

1 Introduction

My long-term empirical study, the generalized findings of which are presented in this monograph, applies exclusively to the provincial society in Russia. It is not the society of large or even medium-sized cities. It is the society of small towns and rural districts – since rural districts surround the small towns, "*localities*", forming together an organic continuity, both spatial and social. Even the small towns (as well as considerable areas of many medium-sized cities) are no or little different from our villages. In this sense, the rural district imposes its way of life, the material and spiritual practices of the population, on the small town, thus "absorbing" (devouring) it. The very system of household livelihoods in small towns is similar, and in some places identical, to that in rural areas. This was so throughout all the decades of my research – especially pronounced in the late 1980s and during the crisis of the 1990s; and still the case at the beginning of the 2020s. Therefore, I believe it reasonable to extrapolate the records of my observations covering 300 of the total 1,700 local communities to a significant part of Russia's population. This part ranges from two-fifths to half of the entire population of the country. In fact, this is provincial Russia.

Initially, the purpose of the research was to describe the social structure of local communities, which was then understood quite narrowly, operationally. In fact, the empirically described local grassroots social structure failed to fit class or estate stratification patterns. Neither stratification by household income nor distribution of people by rank in the estate-based state system enable to understand the essence of relations existing between people, families, and social groups within the local community. In addition, these relations and the entire life of the community are associated with the local territorial structure. One does not exist without the other; they mutually determine each other. The physical projection of the community is an organic part of its social structure. Three components of social behavior are inseparable: habitation (in physical space),

existence (relationships), and activity (subsistence). Each one has a particular and special structure but is dependent on the other two. In addition to describing relationships between people, it proved necessary to also depict their subsistence patterns – household management and economic practices, – which strongly affect the structure of relations. However, household management and economic practices turned out to be associated with the territorial structure, since for subsistence our provincial population relies primarily on the informal and shadow segment of the economy. Livelihoods depend most closely on the resources provided by nature and created by the people themselves on their own homesteads (territories). Therefore, I describe the provincial social structure herein as a three-component system: the territorial structure, subsistence patterns (economy), and the structure of relations in the system of basic oppositions describing these relations (the "us/them", "active/passive population", and "upper/lower strata" oppositions).

The diversity of essentially ethnographic records required generalization. The four methods I used to typologize local communities proved to be quite heuristic, especially when classifying communities by the degree of their spatial isolation and by the extent of external, government, impact on their development. These tools allowed me to describe the structural features of all the above mentioned three components by grouping them into just several typical forms. I identified only six types of local communities, which are reducible to four basic types.

These two approaches – decomposition into three structural components, on the one hand, and typology of communities based on external principles, on the other hand, – made it possible to distinguish several quite clear patterns in the patchwork of provincial life. Besides descriptive exhaustiveness and concision, they also have predictive value. Knowing what type a local community can be classified into – by age, spatial isolation, and impact of public resources on its development (even by the layout of its administrative center) – we can reasonably estimate various aspects of its existence: the structure of the controlled territory; the nature and even types of widespread economic practices of the inhabitants; the structure of the formal segment of the local economy; the composition of the population, including the "us/them" structure; and even the system

of power relations and the determinants of individual status positions. Of course, I do not claim that the predictive value of my typologies is absolute. Provincial communities over the vast expanse of Russia are too diverse to fit readily into the Procrustean bed of sociological concepts. Nevertheless, to a certain extent this is achievable, and that is one of my most significant findings.

I believe the predictive nature of a model based on the analysis of the territorial, economic, and social components of the structure has another important merit. It allows us to assess the self-organization and sustainability of a local community, its ability to withstand various external destructive influences, whether of natural, economic, or political origin.

The book is divided into nine chapters. The first three chapters constitute a methodological and conceptual framework, which is then "draped" by the empirical structure of the local community. The research concept outlined in Chapter 2 is based on three hypotheses. The first one claims the existence at the local level of two additional structures different in nature: a formal estate structure imposed from above by the state and a local structure developing from below. The second hypothesis is based on the well-known statement about the complementarity of physical and social space; it suggests that the territorial structure of the local community quite distinctly "correlates" with the social one. The third hypothesis assumes that the above mentioned three-axial binary framework underlies the local social structure.

Chapter 3 is devoted to qualitative methodology and describes observation and interviewing methods that form the basis of all my empirical research. The second part contains empirical data relating to nearly three hundred local communities.

Chapter 4 contemplates on several typologies that can be developed to generalize empirical sociological descriptions. It proposes and substantiates four typologies based on different, independent principles: age of the community; its spatial location; dependence on external sources of existence; and distinctive features of the residential structure reflecting the administrative status.

Chapter 5 addresses the territorial component of the local community structure. Up to a dozen criteria necessary and sufficient to describe the territorial structure are identified and defined. A

comprehensive description of the territories under the four mentioned typologies made it possible to differentiate the territories of different types of communities according to all the selected criteria.

Chapters 6, 7, and 8 focus on the various household and economic practices of the provincial population. Besides the "thin lawn" of formal economy, I am also considering the "wild field" of informal economy. Invisible to the state, uncontrolled, unregulated, and therefore unperceived by economists, it is this part of the economy that forms the basis of provincial livelihood. I describe both archaic economic practices represented by *otkhodnichestvo* (internal circular labor migration) and "*scattered manufactories*" in small towns, as well as many modern ones represented by the "*garage economy*" and various household crafts, which are everywhere the basis of well-being for provincial households.

Chapter 9 deals with the structure of kin and neighborly relations under the "us/them" dichotomy. Kinship and neighborhood are the basis of the provincial social structure. Any relations – from professional to power – are "strung" on kin and neighborly ties. This is the radical distinction between the provincial and urban societies. The structure of kin and neighborly relations in the province can be considered as invariant, independent of the type of community. The composition of "us" depends on how a community emerged and subsequently developed – as an "agglomeration" assembled from different parts or as a "layered structure" formed by successive layers over a long period of time. The composition of "them" has only quantitative differences.

Chapter 10 focuses on the nature and individual components of the personal status of a provincial inhabitant, and on the nature of local authority. In a provincial society, status determination dominants differ from those in urban societies. Here, the most important factors that determine an individual's social status are personal influence, clan/family affiliation, formal power position, and only last of all, disposable capital (income). However, the decisive factors differ depending on the type of community. This also proved to affect the style of local (municipal) government. The characteristic styles (or strategies) of governance identified in previous studies correlate with factors of spatial isolation and dependence on public resources.