum, the level of wages and the condition of education, unemployment.

3. THE STUDY RESULTS

The permanent population of the Bryansk region as of 1st Jan 2020, was 1,192.5 thousand people [15].

In the rating of regions of Russia for quality of life RIA Rating ("Russia Today") in 2019, the Bryansk region improved its position compared to the previous year and took 41st place (in 2018 - 49th) [16].

In terms of pre-school education coverage (as a percentage of the number of children of the corresponding age), the Bryansk Region in 2017 was on the 30th place among the subjects of the Russian Federation with an indicator of 71.5% (the average Russian value of the indicator is 66.5%). In 2019, this figure reached 91.1% [17].

The birth rate in the Bryansk region at the end of 2019 was 8.4 people per 1000 people (in 2018-9.2 people per 1000 people), the mortality rate was 14.7 people per 1000 people (in 2018 - 15.2 people per 1000 people).

The natural population loss rate was 6.4 people per 1000 people (in 2018-6.0 people per 1000 people) [15].

This ratio has been growing every year since 2015: 4.4 people in 2015, 4.7 – in 2016, 5.8-in 2017, 6.0-in

2018, 6.4-in 2019 [18].

When the birth rate falls and the natural loss rate increases, the depopulation rate becomes increasingly high, which affects the overall resource state of the region.

According to the Department of the State Service for Labour and Employment of the Population of the Bryansk Region, 13,451 people received the official status of unemployed at the end of November 2020. The number of unemployed increased by 9,018 people compared to the same period of the previous year. 53.6% of the unemployed receive unemployment benefits [19].

Among the main social challenges associated with the Bryansk region's demographic situation are also called low wages.

The average monthly salary in the Bryansk region in 2017 was 26,867 rubles, which is the 31st place among Russia's regions (the average Russian value of the indicator was 31,477 rubles). The share of citizens with monetary incomes below the subsistence minimum in 2017 was 13.3%, which is slightly higher than the national average (13.2%).

Data on the subsistence minimum and the dynamics

Table 1. The amount of the subsistence rate (on average per month, rubles) [18]

	Average per capita	Including			For reference: the ratio of the average per capita monetary income and the value of the subsistence rate (times)
		able-bodied	pensioners	children	
2011*	5323	5705	4336	5290	2,9
2012	5327	5707	4298	5362	3,3
2013	6509	7008	5420	6268	2,9
2014	7335	7897	6119	7043	2,8
2015	8843	9498	7353	8610	2,6
2016	9099	9762	7572	8899	2,6
2017	9536	10226	7921	9366	2,6
2018	9787	10486	8120	9670	2,7
2019	10575	11362	8796	10285	2,7
I quarter	10461	11224	8700	10233	2,3
II quarter	10905	11721	9058	10606	2,5
III quarter	10615	11411	8823	10312	2,7
IV quarter	10320	11092	8603	9990	3,1

*For the I-IV quarters, data are provided on the value of the subsistence minimum established by the resolutions of the Government of the Bryansk Region for the year – an estimate based on these data.

Table 2. Structure of consumer expenditure of the population [18]

	2010	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Total consumer expenditure	100	100	100	100	100	100
including on:						
food products	41,2	43,9	47,5	43,5	38,3	40,2
non-food products	33,3	30,6	30,7	31,8	38,4	33,3
alcoholic beverages	1,4	1,5	1,6	1,3	1,5	1,9
payment for services	24,1	24,0	20,2	23,4	21,8	24,6

of its change are presented in table 1.

The table is indicative and the figures, although their analysis allows us to trace a relatively steady trend (in recent years (2017-2019 biennium.) slowed the growth of the subsistence minimum concerning the period of 2012-2016), and the ratio of per capita income and the subsistence minimum, starting from 2011 (i.e. during the 10 years) this ratio shows a tendency to a decrease (since 2013), and only in the last two years – 2018 and 2019 – to the relative stability. But the indicators of this stabilisation do not "hold out" until 2012.

Although in 2021 it is planned to increase the minimum wage (from 1st Jan 2021, the minimum wage will be equal to 12,792 rubles per month (today-12,130 rubles [20]), and the salary fund of all business entities was adopted based on old indicators, and in 2021 it is unlikely to change this ratio upward significantly, most likely, the rate of average per capita income and the subsistence minimum will show a tendency to an even more significant decrease.

These trends will become even more significant if they are considered through the prism of two more groups of indicators: the structure of consumer spending of the population, and the value of average wages (table 2).

This table shows that the structure of consumer spending for almost 10 years has not undergone any significant changes. There were only minor "shifts" of indicators between positions, which indicates that in 10

years, the Bryansk region population has not become better off.

The data presented in table 3 reflect another "cross-section" of the quality of life indicators in the Bryansk region: cash incomes in the Bryansk region are not only lower than the average for the Russian Federation but also significantly lower than this indicator for the Central Federal District, especially in comparison with Moscow and the Moscow Region. It should be noted that in the Central Federal District there are several other regions in which these incomes are even lower than in the Bryansk Region (for example, the Kostroma Region). Still, the average nominal accrued salary in the Kostroma region is higher than in the Bryansk region. Even if the average nominal wage in December is not representative (as at the last month of the year account for the payment of bonus, etc.) that the average nominal accrued wages for 2019 in the Bryansk region - 29686,0 rubles (it has increased by 7.6% in 2018 [15]), in the Kostroma region – 30,962 rubles (it has increased by 10.7% to a level of 2018 [21]) that the gap between the Bryansk and Kostroma regions is maintained.

The Bryansk Region is one of the "poorest" regions of the Central Federal District. Accordingly, achieving a new quality of life in it is not just a complicated process, but practically impossible to implement in the near time (at least in the next 3 years).

Thus, the analysis of the above data does not allow us to say that in 10 years, there have been changes that

Table 3. Wages, monetary income and expenses of the population [18]

	Cash income and consumer expenditure per capita in 2019, rubles		Average monthly nominal accrued salary in December 2019, rubles
	cash income	consumer expenditure	
Russian Federation	35249	28647	62239
Central Federal District	46917	36880	82267
Bryansk region	28358	24522	35188
For comparison:			
Moscow	73827	56185	135375
Moscow region	47217	37661	68970
Kostroma region	25290	21259	37851

indicate the achievement of a new quality of life in the Bryansk region.

4. RESULTS DISCUSSION

1. The article presents statistics, and even the small amount of theoretical approaches to the term "new quality of life", which was referred to the authors, suggests that the question of theoretical reflection of this concept to assess the level of social development, and, especially, practice the implementation of this level are, of course, relevant for the Russian Federation, especially in terms of its post-pandemic development.

2. As for directly achieving a new quality of life in the Bryansk region, on the one hand, specific social resources are available for this purpose, such as deposits of natural resources, recreational resources, large specially protected natural areas of the federal scale (Bryansk Forest), etc.

5. CONCLUSIONS

It can be argued that by declaring a new quality of life as a trend of social development and introducing this scientific category into the management discourse, the necessary work was not carried out to operationalise the very content of this scientific category, to develop and justify the threshold values of indicators that reflect the process of transition to this new quality of life in a particular functioning subject. This led to a violation of the logic of "designating" the described characteristics of social processes (changes) and their indicators.

That is, this term was used nominally as a generalising name for a group of documents whose content is not entirely focused on justification, and, most importantly, on ensuring such a process of social development, as a result of which a new quality of life in the Russian Federation in general, and a particular subject in particular, will actually be achieved.

The research conducted in this article's framework showed that the real social indicators achieved in the Bryansk region do not allow us to talk about achieving the quality of life that could be designated as "new" at this time.

At the same time, the fixation in official documents, such as national projects, state programs, targets, the achievement of which in a particular region (region) will contribute to the formation of opportunities and resources necessary for the formation of a new quality of life is both a conscious and consciously formed social challenge for public administration, and a natural indicator of its effectiveness, and the level of social opportunities of both the state and the individual, which, hopefully, will still be achieved.

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