

Old-Developed Areas and Socio-Geographic Space of Russia: From the Editors of the Special Issue

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Abstract—This special issue is devoted to the study of the middle zone of European Russia from the western borders to the Urals and Trans-Urals, that is, the old-developed regions of the country. This territory is characterized by acute problems caused by the spatial unevenness of development, despite its small area (against the northern and eastern regions of Russia). In the old-developed areas, the change of historical periods has led to the accumulation of achievements and problems. They continue to influence modern life in the form of the cultural heritage, the prevailing settlement pattern structure, local traditions, accumulated fixed assets, etc. The authors of the 17 articles of the special issue tried to identify the development trends and spatial socioeconomic contrasts, as well as their causes and consequences against the historical background. In the introductory article to the special issue, the authors give a brief overview of the articles presented in the journal.

Keywords: unevenness, multi-scale approach, regions, cities, countryside, Center of Russia, Urals

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When studying Russia, one cannot avoid a spatial approach, and not only because the physical space of the country is huge. Space acts both as an external factor in the society development, and as its immanent property, since it is formed by people and is made up of the results of their activities (Smirnyagin, 2016).

In speaking about the spatial development of Russia, one often immediately goes to the North and East of the country. This was reflected in the Spatial Development Strategy until 2025.¹ Normally geopolitical tasks, the development of natural resources, new cities, highways, etc. are discussed. The Soviet and pre-Soviet “hurray-exploratory” stereotype is having an effect. However, human resources, infrastructure, etc. are concentrated in areas of old development and colonization.

Old-developed areas are territories where artifacts and mentifacts of the development of past historical periods have been preserved. Their layers overlapped each other, but in such a way that the accumulated achievements and problems are still noticeable. They often continue to influence modern life in the form of the cultural heritage, the existing structure of settle-

ment pattern, local traditions, accumulated fixed assets, etc. At the same time, the “old age” of development is a conditional concept. The ages of old-developed areas can be tens, hundreds, and thousands of years. Knowledge of their characteristics is especially important in large countries with uneven development in time and space, in contrast to many European countries with dense settlement and a 1000-year history.

The famous Russian economic geographer N.N. Baranskii wrote in 1946: “... each historically given “drawing” of the location of the economy has internal regularities inherent in it. At the same time, the “patterns” of the economic geography of any country or region emerge against the background of not only a certain natural environment, but also the previous economic development, and this background in many, many cases, especially in countries and regions that are already old, often turns out no less important for understanding modern economic geography than the natural background” (Baranskii, 1980). Nevertheless, the main issue in the articles is the modern period of Russia’s development and the problems that have arisen in the post-Soviet era, including those related to its space, the characteristics of settlement pattern, modern institutions, and the transformation of the economy. Following this logic, the authors of the articles in the special issue try to answer a number

¹ Spatial Development Strategy of the Russian Federation for the Period up to 2025. Approved by Decree of the Government of the Russian Federation dated February 13, 2019 no. 207-r. <http://www.consultant.ru/law/hotdocs/56857.html/>. Accessed September 12, 2021.



Fig. 1. The old-developed regions of Russia as an object of study of the authors of articles in the special issue.

of questions. How does the duration and nature of development, the change in its stages, affect the state of cities and regions, their cultural landscapes? What is the specificity of the modern period? Why are the socioeconomic contrasts in the old-developed zone growing in recent decades? What are the key problems of their development and how can (or cannot) be solved? Which areas deserve more detailed analysis?

The articles published in the special issue are based on the collective monograph *Old-Developed Areas in the Socio-Geographic Space of Russia: History and Contemporaneity*, published in Russian at the end of 2021 (compiled by the scientific editor T.G. Nefedova and editor A.V. Starikova). The monograph was prepared by authors' team at the Institute of Geography of the Russian Academy of Sciences under the project of the Russian Science Foundation. In this special issue the book with some changes is presented in the form of articles linked by meaning and are cross-referenced. Considering that each text is part of a common inter-related study, the articles have somewhat abbreviated literature reviews to avoid repetition by different authors, and conclusions, which are summarized and expanded in the last article of the issue.

The study area is largely arbitrary: it includes, although old-developed, but different-age regions of Russia. Recently, unevenness of their development has increased. More specific modern problems of

these territories include strong inter-regional inequality, intraregional economic stratification, shrinkage of the developed space to the main centers, and social devastation of long-settled areas. This intensifies the contrasts and the lag of many rural areas and small towns in terms of the level and quality of life of the population from large centers.

The authors mainly explore the middle part of European Russia from the western borders to the Urals and Trans-Urals (Fig. 1)². D.I. Mendeleev at the beginning of the 20th century wrote: "The separation of Europe from Asia is artificial in all respects, and with the passage of time it will certainly smooth out and, probably, even completely disappear" (Mendeleev, 1906, p. 143). Development shifted over time to the East, although the collapse of the Soviet Union caused a reversal of population migrations, from the East to the West in the 1990s. All this makes the boundary between the European and Asian parts of Russia rather unsteady.

The main object of study is precisely the core of the Russian nation, the cradle of its state, the receptacle of its capitals, monuments and cultural centers, and the focus of the modern population and activities. Despite

² The borders of Russia are considered in accordance with the Constitution of the Russian Federation adopted by popular vote on December 12, 1993, with amendments approved during the All-Russian vote on July 1, 2020.

the fact that in terms of its gross regional product the European part of modern Russia, especially its middle zone, is subordinate to many European countries and some eastern regions of Russia itself, the concentration of population and the capital in it determines its leadership in consumer and other sectors of the economy. Moreover, human capital, its quantity and quality, are becoming the main factor of development in the modern world.

Exploring the chosen area in the triangle of St. Petersburg—Belgorod—Tyumen, the authors pay special attention to two groups of old-industrial areas: in the historical core, that is, in the Center of the country, and in the Urals. The main issue in the study was to identify, considering the historical background, the modern development trends, spatial socio-economic contrasts, their causes and consequences.

The articles are based on the analysis of statistical data by regions, cities and municipalities. The research was supplemented by the interpretation of space images, as well as the creation and use of maps for different periods of time. This made it possible to correct official statistics and study the real spatial structures of settlement pattern and the consequences of people activities. Assistance systems the Consultant Plus: Budget Organizations and the Consultant Plus: Consolidated Regional Legislation were used. One important component was authors' field research in key regions of the Center and the Urals along specially designed routes. The visual examination was supported by conversations (interviews) with residents and experts—heads of municipalities (cities, districts, and rural settlements) and enterprises.

The special issue opens with three articles that reveal the characteristics of the old-developed regions against the backdrop of Russia.

The article by **A.I. Treivish** *Old-Developed Areas under Conditions of Uneven Development* is devoted to the phenomenon of old-developed regions, as well as the peculiarities of their development in Russia. It is shown how initially heterogeneous areas were subjected to increasingly strong spatial stratification and fragmentation during uneven development. The perception of the old-developed territories, as well as the processes (and concepts) of uneven development, its concentration, polarization, shrinkage of habitable space, which are most characteristic of these territories, differed in Soviet and post-Soviet times. The place of the old-developed regions in the country's economy, their sectoral composition and the post-Soviet, mainly post-industrial, transformation of the main structural types of regions is considered.

The article by **T.G. Nefedova** *Urbanization and Rural Trends in Russia and in Its Old-Developed Regions* considers the population of cities as a result of the change in the stages of urbanization in the 20th century and the depopulation of the rural areas in the old-developed regions against the backdrop of all-

Russian processes. It is shown that the results achieved in Soviet times, with a decrease in powerful Soviet financial support, turned out to be short-lived. The modern technological paradigm of agriculture in the form of large modernized agro-industrial complexes solved the problems of the food supply for cities, but due to the shift in production to southern regions, it led to a sharp increase in spatial contrasts in the old-developed Non-Chernozem regions.

The article by **A.I. Treivish, O.B. Glezer, and T.G. Nefedova** *Old-Developed Regions in the Waves of Municipal Reform* is devoted to the transformation of authorities at different levels, which is characteristic of the post-Soviet period. Its main stages and types are considered and the financial motives for reform are identified. As a reaction to the depopulation, especially in rural areas, reform only intensified the process of population decrease. Some examples in the old-developed regions of the Center and the Urals are given.

The next three articles of the special issue reveal the characteristics of cities and rural areas of the old-developed regions of Central Russia.

The article by **T.G. Nefedova** *Regions of Central Russia in the Context of Demographic and Economic Shrinkage and Polarization* considers the territories around the Moscow capital region in more detail. The concentration of the economy and population in centers here is accompanied by depopulation and economic desertification of old-developed territories on the regions' periphery. The evolution and characteristics of the socioeconomic state of cities with different population sizes, the share of the population living in problematic cities, as well as the contrasts of rural areas are shown.

The article by **A.A. Medvedev** *The Fields and Farms of Central Russia as Seen from Space* considers methods for mapping land use change and the organization of animal husbandry using the interpretation of remote sensing data. The modern state of agriculture is compared with the late Soviet time. Examples of revealing the spatial organization of modern agricultural holdings are given.

In the article *Human Spatial Mobility and the Role of Dachas in the Old-Developed Areas* **T.G. Nefedova and A.A. Medvedev** also use the results of remote sensing data interpretation due to the lack of statistical information. For Central Russia two types of return population migrations are typical, that are labor migrations (to Moscow and large cities) and migrations from cities to dachas, not only to the suburbs, but also to remote rural areas. The article is devoted to depopulation of remote areas in the regions of Central Russia and the expansion of dachas in rural areas as well as the role of the shadow dacha economy. Villages with a population of less than 100 inhabitants are the most popular among urban summer residents. Maps of transport accessibility of such villages are given.

In the next five articles, the authors examine the Central Russia's regions at the level of individual municipalities, cities, and enterprises in detail, focusing on a variety of problems from economic transformation to the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic.

In the article *Contrasts of the Socioeconomic Space in the Center of Russia and Their Evolution: Two Cross-Sections* T.G. Nefedova reveals the depth of socioeconomic contrasts using different indicators. Two cross-sections are considered: from St. Petersburg to Moscow and further to the south of Tula oblast and from the southern outskirts of Kaluga oblast to Moscow and further to the eastern outskirts of Kostroma oblast. Several graphs reveal the most attractive places for migrants, the migration losses of the population and the crisis of the local economy. The article analyzes the evolution and current state of industrial enterprises of various specializations along the cross-sections and the cumulative effects of population concentration closer to the largest centers.

The Moscow capital region itself is considered in the article by A.G. Makhrova *The Moscow Capital Region: An Example of Accelerated Development*, taking into account the centers of economic growth in the immediate vicinity of Moscow and the characteristics of the spatial population pulsation. For a more detailed analysis, up to cities, rural settlements, and enterprises, on the basis of route and field studies, the northeastern sector of the Center of Russia was selected. Its description begins in this article from the city of Mytishchi to the borders of Moscow oblast.

The next article by K.V. Averkieva and T.G. Nefedova *Polarization of the Russia's Socioeconomic Space to the Northeast of the Capital Core* describes the economic development in the pre-Soviet, Soviet and post-Soviet times of the northeastern sector of the Center of Russia—Vladimir, Ivanovo, Yaroslavl, and Kostroma oblasts. The detailed analysis of the historical and modern intraregional organization of Yaroslavl oblast and examples of its industrial and agricultural enterprises is provided.

In the article *From City of Kostroma to the Regional Outskirts* T.G. Nefedova describes not only the evolution of the economy and backbone enterprises of the region, including the forest complex, but also goes deeper to the level of individual municipalities and villages. The changing of remote villages in the 20th century are shown as well as and the role of Moscow summer residents in the 21st century. The problems of the cultural heritage are considered. The article ends with the “managed shrinkage” models, which include partially preservation of traditional industries and culture and also the emergence of new small businesses and recreational use.

The authors did not ignore the problems associated with COVID-19 pandemic. In the article *The Year of COVID: A Migration Reversal?* A.G. Makhrova and

T.G. Nefedova, using the examples of settlements at different distances from Moscow studied the impact of morbidity and the coronacrisis restrictions on the processes of sub- and deurbanization in the spring, summer, and pre-winter periods in 2020.

The three following articles reveal the characteristics of the old-developed regions of the Urals with a description of the history of development and modern problems.

This section opens with an article by A.I. Treivish and T.G. Nefedova *Old-developed Regions of the Ural Macroregion and Its Large Centers in the Middle*, showing the Urals as the leading industrial macroregion of Russia, based in contrast to Central Russia on natural rent. The authors show the role of the Urals in Russia and discuss how its large centers developed with the increasingly noticeable leading role of Yekaterinburg against the background of the polycentrism that has long been characteristic of the Urals.

The article by K.V. Averkieva and E.A. Denisov *The North of Sverdlovsk Oblast: A System of Cities on the Edge of the Old-Developed Urals* is dedicated to single-industry cities with a difficult socioeconomic situation that are located on the border between the mining Urals and the resource-rich North. These cities, which were built on the use of natural resources, are experiencing a painful restructuring of the economic, with the elimination not only of traditional extractive industries, but also of the upper floors of the manufacturing industry.

The history and problems of predominantly lowland old-agricultural and trading territories to the south of Chelyabinsk, in Kurgan and in the southwest of Tyumen oblasts are considered in the article by A.V. Starikova and A.V. Sheludkov *The Southern Urals and Trans-Urals: Inherited and New Pathways of Development*. The authors consider in the logic of archetype analysis the relationships between past and present development pathways of settlements, prerequisites and factors for the formation of various genetic types of settlements, as well as the key impulses that influenced them in the Soviet and post-Soviet periods.

The special issue ends with two articles in which the authors sum up the results of the old-developed regions' studies.

The article by A.V. Sheludkov and T.G. Nefedova *Spatial Inequality of the Old-Developed Regions of European Russia and the Urals* considers the entire range of 1190 municipal units in 37 regions from the western borders of Russia through the Center to the Urals. The study is based on the variety of indicators for: population density, natural increase and migration of population, the number of employees and their average wages, land use and the number of livestock in agricultural holdings and households, the density of roads, and the share of gasified settlements. The study includes the methodology, diagnostics and mapping of the socioeconomic state of cities, urban okrugs and

municipal districts, as well as an analysis of spatially differentiated factors that affect it.

In the article *Old-Developed Regions of Russia: The Main Evolutionary Outcomes* T.G. Nefedova and A.I. Treivish attempt to generalize the results presented in the articles of this special issue, showing the evolution of the old-developed areas on different scales and their modern polarization and socioeconomic shrinkage. The authors also discuss options for assessing the situation and appropriate policies.

Collected in one issue of the journal, these articles give a comprehensive and holistic view on the historical trajectories of development, contemporary socio-demographic, economic and cultural problems as well as spatial contrasts of Russia on different scale levels until 2022.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest.

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