REFERENCES


EXPERIENCES OF SETTLING MANAGEMENT IN RUSSIA DURING SOVIET AND POST-SOVIET PERIODS

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Abstract. For the Soviet period an exaggerated idea of state’s possibilities in settling management was typical. In reality the attempts to stop the growth of the largest cities or to develop the small cities were seldom successful. However the rural settlement pattern was by far more affected by the state policy. A campaign of the 1960/70-s aimed at the "elimination" of small villages has triggered the reduction of the number of settlements. During the post-Soviet period the state obviously has fewer possibilities, but very often more ambitions.

Алєксєєв А.І. Досвід управління розселенням в росії у радянський та пострадянський періоди. Для радянського періоду було характерне перебільшене уявлення про можливості держави в управлінні розселенням. Насправді спроби зупинити рост найбільших міст або розвивати малі міста рідко були успішними. Однак система сільського розселення зазнала суттєвого впливу державної політики. Компанія 1960-70-х років, спрямована на «знищення» невеликих сіл, викликала скорочення кількості населених пунктів. У пострадянський період держава, очевидно, має менше можливостей, але дуже часто більше амбіцій.

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«…. Large cities are the heritage left to us by civilization, and to get rid of them will cost a lot of time and efforts. But they should be eliminated – and will be eliminated, despite the fact that it will be a very long process». The words of Friedrich Engels were taken on board by his interpreters in the first years of the USSR existence; and then the works appeared which predicted crash of the cities and the need to live «closer to the nature». However the practice of industrialization, impossible without the development of big cities, quickly disproved these dreams.

For the Soviet period an exaggerated idea of state possibilities in settling management was characteristic. In reality the attempts to stop the growth of the largest cities or to develop the small cities were seldom successful. However the rural settlement pattern was by far more affected by the state policy.

Collectivization of 1929-1932 and the consolidation of collective farms in the 1940/50-ies have resulted in a sharp division of all rural settlements into two groups:
a) central estates where all functions started to concentrate; b) other settlements from then on being initially behind in all terms. The subsequent merging of collective farms has even more reduced the number of central estates which accumulated the permanently increasing share of the population.

Another impact on rural settling was the mass integration of isolated farmsteads (formed as a result of Stolypin reform and in the first years of the Soviet power). The resolution of the Plenum of the VKP Central Committee and the USSR SNK from May 21-24, 1939 entrusted local authorities with a task to consolidate all farmsteads till September 1, 1940. The main aim was, probably, the strengthening of village life supervision, including such spheres as land use and activities of collective farms. We can judge the results of this campaign for the Smolensk oblast, for example, where the five-year plan (1936-1940) of moving people from about 160 thousand farmsteads to collective-farm villages was completed by 1940. As a result of de-kulakization and moving people from farmsteads over 700 thousand hectares of agricultural land, including 400 thousand hectares of arable lands were took away from economic activities.

During the post-war period the problems of rural settling drew attention after publication of the article of the then First Secretary of the VKP MGK and MK Nikita S. Khrushchev in "Pravda" newspaper on March 4, 1951. After many years of work in Ukraine, Khrushchev was struck with the poverty of small (if compared with Ukrainian ones) villages situated near Moscow. The solution seemed rather simple: you could not provide roads, schools and hospitals to each small village; so it is necessary to build new houses for collective farmers in larger settlements. And in his article Khrushchev foretold that very soon «small villages will be replaced by cultural, well-planned collective-farm settlements with schools, baths, recreation centers, kindergartens…»

But this initiative was out of luck: the article was read by Stalin, he didn’t like it, and already in two days, on March 6, 1951, Khrushchev wrote the letter to Stalin to recognize «the gross mistakes he had made». But this wasn’t enough for Stalin, and on April 2 the Politburo dispatched all over the country a secret letter written by

Stalin himself (as S. Khrushchev argues) – «About the problems of construction in connection with the integration of small collective farms». It said that «some Party officials» were busy «substituting the principal task of agriculture, i.e. production, with an immediate reorganization of the life of collective farmers, thus distracting the resources of collective farms from the solution of the major production tasks». Stalin's position is absolutely clear: collective farms should provide agricultural products and the living conditions of collective farmers are their private matter. It was unacceptable for Nikita S. Khrushchev, and having become at the head of the country, he came back to this problem again. The phrase of the Third CPSU Program approved by the 22nd Congress in 1961 became the deification of the move to the complete transformation of rural settling:

«Collective-farm villages will gradually be transformed into larger settlements of city type with well-planned houses, public services, household enterprises, and cultural and medical institutions».

To realize these ideas the "agro-city" concept was elaborated – that of a large settlement with urban housing and services for agricultural workers. The propaganda of the concept was extraordinary. The professor of the Moscow State University S.A.Kovalyov wrote in his memoirs that at that time (the 1960th) he received a lot of letters from foreign geographers with requests to help them studying this new type of settlements. In the early sixties the French urbanists Jacqueline Bozhe-Garnye and George Shabo published the book «Outline of the Geography of Cities» in which they distinguished seven types of cities in the world and added one more – «agro-cities which are build in the USSR for peasants».

In fact the construction of «agro-cities» had become an ordinary Soviet campaign. The administration of each oblast considered its duty to construct an agro-city (they were then called «model settlements») to show it to officials and foreigners.

The program of the «elimination of small villages» is often added to the general list of «the Soviet power sins in the village», along with collectivization and dekulakization. Some researchers even call it «the second collectivization», but in fact its role is much less than it is usually seen. Under the essential decrease of rural population the reduction of number of rural settlements was inevitable, particularly of small- and medium-size ones which predominated in the majority of the regions of Russia. However, wide propaganda of "being unpromising" psychologically affected the inhabitants of small villages, especially young people, who chose to move away from their native places – not to "model" settlements, but to the cities. Rather often a village qualified as "unpromising" was not only deprived of new construction plans. Even public buildings (schools, shops, post offices, medical assistant's points, etc.) were neither maintained nor repaired – no sense doing this if all the same the village is to be liquidated soon!

As a result the practice of "consolidation" appeared to be absolutely absurd and was ceased at the end of the 1970-ies. But this was not the end of experiments with rural settling!

Practice of "counterrevolution": construction of «production centers». Negative experience of the «consolidation of small settlements» caused to life a new, quite
opposite campaign. The then First Secretary of the CPSU Moscow regional committee (1963 – 1985) V.I.Konotop was its initiator. In the early eighties he launched an idea of the «revival of production centers» - in order to «correct the excesses» in the settling program. This referred to rather small settlements – from 100 to 200 inhabitants, not the central estates. Construction of one-family cottages for their inhabitants (unlike five-storey buildings in «agro-cities»!) was suggested, and the whole complex of services: an elementary or incomplete secondary school, a medical ambulance station or medical assistant's point with an apartment for the doctor or medical assistant, a community club with the library, a shop, a canteen, a post office etc.

In small settlements the service sector could engage the vast majority of workers (i.e. the settlement mostly «served itself»), but nobody cared about it – because everything was constructed and worked for the state account! They managed to construct just few «production centers», and the experience of their operation remains poorly studied yet.

During the post-Soviet period the state obviously has fewer possibilities, but very often more ambitions. The fixed idea about "unpromising" small settlements reached even small and average cities. In 2011 the then Minister of Economics, Elvira Nabiullina declared: «… In the course of three waves of industrialization we created an extensive, and in some places too wide network of small and average cities ... Decrease of the number of small cities is an insuperable global tendency ... Preservation of economically inefficient small cities at any cost and preventing the overflow of labor-active population to large cities can cost us 2-3 % of economic growth. ... Within the next 20 years about 15-20 million people can move from the small cities of Russia». It caused the negative response of the Russian urbanists, and such statements didn't repeat.

The rural policy of the Russian government is oriented on the reduction of expenditures on education and health care facilities. So, in 1999-2010 the number of elementary schools (the majority of them are in rural areas) decreased almost three times. The maintenance of schools is now regarded “inefficient” if there are less than 12 pupils in a class – and it is a pretty usual situation in rural areas. Besides, the history of rural settling of Russia showed that if rural schools are closed the emigration of families with children grows sharply leading to rapid extinction of the settlement itself.