

Polevshchikova, Nadezda

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Social infrastructure and the level of population's life of the North region

Annotation. The socio-economic phenomena taking place on a separate territory have their regional specificity formed by a complicated complex of factors including specific economic and geographic location. Geographic researches conducted by the author in cooperation with Russian and foreign geographers, economists and sociologists in the Republic of Karelia are developing in different directions. The given article is devoted to consideration of specific traits of and changes in social infrastructure of the Republic of Karelia that is a part of the Northwestern Federal District of the Russian Federation.

Key words: social infrastructure, North, Republic of Karelia, city, rural area

Development of the social infrastructure system and demand for its services depends on many factors: natural, economic, social, demographic, etc. Modern processes of changes of quality and quantity of its services take place under the influence of socio-economic transformations in a country and the Republic, as well as under the impact of its location close to the border (border with Finland, and consequently with the European Union).

Population is the main consumer of services provided by the social infrastructure, this is why let us describe it shortly. Major trends of the population changes are as follows: decline in number of people, increase in share of urban population in relation to rural population, increase in share of older people (see Table 1).

Population characteristics (according to the Official web-site of the Territorial Authority of the Federal State Statistics Service)

Table 1

Indicators	2006 (thousands)	2006 (%)	2013 (thousands)	2013 (%)
Total population	697,5	100	636,9	100
including urban population	529,9	75,5	501,9	78,4
rural population	170,6	25,5	135,0	21,6
Population under working age	111,0	15,9	106,6	16,7
Population of working age*	452,0	64,3	376,9	59,2

Population in retirement age	134,5	19,8	153,4	24,1
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*Working age in the Republic of Karelia is 16-55 years for men, and 16-50 years for women

As the share of population in retirement age increases, the need for the more comfortable accommodation increases as well. But the improvement of living conditions is impossible for many people especially in rural areas due to low income. Let us provide some data on living conditions of people in rural and urban areas for comparison (see Table 2).

Living conditions of population of the Republic of Karelia (RK)

(Municipal Districts of the Republic of Karelia, 2013, the Official web-site of the Government of the Republic of Karelia, the Official web-site of the Territorial Authority of the Federal State Statistics Service)

Table 2

Indicators	2008	2012
Total housing stock in RK (thousand sq. m)	16259	16469
Housing stock of urban areas (thousand sq. m)	11880	12137
Housing stock of rural areas (thousand sq. m)	4379	4332
Connection rate to a water supply system in RK (%)	68,8	69,1
Connection rate to a water supply system of urban housing stock (%)	85,3	85,1
Connection rate to a water supply system of rural housing stock (%)	24,0	24,3
Connection rate to a heating system in RK (%)	66,9	67,4
Connection rate to a heating system of urban housing stock (%)	82,6	82,6
Connection rate to a heating system of rural housing stock (%)	24,3	24,8
Connection rate to a sewage water discharge system in RK (%)	67,3	67,7
Connection rate to a sewage water discharge system of urban housing stock (%)	84,7	84,5
Connection rate to a sewage water discharge system of rural housing stock (%)	20,1	20,5
Availability of housing in RK (sq.m. per 1 person)	24,9	25,9
Availability of housing for urban dwellers (sq.m. per 1 person)	23,4	24,2
Availability of housing for rural dwellers (sq.m. per 1 person)	29,8	32,1

Quality level of housing stock in rural areas is several times lower than in urban areas. Consequently, considering the severe climate conditions in the North low connection rate to a sewage water discharge system and the fact that toilets in many settlements are located outside look dramatic. Considering the fact that firewoods that are used for heating are becoming more expensive and less accessible, the absence of district heating is a big problem for the rural dwellers. The availability of housing for rural dwellers in recent years is mostly connected with the decline of total rural population but not with the increase in construction of new houses. New modern houses with autonomous utility systems are being built in rural areas that are located close to big cities and have with well-developed transport infrastructure. In general, as the number of many facilities of different fields of social infrastructure is declining (see Table 3), its concentration in big settlements, including cities, is increasing.

Social infrastructure facilities (Municipal facilities, 2013, the Official web-site of the Government of the Republic of Karelia, the Official web-site of the Territorial Authority of the Federal State Statistics Service)

Table 3

Indicators	2005	2012
Hospitals (units)	65	36
Medical and outpatient facilities (units)		64
Gyms (units)	769	384
Comprehensive schools (units)	278	219
Retail turnover (mln RUB)	28832,3	78438,8
Retail turnover per capita (RUB)	41171	122885

Let us consider some changes in social infrastructure taking place in rural and urban areas. Specific traits of Karelian economic development are related to development of forests, this is why timber industry settlements were basis for resettlement of population (Klementiev, 1988, Litvinas, 1985, Polevshchikova,1992). Social infrastructure facilities were industry-sponsored. Timber industry owned majority of the Republican housing stock, educational, cultural and community facilities. Definite amount of social infrastructure services was provided locally depending on the population size of the forest settlements. To some extent it

balanced the difficulties in receiving services in district centers that were located far away from the forest settlements. Now the situation has dramatically changed. The ownership of social infrastructure facilities was transferred to the local authorities. Lacks of financing, difficulties of socio-economic development are leading to drastic reduction of possibilities for receiving the services locally in rural settlements.

Researchers conducted in a number of forest settlements revealed dissatisfaction of the dwellers with the living conditions (Polevshikova,1998, Polevshchikova1999, Polevshchikova, 2000, Polevshchikova, 2002).

As an example of changes in rural areas, let us consider on of the forest settlements – Koivuselga village located in Prjazha district of the Republic of Karelia. Comprehensive research are being conducted here since 1992 (Polevshchikova,1996, Polevshchikova, 1998).

International expeditions with participation of Russian and Finnish scientists on the study of socio-economic situation in the settlement were conducted in summer 1997 and 2014. The settlement was founded in 1949, it was established in the period of active development of the timber industry. In 1955 population of the settlement was 1122 people. Till 70s the settlement had a culture center, a library, a secondary school, a nursery and a kindergarten, a public bath, a consumer services center, a hair salon, a hotel, a post office, an outpatient clinic and a hospital with the patient capacity of 15 people, a drugstore, a café, a bakery, several stores where people could buy grocery, books and other consumer goods. The settlement was established as a temporary one due to production, this is why many buildings were built as temporary ones as well.

Quality of housing was extremely low. But these are housing conditions that determine social and everyday comfort of life. In general the majority of housing stock in the Republic does not comply with the severe northern climate conditions, especially in forest settlements where most of the houses are panelized houses with poor heat insulation and without utility and sanitary rooms. But difficulties connected with living conditions were balanced by the opportunity to get housing as such, relatively high income and accessibility of different services.

In 70s due to reorganization of the timber industry enterprises an outflow of population happened and a number of facilities in the village were closed (a hospital, a drugstore, a bakery, and stores selling books and fruits and vegetables). In late 80s the social infrastructure facilities were transferred to local authorities that did not have enough money for the development of social infrastructure, and it made the living conditions of people even worse. In 90s a nursery, a consumer services center and a café were closed; a medical and

obstetric center, a school, a kindergarten and housing stock were transferred to local administration. In 1997 population of the settlement was 344 people. Even though the demand for medical services from the increasing share of older people who ruined their health during heavy logging operations, all the medical facilities were closed. What is the future of the settlement? In 1997 schoolchildren responded that they wanted a new beautiful school, a new culture center with different hobby groups; and schoolchildren mostly wanted to live and work in their own settlement. But the absence of stable job, closure of small schools all over the Republic led to decline in number of labor force in forest settlements. Today population of the settlement is 107 people, only 10 of them are children who have to study in a school located tens kilometers away from the settlement. The social infrastructure facilities include a store, a culture center and housing stock with high deterioration rate. The majority of population is retired people with very low income. Relatives of local dwellers come to visit them to the settlement in summer. There are also people who have their own houses and live here for a certain time.

Based on the example of the only settlement, we can reveal a certain tendency towards narrowing of services provided locally and their redistribution in favor of the larger settlements. But the transport accessibility is becoming worse as well (there is no daily transportation to other settlements), what is making the level and quality of life of people worse.

As regards the accessibility of social infrastructure services for the urban dwellers, let us consider a big center Petrozavodsk, the capital of the Republic of Karelia.

What are the trends? Firstly, it is the increase in number of retail facilities. Real accessibility level for population of Petrozavodsk exceeds the standard almost twice and amounts to 940,8 sq. m per 1000 people. Retail sales in the city are constantly growing and retail turnover in the city is about 23 billion RUB (in 2012). Several big supermarkets have been built in the city in recent years («Lenta», «Sigma», «Maksi»). The number of large chain stores has increased, they are presented in practically every district of the city, and their number continues to grow. These are stores of such large chain companies as «Magnit», «Diksi», «Pjaterochka», etc. Centralization of almost all paid services takes place in the capital – the number of hair salons, hotels, entertainment centers, stores, educational facilities is increasing; unique medical centers where medical services are provided at the highest level appeared. But the accessibility of these services for rural dwellers is declining due to the decline of transport accessibility of the capital (expensive tickets, poor schedule – irregular and sometimes absent buses).

Thus, according to the researches conducted by the author in different districts of the Republic of Karelia, the changes in social infrastructure organization at different levels are taking place under the influence of factors related to socio-economic processes in the country:

at a spatial level: polarization of level and quality of services between the center and the periphery of different territorial levels; decrease in density of facilities of some fields of social infrastructure in administrative units; increase in transport and time costs of receiving various types of services;

at a sectoral level: the existed system provided a range of services locally is being destroyed; the facilities necessary for normal life of the population are closed; brand new expensive and prestigious facilities appear;

at a qualitative level two different processes occur simultaneously: reduction and increase in quality of services. Reduction of quality is associated with reduction of material and technical support of different public institutions of education, healthcare and culture, mainly in rural areas. On the contrary, increase in quality is related to increase in funding of some of these facilities in the same fields, located mainly in regional centers. The price for various types of services increases, the number of free services is reduced while the number of paid ones increases; new types and forms of paid services are introduced;

at the organizational level and the ownership level: introduction of market mechanisms of its functioning, transfer of state assets to private owners and expansion of private ownership of various elements of the social infrastructure.

Processes that are taking place in socio-economic sphere at different territorial levels are very complicated and require comprehensive interdisciplinary researches.

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