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**«МНЕ ДОВОЛЬНО-ТАКИ ТЯЖЕЛО ЖИТЬ В ГОРОДЕ»:
ЛОКАЛЬНЫЕ ИДЕНТИЧНОСТИ И СОПРИЧАСТНОСТЬ МЕСТУ
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«МНЕ ДОВОЛЬНО-ТАКИ ТЯЖЕЛО ЖИТЬ В ГОРОДЕ»: ЛОКАЛЬНЫЕ ИДЕНТИЧНОСТИ И СОПРИЧАСТНОСТЬ МЕСТУ МОЛОДЫХ СЕЛЬСКИХ РОССИЯН

'IT IS HARD FOR ME TO LIVE IN THE CITY': LOCAL IDENTITIES AND PLACE ATTACHMENT AMONG YOUNG RURAL RUSSIANS

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Аннотация. Молодежные исследования в основном развиваются вокруг мегаполисной культуры. Сельская молодежь в них часто выпадает из фокуса исследователей и маргинализуется в сравнении с городской молодежью, чей опыт и стиль жизни воспринимаются как нормативная модель. При этом само пространство деревни маркируется как нелегитимное и структурно депривирующее молодежь. Такой подход критикуют исследователи, работающие в традиции культурной географии детства и молодежи и принимающие во внимание множественный, сложный, зачастую противоречивый, но в то же время уникальный и автономный опыт молодежи, проживающей в сельских регионах. В данной статье на основе 59 биографических интервью авторы показывают, как российская сельская молодежь мыслит свою сопричастность месту в контексте трех сельских локальностей, и выделяют три типа предпосылок, определяющих принадлежность месту и конституирующих локальные идентичности молодежи: рациональный выбор, биографическая связность и социальная укорененность.

Ключевые слова: молодежь, молодые взрослые, сельский, Россия, принадлежность месту, локальная идентичность

Abstract. The contemporary youth studies are mostly metrocentric. As a result, rural youth often find themselves outside the focus of researchers' attention being marginalized in comparison with urban youth whose experience and lifestyle are perceived as a normative model. In these conditions, rural space is labeled as illegitimate and structurally depriving for youth. This approach is criticized by researchers who work in the tradition of the cultural geographies of childhood and youth and take into account complex, often contradictory but still unique and autonomous experiences of today's young people living in rural areas. The article is based on 59 biographical interviews and describes how Russian rural youth comprehend belonging to places in three rural localities. The authors single out three types of prerequisites defining the place attachment and local identities among young people: rational choice, biographical rootedness, and community rootedness.

Keywords: youth, young adults, rural, Russia, place attachment, local identity

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Introduction

Contemporary scholars point out that the global urban imagination is becoming central to the present age [Madden, 2012: 784]. This does not mean that all inhabitants of the Earth live in cities, but it means that modern life, development and future are viewed as urban phenomena. According to David J. Madden, 'for a growing number of analysts, boosters, critics, and political actors this is the era of megacities and urban hyperdevelopment, an epoch marked by the demise of rural autonomy and the unprecedented permeation of the world by urban society [Madden, 2012: 772].

Global shifts in economic and cultural foundations of rural areas, such as the decline in agriculture, development of service economy, tourism, development of communication and transportation networks, all lead to significant changes in the traditional social way of life in rural areas [Rye, 2011]. Globalization blurs the line between the city and the countryside even more, making it mobile and ambiguous [Hogan, 2004], [Lynch, 2004], [Cid Aguayo, 2008]. Researchers note that the urban lifestyle becomes normative and rurality turns into 'mental categories, located in people's minds, rather than ... outward reality' [Rye, 2011: 173].

However, the binary division into 'rural' and 'urban' still exists. This division no longer looks like the gap between 'gesellschaft' and 'gemeinschaft' [Tonnies, [1887] 1963], but rather takes the form of a structural and symbolic inequality. In contrast with the city, rural areas are conceived as deprived, which, in both academic and policy debates, calls for the idea of additional development of rural areas, following the example of urban ones, and of economic, social and other limitations overcoming.

In many ways, youth studies, as well as wider debate of the social sciences, are developing in a metrocentric manner [Farrugia, 2014]. It is important to note not only that the dominant number of works is focused on urban youth studying, but also the fact that the experience and practices of latter are seen as universal and normative for young people in general [Cuervo, 2014: 546]. This considerably marginalises rural youth [Leyshon, 2008], [Leyshon, Bull, 2011], [Farrugia, Smyth, Harrison, 2014]—they find themselves outside of researchers' attention focus; their experiences are not regarded as autonomous and significant in the modern conditions; they are compared with urban youth and regarded as a group deprived by the structural conditions of the

countryside. For instance, according to Hernan Cuervo, despite the increased interest in studying rural youth in the last decade, most studies are focused on their social and economic exclusion [Cuervo, 2014].

Along with the marginalisation of rural youth's agency, rural place itself as a legitimate space for young people is marginalised as well. Rye says: 'For all social classes, rural-to-urban migration is beneficial in terms of the long term accumulation of cultural and economic capital' [Rye, 2011: 6]. Countryside is regarded as a space that significantly limits young people's life opportunities [Alston, Kent, 2009]. Moreover, popular, political and academic discourses consider rural youth's place attachment as a negative subjective emotional and structural engagement that prevents young people from implementation of their life plans [Evans, 2016: 502]. Therefore, rural-to-urban migration is not just a typical contemporary process: it is expected from young people, among other things, as a way of overcoming structural inequalities of the rural area [Looker, Naylor, 2009], becoming 'the mobility imperative for rural youth' [Farrugia, 2016].

Russian studies, with the exception of several works [Brednikova, 2012], [Melikhow, 2011] also focus on 'rural problems' that 'objectively present' (unemployment, alcoholism, the collapse of agriculture) and on the analysis of survival strategies in rural areas in the context of post-Soviet recessionary transformations [Veliky, 2010], [Staroverov, 2004], [Paciorkovskij, 2003], [Kalugina, Fadeeva, 2009]. On the whole, young people mostly are out of researchers attention, and works which do take rural youth into account also focus on their survival strategies [Gataullina, 2007] or on their rural-to-urban migration [Veliky, 2010], [Kareva, 2003].

However, despite all this, it is obvious that spaces marked as rural (both outside and inside) still exist, and youth are a part of their inhabitants. Moreover, some rural youth return back to the countryside after living in the city [Rérat, 2014], and some urban youth migrate to the countryside [Kloep et al., 2003], [Henderson, 2005]. In this context, we turn to studying place experiences and senses of youth that live and are rooted in Russian rural areas, and we follow the developing trend [Panelli, Nairn, McCormack, 2002], [Leyshon, 2008], [Leyshon, Bull, 2011], [Farrugia, Smyth, Harrison, 2014] of critical consideration of the marginalisation of rural youth, which takes into account the multiple, complex, often contradictory, but still unique and autonomous experiences of today's young people living in rural areas.

This article demonstrates how Russian rural youth conceive their 'place, space and identity' [Farrugia, Smyth, Harrison, 2016] in the context of three rural localities and defines three types of place attachment that constitute local identities of young people: rational choice, biographical rootedness, and community rootedness.

Locating our research in current debate

The emergence of the 'cultural' and 'spatial' terms made in social sciences make a major contribution to rural youth studies in the 1990s [Rye, 2006a]. In 2002, Ruth Panelli even defines a direction for the rural youth studies development as 'negotiating rural space and place (spatial and cultural)' [Panelli, 2002]. Within this approach, researchers usually focus on the social construction of 'rurality', on the meanings vested in it and on the way it is imagined.

A number of studies analyses young people's images of the countryside [Jones, 1995], [McCormack, 2002], [Vanderbeck, Dunckley, 2003], [Leyshon, 2008], [Rye, 2006a] both as images of an autonomous space and in relation to the city. For instance, describing rural youth in New Zealand, McCormack says that their view of the countryside is constructed primarily through two images: 'agriculture' and 'nature' [McCormack, 2002]. Defining 'rural' as 'nature' is quite common in other geographic regions as well (see, e. g. [Wiborg, 2004]), including Russia [Brednikova, 2012]. Moreover, 'nature' is often presented as a part of more complex positive image of the countryside called 'rural idyll' [Leyshon, 2008], [Vanderbeck, Dunckley, 2003] associated with peace, fresh air, freedom and close social ties.

On the other hand, the opposite of the 'rural idyll' is the 'rural dull' [Rye, 2006b]. When articulating this image, young people mention the lack of entertainment, mundane routine life, underdeveloped infrastructure and limited opportunities. However, researchers underscore the fact that in everyday narratives of young people don't confront these images, but rather complement each other [Leyshon, 2008]. In general, it can be noted that although young people's images of the countryside and their experience (amongst other things, inclusion and exclusion) are multiple and inconsistent [Panelli, Nairn, McCormack, 2002], [Kraack, Kenway, 2002], but they co-exist in the same space and constitute holistic local identities together.

Conflicting images of the 'rural' become part of a person's attitude to the place: their local rootedness and place attachment. The feeling of attachment to rural place maintains the establishment of a local identity [Leyshon, 2008]. In our study, we use the idea of geographical imagination in order to understand the construction of local identity and place attachment [Hung, 2011], which, along with personalized experiences (including bodily experiences) of living in a place and with its images [Crouch, 2001], [Saunders, Moles, 2013], [Farrugia, 2014] include a critical reflection of its socio-economic structure and its location in broader geographical and social contexts [Hung, 2011: 590]. For instance, in our research young people focus on the three key components when interpreting their place of residence: environmental, social and working conditions. Different assessment of structural conditions not only results in different narratives about the localities but also place them onto a bigger socio-geographical map, which is discussed in detail below. In this case, geographical imagination allows us to consider local rootedness as a reflectively established link between 'biography and geography' [Hung, 2011: 580].

Place attachment, in turn, may be determined 'as a form of belonging' [Cuervo, Wyn, 2014: 906—907]. Hernan Cuervo and Johanna Wyn convincingly substantiate the necessity of sometimes shifting the interpretative emphasis of youth studies from the metaphor of transitions (see, e. g.: [Shucksmith, 2004], [Hall, Coffey, Lashua, 2009]) to the metaphor of belonging, since it makes it possible to accentuate a subjective emotional connection with a place, people and generations without the objectifying transitional discourse (transition into adulthood, employment, family, and also to the city). We adopt this idea in our study and lay the main emphasis on analysing belonging, putting transition and mobility aside. The current youth studies often regard spatial belonging solely as an emotional affective relationship with a place [Leyshon, Bull, 2011], [Power, Norman, Dupré, 2014], [Farrugia, Smyth,

Harrison, 2016]. However, in our study we encounter multiple interpretations of place belonging: along with emotional ties, young people also use rational arguments. Therefore, we believe that spatial belonging should be discussed as a reflective emotional and rational object.

Michael Leyshon [Leyshon, 2008], [Leyshon, Bull, 2011] notes that local identities are produced through autobiographical narratives for oneself and for others in relatively coherent and stable manner and in these narratives controversial circumstances of life are interpreted and linked together. However, a 'stable sense of self should not be assumed to be synonymous with a "good" or "happy" life' [Leyshon, Bull, 2011: 176]. There are two reasons why this idea is important for our study. First, our informants also produce relatively stable coherent identities and place attachments, regardless of their evaluation of place, their life satisfaction, etc. And second, it allows us, as researchers and readers, to step away from value judgements about the standards of living and well-being of rural youth, and view them as subjects coping with controversial and often difficult circumstances.

However, modern conditions don't allow us to consider rural youth as some solid group [Matthews et al., 2000], as it is highly differentiated in terms of their experience and understandings of rurality. We agree with Rye that the most valuable studies in today's debate are those that do not take everyday experiences and understandings of rurality as something common and universal but consider them to be differentiated, and often unequal [Layshon, 2011]. Researchers indicate that key distinctions are related to the following: class [Matthews et al, 2000], [Rye, 2006b], gender [Rye, 2006a], ethnicity [Haug, 2002] and the experience of mobility [Jamieson, 2000]. In our study, we do not focus on such basic distinctions as class, gender or race, but on the structural and subjectively different local experience of Russian rural youth. Life in territorial localities with social, economic and cultural differences leads to the production of various narratives of place, space and identities.

Methodology and empirical data

The study was conducted in the Leningrad Oblast in 2015. The Leningrad Oblast is a large area in the North-West of Russia bordering Estonia and Finland, with a total area of about 84,000 square kilometres. Despite the fact that the Leningrad Oblast is geographically located around the metropolitan city of St. Petersburg, it is an independent federal subject of the Russian Federation. This territory is home to about 1,800,000 people, 35% of whom live in rural areas¹. Despite the fact that there are different types of settlements in the Leningrad Oblast — cities, towns, villages — in the stable metacultural Russian narrative it is perceived as a suburban and rural area compared to the metropolitan city of Saint Petersburg. The region has a high developed industrial production; its agriculture is dominated by livestock breeding.

We have picked three districts in the Leningrad Oblast as research sites: Luzhsky, Priozersky and Volkhovsky. These districts are located in different geographical areas (north-west, south and east) and at approximately equal distances from Saint Petersburg (135, 140 and 145 km). Saint Petersburg is the closest big city for each

¹ Russian Federal State Statistics Service (2015). The number of the population of the Russian Federation for municipalities on January 1, 2015. Moskva. (In Russ.).

district. However, the considerable distance between districts and Saint Petersburg does not allow young people to commute to the city every day to go to work/school (on average, a one-way trip takes about 2—3 hours).

These districts are similar in many ways, but each of them has its own unique features. For instance, Luzhsky district has a number of industrial enterprises (mainly chemical and food industries), and a decrease in industrial production coincides with increase in agriculture, hunting and fishing. Its labour market is stable; the number of vacancies exceeds the number of applicants.

In Priozersky district, the most developed areas of industrial sector are granite mining and processing as well as woodworking; however, agriculture is more developed there, especially dairy, fish and pig farming. In the area domestic tourism is also actively developing (there are museums, cultural attractions, sports facilities and a developed hotel industry). Its labour market is also stable, with the demand for labour exceeding the supply.

In Volkhovsky district, where the Volkhov aluminium plant, the largest industrial enterprise in the area is located, the industrial sector of the economy is the strongest one. There are also sizeable contributions from pulp and paper, textile, food processing and oil refining industries. Dairy farming is the primary agricultural activity of local enterprises. Until 2009, the area had a relatively high unemployment rate (1.9%)², but the situation has stabilised over the last few years (the unemployment rate in 2015: 0.61%)³; however, the problem still is quite acute, and there is a shortage of jobs.

The study was conducted in villages, rural settlements and small towns. We do realize that defining these areas and our informants as 'rural' is to some extent our own artificial construct (on the debate on who should be considered as 'rural youth' see e.g. Vanderbeck & Dunkley, 2003). However, we decide to use this term since, according to statistics, most of the settlements in these areas are towns and villages (Volkhovsky: 12 rural/3 urban settlements, Priozersky: 12/2, Luzhsky: 13/2), and the sizes of towns let us classify them as small towns, whose population does not exceed 50,000 people. In general, the Leningrad region population density is 21.2 people/km²⁴, which corresponds to 'Randall's [1992] definition of rural districts as having fewer than 100 persons/km², and being located at least 50 km from large urban conurbations' [Kloep et al., 2003: 94].

Data collection took place in the form of research expeditions: a team of researchers travelled to selected settlements, where they spent several days collecting interviews and making observations. On average, there were three to four expeditions to each location. Finding young people for interview usually started in local large-scale enterprises (plants, factories, agricultural facilities); then, the researchers looked for informants in public institutions (kindergartens, schools, shops, community centres,

² The report of the head of administration of the Volkhov municipal district Akulishin S. A. in 2009. URL: <https://volkhov-raion.ru/index.php/2-uncategorised/120-doklad-glavy-administratsii-volkhovskogo-munitsipalnogo-rajona-akulishnina-sergeya-alekseevicha-za-2009-god> (accessed: 19.02.2019) (In Russ.).

³ Passport of the labor sources. Volkhov municipal district. 2017. (In Russ.).

⁴ Russian Federal State Statistics Service (2015). The number of the population of the Russian Federation for municipalities on January 1, 2015. Moskva. (In Russ.).

city hall, fire station, etc.), leisure facilities (playgrounds and sports facilities, cafés, squares) and shopping areas.

The early stages of the study already made it apparent that rural youth has a relatively high mobility level within their districts (i. e. some live in a small town and work in nearby larger settlements), which is explained by a greater amount of jobs in large industrial enterprises and in the trade sector, which are more developed in certain locations and near regional centres. Therefore, the main informant selection criteria belong to a certain age group and have long-term experience of living and working in the research sites without ties to a particular locality but with rootedness within the boundaries of the district.

This study focuses on young adults, whose choice of their place of residence, life-style, work and leisure, albeit limited by structural conditions and parents, is in many ways already an independent project, as opposed to, for example, adolescents who are more dependent on their parents. We find it important to understand how the young interpret their experiences at the beginning of their 'adult' life (20—25 years) and how those who have been relatively self-sufficient for a relatively long time already (30—35 years) understand it. The key research method is a biographical interview. Young people interviews with duration from 80 to 120 minute have been recorded and transcribed. All personal data is anonymised, with the exception of districts names and relevant geographical points.

The study includes 59 young economically active residents of the Leningrad region, who work in different areas and have different levels of education. Men and women are represented almost equally (29 men, 30 women), as well as the two age groups (20—25 years old — 31 respondents; 30—35 years old — 28 respondents). The sample also demonstrates a relatively even distribution across the three districts of the Leningrad region (Luzhsky district — 21 respondents, Priozersky district — 18, Volkhovsky — 20). The resulting collection of interviews represents rather diverse picture. It includes staff of agricultural and industrial enterprises with different positions (from unskilled workers to mid-level managers), workers of budgetary and municipal government organizations (teachers, municipal employees), private sector employees (lawyers, bank clerks), representatives of service and trade sectors (shop assistants, bartenders, waiters), and the self-employed (those who work under short-term contracts and individual entrepreneurs). We collect such a variety of narratives with purpose, so that we could see the image of rural life as a whole on the one hand (with the views of people with different social statuses and from different areas of employment), and understand conventional ideas about rural life on the other.

Local identities and place belonging of young people in Leningrad Oblast

The interview analysis shows that the Leningrad Oblast is a heterogeneous space where several types of local identities coexist. Attachment to place of young adults living in the research sites is significantly different. The sense of place and place belonging in young people's biographical narratives is constructed through the description and evaluation of the labour market (both personal and general), through the description of infrastructural opportunities for young people, through the assessment

of environmental and social conditions of a locality, as well as through the comparison of their place of residence with other places.

Site 1. Luzhsky district: Place attachment as a rational choice

Informants describe Luzhsky district as developing and promising. By the former they mean the development of (agricultural) production, which, in turn, defines job market growth. Jobs in the industrial sector, agriculture and trade are in demand. Salary levels in various sectors of the economy are interpreted somewhat differently, but in general, jobs are perceived as satisfying. Here is what Nikolay, a young 23-year-old lawyer, mentions in his overall assessment of the labour market in the district:

Shops offer positions of shop assistants, you know, unskilled workers. This is mostly a blue-collar town.

We have several plants. They also offer jobs with average salaries, not really well-paid but okay for our town (Int. 2, Luzhsky district, male, 23 y. o., lawyer)

However, the labour market seems problematic for educated workers who want to find white-collar jobs. The respondents say that such jobs are not easily available and that salary does not match qualification requirements. Nikolay finds this a very pressing problem:

Look at the position of a lawyer or of a good economist, and you will see, that such employment does exist here but it is extremely underpaid. So, for a man with self-respect who wants to provide for his family — [he got] no chance, there are no well-paid jobs [for him] (Int. 2, Luzhsky district, male, 23 y. o., lawyer)

At the same time, those who are looking for blue-collar jobs see an open labour market. Vasiliy, a 21-year-old unskilled worker, is highly confident in employment availability:

There is lots of work. You can go into crop farming. Or work in a garage, as a driver — I don't know — as a mechanic, as a loader. Well, I don't know. You can find work if you want to. So, you won't be unemployed at all (Int. 5, Luzhsky district, male, 21 y. o., unskilled worker)

It is important to emphasize that jobs in the agricultural sector are not marginalised — on the contrary, they are regarded as important, respected and good. For example, 21-year-old Elena, a foreman on a dairy farm, describes rural workers as a part of an 'elite':

Milkmaids are our elite — milkmaids and feeders — because they generate our main income; they, so to say, make money with their hands (Int. 7, Luzhsky district, female, 21 y. o., stockbreeder)

The informants also believe that the expansion of the labour market and the area growth could be achieved through infrastructure development. Anna, a 34-year-old kindergarten teacher, indicates a significant increase in demand for skilled workforce:

...at least to go study somewhere and then come back, because there are new medical centres, new kindergartens — we will need professionals soon; I mean, we will soon need health workers (Int. 19, Luzhsky district, female, 34 y. o., kindergarten teacher)

In general, the infrastructure of the area is described as developed: kindergartens, schools, hospitals, bakeries, shops, etc. Young residents point out that the district offers most kinds of services, albeit on a limited scale. For instance, young people em-

phasize the availability of leisure and sports infrastructure. Young parents emphasize the development of educational services for children.

One of the important elements of the local infrastructure for young people is available housing for employees, as well as the availability of state housing subsidies for young people under the rural development programmes. Young adults do not only have access to social rent in blocks of flats but also make plans to build their own private homes, what is not typical for Russian youth, who experience significant difficulties with the access to housing.

Local youth compare living in their district with living in other localities, choosing Saint Petersburg as a point of reference. Life in a big city is considered to be time-consuming and resource-consuming in general — psychologically, emotionally and financially. According to the informants, higher salaries in large cities don't make up for the high cost of living, and thus don't give permanent residents any advantages. Aleksandr, a 33-year-old driver, offers his detailed calculations and explains why it would be unprofitable for him to move to a big city:

Let's take Saint Petersburg: the salary is 50 thousand, renting a one-bedroom flat is 20 thousand. This leaves me with 30. Transport expenses, even if I come here, would be, say, about five thousand. Subtotal: 25 thousand left. Now, food. Well, roughly speaking, it would be about ten thousand for my family. 15 left. Oh, I mean, ten. I can earn ten thousand here, in my village, which needs help anyway (Int. 14, Luzhsky district, male, 33 y. o., driver).

Saint Petersburg is an available space for leisure activities (walks, museums, cinema) and shopping rather than a fascinating metropolis. 24-year-old Irina, a hotel receptionist, says the following in her description of Saint Petersburg:

Well, Saint Petersburg... We have been visiting it almost since childhood, sometimes going there just to run some errands — an hour and a half and you're there. Well, this is not a problem, I mean, [that you absolutely have to live in] Saint Petersburg. I mean, maybe someone come from some faraway place, and it is everything for them, so they get a mortgage, a flat — everything to live in Saint Petersburg. I don't really want to; it is even rather hard for me to live in the city (Int. 10, Luzhsky district, female, 24 y. o., manager)

Thus, the metropolis with its resources is regarded as a close and available place, but not as an attractive place for living there.

The possibility of building their own homes, satisfying jobs and developing infrastructure let young people view living in the Luzhsky district and their local belonging as a rational choice. The informants appreciate the advantages of living in their (small) towns/villages compared to larger cities and reflectively refer to a number of benefits. The key ones are the following: first, favourable environmental situation, which is an important and attractive feature for families with children. Here is what 23-year-old Pyotr, who works as a loader, says about his decision to stay in the countryside:

Initially, I made plans to move to Saint Petersburg to continue my studies. But I sort of decided to stay here, kind of. Here, kind of, in the future, if I have a child, he will have to live here, well, you know. Not breathe those carbon dioxides in Saint Petersburg, those, you know, exhaust fumes. And it is kind of calm here, fresh air, you know. Nature and sports facilities, where you can... A playground where you can go play with your child, or simply go for a walk. There are many interesting places here. A lot of young people, and, as far as I see, basically no one leaves the town, everyone stays here. There are

jobs [in our town], and everything is all right here. (Int. 11, Luzhsky district, male, 23 y. o., unskilled worker).

Second, territorial compactness. Proximity and walking-distance access are viewed as key resources of life in a rural area because they allow to save time and financial resources. 30-year-old accountant Maria underscores:

Well, it's, like, walking distance; I mean, even if I can't find suitable transport, you know, it will take me, well, a little more time, [but] I will be able to get there on foot — I mean, from one side of the town to another, so... (Int. 17, Luzhsky district, female, 30 y. o., accountant)

Third, the particular rhythm of life associated with routine time structuring (early start of the work day, ability to plan the time spent on getting about), the lack of haste and competition, economical lifestyle (the lack of opportunities for spending money) and non-consumptive leisure activities (sports, crafts, walks, building and keeping house).

Thus, we can say that place attachment of young adults from Luzhsky district looks in their narratives like a conscious, reflective and rational choice. According to the informants, satisfying jobs and the developing infrastructure, along with favourable environmental conditions, compactness and slow-paced lifestyle result in the standard of living that cannot be found in a big city.

Site 2. Priozersky district: Biographical rootedness

The interview analysis shows that Priozersky district offers a different kind of narratives about local belongings. Just like the informants from Luzhsky district, young adults from Priozersky district consider labour market opportunities crucial. Here they are primarily linked to industrial enterprises and are problematised as limited. Andrey, a 29-year-old firefighter, mentions a considerable shortage of jobs: *'there is not enough choice. Just these plants'* (Int. 32, Priozersky District, male, 29 y. o., firefighter).

Several enterprises that do exist there do not provide the required number of satisfying jobs. And this is not only with industrial production being named as environmentally harmful, but also with the unstable operation of enterprises during a crisis. The industrial sector responded to recent crisis-related economic changes with a decrease in the pace of production and suspensions of plants, which resulted in an instant reduction in wages and in the number of employees. 23-year-old lumberjack Mikhail is very pessimistic about the future:

They lay off people from factories; I just don't know where people are going to work. There is nowhere to work here (Int. 25, Priozersky district, male, 23 y. o., lumberjack).

The decline in the labour market leads to competition, unemployment and the need for temporary side jobs. In the context of a crisis, declining production, and private businesses' difficulties, government jobs (in the housing and public utility sector, the police and the army) are seen as valuable. Olga, a 26-year-old manager in housing and public utility services, emphasizes the advantages of her position:

The fact that we work in the housing and utility sector. Well, that there is stability, and [it's a] public institution (Int. 30, Priozersky district, female, 26 y. o., manager).

Stability, social protection and state-provided salary make these places much more attractive than the industrial and commercial sectors of economy, even if the latter offer higher pay. However, most informants mention a reduction of blue-collar and service jobs and the fact that young people leave the district to work in Saint Petersburg.

Young adults in Priozersky district describe both the labour market and the present infrastructure through the concepts of limitation and instability. The informants from small communities do not have enough educational opportunities and accessible health services. Young men and women report difficulties with transportation and with public and social services. In general, the interviews demonstrate dissatisfaction with local structural conditions and the quality of services available. For example, Olga is rather critical about the existing leisure infrastructure:

Interviewer: What leisure activities do people take part in? What do young people do?

Respondent: I don't know. Just walk around the town.

Interviewer: Is there any nightlife?

Respondent: Well, that's not true. There are three bars. So, on Fridays and Saturdays you can go to a bar, drink expired beer and feel as if you are dying the next morning. And that's it — there is nothing else here (Int. 30, Priozersky district, female, 26 y. o., manager).

Most informants place the blame for this on district authorities. However, some problems are attributed to the nature of local industrial enterprises. Rock mining and processing results in peculiar infrastructure development. Andrey says:

We don't have any petrol stations because there are quarries here... Not a single petrol station.

Interviewer: You can't have them near quarries?

Respondent: Because there are explosions all the time. (Int. 32, Priozersky district, male, 29 y. o., firefighter).

The local industry also damages environment. Tatyana, a 24-year-old teacher, complains:

Well, of course you can feel the explosions when they do it; they carry out explosions every day, and of course you feel it. Can't even go to the forest — there is so much dust there. If it hasn't been raining, for example, there is no sense in going there at all — you will be covered in dust. (Int. 28, Priozersky district, female, 24 y. o., teacher).

But despite all the difficulties with employment, services and environment, young people still demonstrate place attachment. However, it is not the rational decision as in Luzhsky district — it is a belonging through biographical rootedness. Place attachment is defined by one's family and rural (as opposed to urban) socialisation. The biographical experience of life and socialisation in small settlements constructs a certain order of involvement in the community — to live among those whom you know and to abide the rules you have known since childhood. 31-year-old shop assistant Natalya is emotional in describing her district:

Everything is dear to you. Well, people, of course; I mean, the atmosphere. You know, we grew up here, we are used to it, we know all the ins and outs, and it's, you know, ours. (Int. 38, Priozersky district, female, 31 y. o., shop assistant)

22-year-old waiter Ivan emphasizes the importance of a familiar community:

I lived in a city for half a year, and my neighbour wouldn't even say hello to me. I mean, here you basically know everyone, and I like it a lot. (Int. 22, Priozersky district, male, 22 y. o., waiter).

Local identity and place belonging is constructed in opposition to the city. The latter is regarded as full of vital dangers. For example, Vera, a 24-year-old recreational centre employee, believes that cities teem with criminals and endanger lives:

I'm scared that there are all kinds of criminals in the city; it's like a different country. How will I go home from work when it's already dark — someone will definitely cut me or something like that (Int. 27, Priozersky district, female, 24 y. o., manager).

Along with hazards to one's life, the city presents moral dangers. Aleksey, a 22-year-old shop assistant, believes that:

The city allows... the city makes you, I guess, vulgar; it shows you what other people have — that is, what you could have, and it pushes you towards things that you would never do living here (Int. 23, Priozersky district, male, 22 y. o., shop assistant)

In contrast to the city, which is full of both resources and risks, life in Priozersky district is perceived as emotionally and psychologically stable, and therefore more acceptable. For instance, Viktor, an excavator operator, views the city as a completely alien space:

We once thought that, I mean, the city for me, I... I have relatives in Vsevolozhsk [city near St. Petersburg, the centre of Vsevolozhsky district in Leningrad region]. We would visit them and, well, I can stay there for three days maximum. Four days, a week — this is just too much for me. I once went there for a week and by the end of the week I thought I would scream. I don't know, the city is not for me. All that bustle... (Int. 34, Priozersky district, male, 31 y. o., worker)

On the other hand, big cities (primarily Saint Petersburg) are viewed as a leisure and consumer resource. However, the narratives describe it as a farther place, not easily accessible in terms of regular trips. Vera is one of the people who mention that:

I mean, it's a beautiful city; I love this city and I like walking around it. But [...] I can't visit it often. (Int. 27, Priozersky district, female, 24 y. o., manager).

On the whole, the interview analysis showed that young adults from Priozersky district assess the local labour market, infrastructure and environment as limited. The industrial instability during the crisis leads to a decrease in revenues, job losses and the formation of an unstable informal employment sector. At the same time, young men and women demonstrate local rootedness through the articulation of local biographies, personal connections with their families and the community, as well as through the establishment of a peculiar 'rural'/'non-urban' habitus and identity. As Marina, a 33-year-old teacher, says, *'it is not for me, big cities — I've decided it right away. Visiting — yes; living there — no. Well, that's who I am, a small-town girl'* (Int. 39, Priozersky district, female, 33 y. o., teacher).

Site 3. Volkhovsky district: community rootedness

The analysis of the interviews shows that in the narratives of young people from Volkhovsky district local belonging is constructed through similar but still rather peculiar categories. For instance, the labour market is described as 'highly problematic', which, first of all, has to do with low wages, and only then with the lack of available jobs. Here is how Nadezhda, a 24-year-old accountant, sees the situation:

I mean, maybe you can get a job, but I doubt that whatever you will earn will be enough to feed your family, especially if your wife is on maternity leave. So I think that the employment issue is of course very pressing. Or rather, the situation with salaries (Int. 47, Volkhovsky district, female, 24 y. o., accountant).

At the same time, the informants indicate that prices and households' expenses are not that different from those in a big city (Saint Petersburg). The fact that salaries

do not match the needs of the population in small settlements makes young people move to the district centre (Volkhov) and to the metropolis of Saint Petersburg. For example, 34-year-old Margarita, who works in a school, is sure that all ambitious young people leave the district:

Yeah, I think they... They all stay in Saint Petersburg. Yeah, yeah, St. Petersburg, Volkhov. Because here, here if you are, you know, smart and have some ambition, there is no way [to grow] here, really (Int. 56, Volkhovsky district, female, 34 y. o., school administrator).

Those who do not stay in bigger cities after finishing their studies and do not move there agree to work for whatever salary they are offered. It is important to note that the situation is particularly difficult for young people with low levels of education. This has to do with a limited number of jobs, low wages and the lack of opportunities to learn and train for a new profession among blue-collar workers. According to the informants, the lack of adequate employment is made up for by non-capitalist priorities and by the potential of household plots. Anastasia, an accountant, draws attention to additional resources of the countryside and to local values, which differ from those in the city:

Competition, there is a lot of competition in the city. It's not like that here; here people are grateful for having lived another day. I mean, people here have different values. More attention to summer houses. Yeah, they are more affordable here than in the city. There are lots of vegetable gardens — potatoes, carrots; it is all accessible here. If you have hands, if you are able to do it — by all means, do it. So, the pay is lower, but there are opportunities to feed your family with whatever food you can grow (Int. 58, Volkhovsky district, female, 32 y. o., accountant).

On the whole, compared with smaller nearby settlements, Volkhov (the central city of the district) looks much more promising and progressive, both in terms of employment and infrastructure. The concentration of services in the regional centre together with the limited income of the population creates new hierarchies and inequalities in access to education, extracurricular activities, etc. And the transportation network shows that Volkhovsky district has a centripetal structure: communication with Volkhov is well-established, while horizontal communication between smaller settlements is limited. Antonina, a 33 year-old municipal employee, says:

Access to transportation to other towns and villages is weak. Interviewer: Yes. So, Volkhov is the only thing here, right? Respondent: Yeah, well, buses go there every hour, for real, yeah (Int. 57, Volkhovsky district, female, 33 y. o., municipal employee).

It does not allow people to use the potential of the district neither for employment, nor for leisure or education. All intraregional mobility is directed towards Volkhov.

The accumulation of resources in Volkhov and its unique status in the district result in the fact that the residents contrast their settlements with Volkhov as a large city. Evgeniy, a 21-year-old fire department employee, underscores that differences manifest themselves in the very nature of human interaction:

...even comparing people from village N and people from Volkhov — they are different people altogether. In N, people are more calm, generally, more kind, more sociable (Int. 42, Volkhovsky district, male, 21 y. o., firefighter)

Though, there is the main opposition, of course, with Saint Petersburg. It is considered to be a city of possibilities. For instance, Varvara, a young municipal employee, says:

Saint Petersburg still offers more opportunities in everything: work, leisure, some self-education, self-realisation (Int. 49, Volkhovsky district, female, 23 y. o., municipal employee).

However, it appears more impersonal and aloof. This is how Vasilisa, a 22-year-old kindergarten teacher, describes it:

Well, as I have said — the pace, everyone is crazy. And, perhaps, in a small town people are 'bigger', they are kinder, well, people themselves. And they follow, you know, events more, take things more personally, while in a big city everyone is on their own, and no one will help anyone with anything (Int. 48, Volkhovsky district, female, 22 y. o., kindergarten teacher).

Personal relationships are constructed as a dominant value, one of the main resources and bases for one's local identity. Artem, a 22-year-old veterinarian, talks about the symbolic and social significance of a local community:

The relationship between people in rural areas are closer; that is, we all know each other in person, by name; it is basically a community. Again, this means that we often help each other free of charge: I treat someone's cat for free, someone tells me not to buy this sausage because it is bad — this kind of thing. We lived in Saint Petersburg for 5 years, and it was not like this at all. Our neighbours were pretty much the only people we knew (Int. 52, Volkhovsky district, male, 32 y. o., veterinarian).

Stable social relationships in the community create a sense of security and general tranquillity. Anastasia finds the safety of her children especially important:

Children are safer here; here you can just let them go for a walk in front of the house, in front of your windows. You can watch them, you can see them. In Saint Petersburg I wouldn't let them to go outside alone even if they stayed in front of the windows. (Int. 58, Volkhovsky district, female, 32 y. o., accountant)

For young adults who live and work in the Volkhovsky region, this world is their own — their home, their place. What 30-year-old Vladimir, an equipment adjuster at a plant, says is very illustrative:

I don't know why my soul is at peace here; well, I wouldn't want to live in the city for sure — those crowds of people, I find them a little uncomfortable. I am really attached to this place. It's calm here. Just calm. But in the city it seems that you always have to... a bunch of thoughts in your head. I would move if I had something of my own there, if something was already beginning. And, as I have said, I have tried several times, but I never achieved anything of my own. That is to say, if you live there, you have to rent an apartment — you don't have anything. And here you have your own corner, your land, your people, right here — this is what makes it easier (Int. 54, Volkhovsky district, male, 30 y. o., worker).

Thus, Volkhovsky district has its own peculiarities demonstrated in the narratives of the informants; they are primarily related to low wages and uneven development of the area. The district centre, Volkhov, is constructed as relatively large, more developed and with more resources than the other towns, which results in new inequalities within the district. However, young men and women living and working in the Volkhovsky district constitute their small towns as spaces with personalised relations, security, peace and a strong sense of place and place belonging.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it should be said that the Leningrad Oblast is a heterogeneous space. This 'rural' area in the narratives of young adults living there is articulated in different ways, with different constructions of local identities and interpretations of belonging.

For example, Luzhsky district is described as a rapidly developing area with satisfying jobs, developed infrastructure, high standard of living and good environmental conditions. This articulation of place image is similar to the concept of a 'rural idyll' found in many studies of rural youth in other countries [Vanderbeck, Dunckley, 2003]. However, this idyll is not just experienced through one's sensations as a given and is not inherited through one's place of birth; it is rationally evaluated, reflectively selected and, among other things, is created by one's participation in the everyday life of the rural settlement. Local belonging is constituted as a conscious ration choice.

Priozersky district is described as an industrial area undergoing great difficulties due to the crisis. Young men and women underscore the shortage of jobs, poor environmental conditions and poor infrastructure. Such a perspective on their own region corresponds to the image of an 'anti-idyll' [Kraack, Kenway, 2002]. But such a negative image of the place doesn't mean that there is no sense of belonging. Moreover, place attachment is underscored and even cultivated as a unique kind of socialisation, a non-urban habitus and embeddedness in the local world with its clear rules. Therefore, we can draw the conclusion that place belonging and place identity are constructed here as biographic rootedness.

Volkhovsky district is described as a low-income and poorly developed area in terms of infrastructure. The lack of opportunities for leisure activities variety, mobility and consumption creates an image of the place close to the 'rural dull'. However, embeddedness in the local community and in the rural way of life, as well as involvement in social networks, makes it possible to overcome existing limitations and even redefine boredom as safety. The main value of living in this rural area is personalised human relationships. The local identity of young adults from Volkhovsky district is constructed as rootedness in the community.

Young adults from all the three districts mainly choose Saint Petersburg along with other major cities (not other districts of the Leningrad Oblast) as the main point of reference for the comparison and evaluation of opportunities, standards of living, etc. All the informants have been to Saint Petersburg, and some have even lived there. However, it is constructed in their narratives in different ways: from being a city of opportunities to being a city of mental risks. But more important, depending on the rootedness and the image of their place young people have, they propose different positions of Saint Petersburg and their locality on the global map. Confident Luzhsky district inhabitants see Saint Petersburg as an available nearby city. Residents of Priozersky district perceive the metropolis as a place for rare tourist trips. And as to young people from Volkhovsky district, Saint Petersburg is not on their everyday horizon and is seen as a distant migration destination. Geographical imagination links together the well-being of the place, one's own capabilities and spatial horizons.

Thus, we see that young adults from different areas of the Leningrad Oblast have different views on the opportunities and limitations of their localities, and different assessments of the level of well-being and geographical location; however, they still create relatively coherent and consistent local identities. At the same time, belonging is constituted through both emotional involvement and rational interpretation. Overall, young adults living in the Leningrad Oblast are very reflective about their rural areas, their place in them and their rootedness.

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