



## Between Empire and the Civil Nation: a Vector of Russia in Consciousness of the Russian Province Inhabitants

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### Abstract

The results of the conducted author's sociological research devoted to modern perception of an image of Russia apperceived by Tyumen citizens are described in the clause. The image of Russia is considered in three basic projections: temporary, civilizational and geopolitical. While analyzing the results of the research the generational approach is used that allows specifying distinctions in answers of the respondents graded to different generations. Four conventional generations are allocated: the Soviet generation, late -Soviet generation (early transitive generation), Post-Soviet transitive generation and stability generation. The growth of traditionalist tendency moods is fixed in all allocated groups. It is paradoxical that on some base parameters «the stability generation» (Putin generation) shows more traditionalism in comparison with the senior generational groups. On the contrary, the most senior «Soviet generation» respondents on a number of key questions showed more modernist position than young respondents.

**Keywords:** The civil nation; Russia; Generation; Image of the past; Civilizational identity; Geopolitical identity

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### Introduction

In public space of the Russian discourse the central theme today is the vector of development of the country. The Russian society endures reevaluation and reconsideration of the past, forms a new strategy of social and economic development, building and nation strengthening. These processes cause an ambiguous estimation; proceed against a high-pitched argument between representatives of the conservative project and liberal model of development. The conservative project obviously or veiledly defends the necessity of restoration of the country on the principles of dominion; the liberal model underlines the necessity of formation of the civil nation and refusal of imperial ambitions. The official Russian power, which aspires to change an image of modern Russia both in perception of other countries and among Russians, acts as a main conductor of a conservative tendency. These processes are taking place both at a fundamental level of reconsideration and designing of new identity and in a political and technological sphere.

In our research we have tried to reveal «an image of the country» through a kit of key associations, the characteristics attributed to the concrete country, models of its description, the self-description, interpretation, geopolitical identity.

The image, according to E. B. Shestopal, represents, on the one hand, reflexion of real characteristics of the object of perception, but on the other - a projection of expectations of the subject of perception, that is knowledge, representations, opinions, estimations, expectations, emotions, requirements of mass consciousness (Shestopal, 2008) are reflected in it. Methodologically the concept «an image of the country» is not specified, it is obvious that this concept reflects the many-sided phenomenon. We have allocated its base aspects: *spatial* (a geographical position, extent, etc.); *symbolical* (the official and informal, historically developed and designed symbols); *personal* (historic figures, the outstanding people, acting politicians, statesmen); *time* (an image of the past, social memory, an image of the future); *civilizational* and *geopolitical* (representations about a country place in the world, symbolical identity within the limits of system of co-ordinates «the East - the West»). In the present article the time and civilizational -geopolitical aspect of an image of Russia in consciousness of different generations of Russians is considered.

Investigating the time aspect we were supported by the works devoted to the analysis of social memory [1-4] nostalgia in Post-Soviet Russia [5-8], the historical policy of the Post-Soviet period [9-12].

Considering a civilizational-geopolitical image of the country we were guided by the scientific works devoted to civil and national identity in Post-Soviet Russia [13-18], Russian idea and the concept of «special way» [19-25].

## Methodology

To reveal representations about the past and the future of Russia, its civilizational and geopolitical identity in March-April, 2015 we conducted sociological research using a questioning method. The object of the research was Tyumen citizens at the age of 17-77 years old. The volume of representative sample constituted 1600 respondents. Parameters of sample concerning general totality (all population of Tyumen at the age of 17 and more senior) were supervised in relation to gender and age of respondents. In addition in the course of data handling a sample «repair» was produced - all calculations were produced with the weight coefficients reflecting social-demographic structure of the Tyumen city population in relation to gender and age.

In the course of handling the data respondents were grouped in four segments depending on age. Age intervals were formed on the basis of generational approach. Four groups of respondents - conventional generations are allocated: the Soviet generation, late -Soviet generation (early transitive generation), Post-Soviet transitive generation and stability generation.

In the first group designated as «the Soviet generation», the respondents who were born till 1972 were included. At the moment of carrying out the poll the age of respondents of this group was from 43 to 77 years old. It is necessary to notice that the Soviet generations designated in references as war generation, post-war generation, generation of the sixties, the stagnation generation etc. were joined together in one and the same group. Endured direct experience of interaction with the key institutes of the Soviet society is a key aspect of our research.

The respondents of 1973-1984 year of birth were included into the «late -Soviet generation» group. This group also included different chronological generations called by sociologists as protest generation, reorganization generation etc. The key factor of allocation of the given generational group was the fact that those who were born in 1984 and entered school at the age of 7 were the last that joined Little Octobrist organization, which was children's organization of communistic sense. Those who were born in 1973 actually were the last that could have experience of membership in the Communist party of the Soviet Union.

The people born during the period of 1985 -1993 were placed into «Post-Soviet transitive generation». A distinctive feature of the given generation is absence of experience of direct interaction with the institutes of civil-political socialization of the Soviet society. They passed the active period of socialization in Post-Soviet Russia during the anomie period.

«The stability generation» covers the youth of 1994-2000 year of birth. This generation is often called in publicistic writings as Putin's generation, «Pu's generation ». The period of its civil -political socialization was passing in «stable» Russia when key steps to a direction of consolidation of the split Russian society were undertaken. During this period restoration of the civil

-political socialization system built in the Soviet period began, the youth public organizations apprehended many traditions of the Soviet youth organizations were created. During the same period there appeared special public platforms, for example Seliger, carrying out a role of civil -political socialization institutes of young generation of Russians. The system of civil -patriotic education at schools and occupational education organizations has started to be recovered. Conservative, neo-traditionalist values were basic there. Great support was given to the military-patriotic education of children and youth.

These generational groups were allocated on the basis of experience of direct interaction with base institutes of civil and political character - Soviet and Post-Soviet. A character, features of the historical period specified political and civil socialization of generation were taken as a key criterion. The majority of the researches conducted in Russia say for the legitimacy of such division. We relied on works of D. Alwin and R. McCammon [26], A. France and S. Roberts [27] V. Gavriiliuk and N. Trikoz [28], J. Levada [29], K. Mannheim [30] V. Semenova [31], R. Thomson [32,33]. Border lines of the allocated groups are rather conventional; they are more likely ideal models.

## Results

### Russia between the past and the future

At mass consciousness of Russians there are various symbolical models, confabulated representations about the past of the country. Some questions in the questionnaire have been directed on revealing «the temporary image of Russia» which includes representations about the past, the present and the future of Russia. In a recent ideological discourse accents were obviously displaced towards the past (the policy of social memory) and the present (in the form of its legitimation). The future is represented rather foggy, indistinct. Today the key actors of social development do not present any distinct project of the future to the public. Therefore the image of the future in mass consciousness is rather uncertain, washed away, causing fear. In the hierarchy of temporary images the future occupies the last place, considerably yielding to the past and the present.

Especially, during our research it was found out that about third of respondents of all generations associate themselves with modern Russia. Discrepancies on this point in different generational groups are insignificant; they vary within a statistical error. At the same time, it is necessary to notice that «here-and-now» orientation recently has fallen away whereas retrospective identity gains in strength. In the senior generations it obviously prevails, considerably having outstripped orientation to the present. Retrospective identity is also characteristic for the third of respondents almost of all generations, except the Soviet. In this generation retrospective identity reaches a half of the interrogated. The images of «Sacred Russia» and «the Russian empire» are more widely presented in Post-Soviet generations i.e. young respondents choose images of the remote past of Russia. Associations with the Soviet Union are obviously prevailed in the senior generations - the Soviet generation (25, 7 %), the late -Soviet generation (27, 2 %). In the group of stability generation the level of association with the Soviet Union is the lowest (4, 1%).

In this background perspective orientation looks insignificant. Approximately every tenth respondent identified himself with the future revived Great Russia. The stability generation works out the least share - only 8, 8 % of young men associate themselves with the image of the future Russia. Such respondents are hardly more in the group of the Soviet generation (10, 5 %). Median generations are big optimists in this question (13-14 %). The distribution of respondents' answers is presented in **Figure 1**.

Soviet period role in designing of the past and the future of Russia is extremely great. In a media discourse the idea of historical continuity, the necessity to rethink the Soviet experience and to recover the best practices of that time is broadcasted rather often. Such communication policy should affect people's outlook, their intentions. Whether or no would the Russians like to return the Soviet system? To diagnose the public opinion on this point two interconnected positions were offered in the questionnaire. The first was of negation character («Modern Russia should refuse restoration attempts of the Soviet system in one form or another»), the second - had positive connotation («Russia should recover all of the good that was in the USSR»). It is interesting that 24, 6 % of representatives of the youngest generation have nothing against revival of the Soviet system elements.

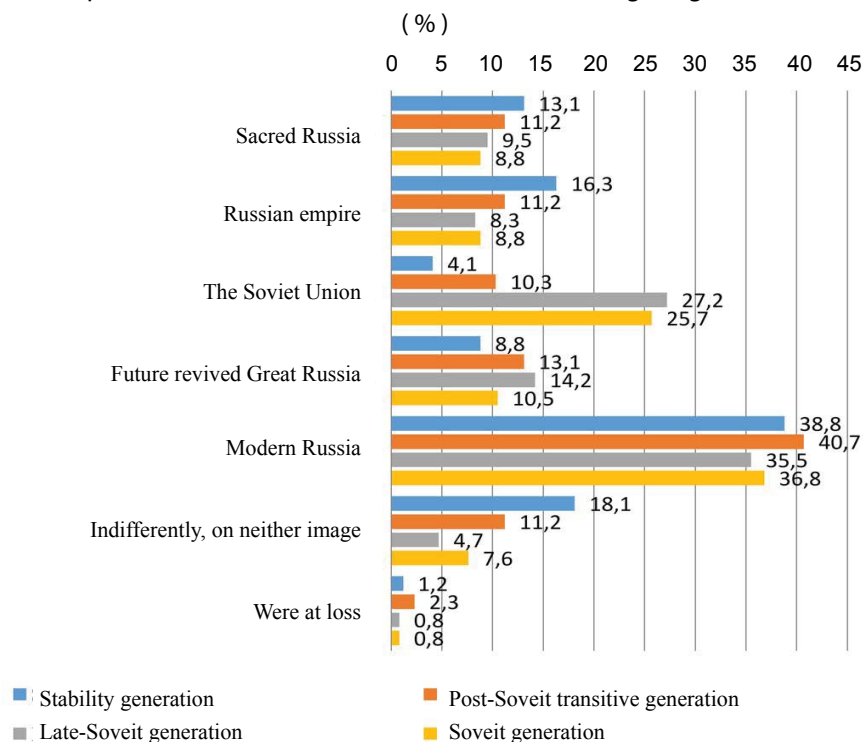
This conclusion proves to be true while analyzing the answers to a question «Should Russia recover all of the good that was in the USSR?». Very similar positions are observed at late-Soviet generation representatives and Post-Soviet transitive generation - the consent with the offered thesis have been shown by more than 66,0 % of respondents in each group, the disagreement

have been expressed by more than 33,0 % (third of respondents in each of these groups). Distinctions on this point are obviously expressed by stability generation and the Soviet generation. In particular, disagreement with the offered thesis was expressed by 24,7 % of stability generation representatives and by 55, 4 % of the most senior Soviet generation representatives (more than a half of interrogated respondents).

The estimation of historical events is a prominent aspect of the relation to the past. The XX-th century, which is regarded in a context of two revolutions occurred in the beginning and the end of the century and their consequences to the country, occupies a special place in modern discussions. Monarchy wreck is a key event in the XX-th century. It is necessary to note that there is a big share of the respondents who were at a loss with the answer or admitted that they had never thought about it. The youngest generation (37, 4%), that is more than one third of the group was a considerable number of those who were at a loss. From 10, 2 % to 15, 8 % of respondents consider this event as a progressive step in the country development, from 15, 3 % to 23, 7% refer to this event negatively **Figure 2**.

In an estimation of a historical role of the revolution taken place in 1917 the similar tendency is found out - the weak awareness of the event is observed in younger generational groups. To the point, positive estimations of a socialist revolution prevail practically in all groups. It is easily explained and quite expectable that the positive attitude is observed in the senior groups. In other generational groups a ratio does not differ so strongly, though the tendency of positive estimation remains. It was possible to

The respondents associate themselves with the following image of Russia



**Figure 1** The distribution of respondents' answers.

The historical event estimation- the breakdown of the monarch in 1917 (%)

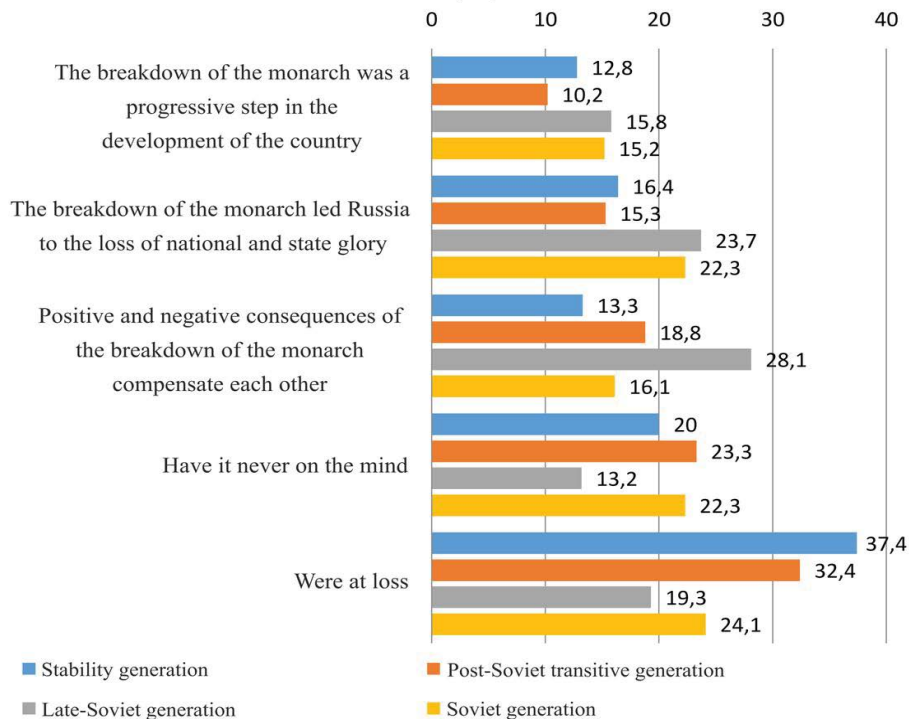


Figure 2 Estimation of a historical role of the revolution taken place in 1917.

expect that events of recent Russian history cause more interest among the youth that young people are better informed on them and have their own personal position. However, the results of the poll do not confirm it. More than 18, 0 % of the youth know nothing about «The August putsch» of 1917. 42, 0 % of stability generation representatives and 33, 5 % of Post-Soviet transitive generation were at a loss to answer the question. The point of view that «The August putsch» is simply a race for power episode in the country top management obviously prevails in substantive responses. From 15, 0 % to 38, 4% of respondents adhere to this point of view. On the whole negative estimations prevail over positive, and the tendency is especially appreciable at the comparison of positions of different generations.

The same distribution of positions is observed in overall assessment of the period of 90th years. About a half of respondents of younger generations and hardly more than a third of senior generations found it difficult to estimate «B.N.Yeltsin's epoch». In all groups, except the youngest one, the obvious prevalence of negative estimations over the positive is observed.

### Civilizational and geopolitical identity of Russia

Today the substantial discourse about the future is dictated by rather limited «agenda», it is directed on a circle of the problems connected with the Russian identity. The problem of identity has fundamental character, first of all it concerns to civilizational and geopolitical identity of Russia. Simply speaking it is possible to present two alternatives which are the center of modern

discussions about global Russian identity. The first alternative declares the necessity of carrying out a policy of «Great power» as driver of the future development. The viewpoint resisting to it defends a priority of the internal purposes of development of the country. This perspective is connected with the necessity of life quality improvement and the refusal of «external ambitions». At this approach great-power, imperial ambitions in policy are considered as the factor interfering development, spraying scarce resources.

In this regard the respondents' answers to a question what country they would like to see Russia first of all, are rather indicative. 43, 9 % of the respondents first of all would like to see their country as a great power which is respected and feared by other countries. Fewer respondents (33, 7 %) would like to see Russia as the country with a high life level, even if it is not one of the strongest powers in the world. Quite enough respondents (22, 5 %) found it difficult to answer this question. The data received were compared to the poll data of the senior groups of respondents. Parameters of answers strongly enough depend on age of the respondents. Results of comparison are represented in Figure 3.

Despite the confrontation with the western countries, the majority of participants of the poll consider Russia being a component of the western civilization. The number of respondents, non consenting with this statement fluctuates from 14, 5 % to 18, 3 %, and it is less than those in the senior generational groups. Rupture in opinions between most senior - the Soviet

generation (every fourth respondent completely agreed with this statement) and the most junior- the stability generation (every second respondent completely agreed with this statement) is indicative. Thus, the observed correlation is - the more senior the respondents are, the greater they agree with the statement that Russia is a component of the western civilization (**Figure 4**).

While analyzing the responses to a question if Russia should follow «the western way» we observed the similar tendency. Despite the consent of the majority of respondents with the offered thesis and almost uniform distribution of the consent on four allocated generational groups (from 81, 4 % to 90, 4 %), consent degree in different groups considerably differs. The accurately traced tendency is that in more senior generational groups the consent rate is higher. The complete consent with the thesis was noted by 41, 8 % of representatives of stability generation, by 45, 5% of Post-Soviet transitive generation, by 50, 9 % of late -Soviet generation and by 69, 5 % of the Soviet generation (**Figure 5**).

The concept of «a special way of Russia» is one of the key ideas in a modern Russian ideological discourse. Results of studying of public moods in Russia from the beginning of the 2000th years show the growth of supporters of «a special way». The results of our research also have shown a high rate approval of the position

confirming dissimilarity of our country on others and a special trajectory of our development. Against some consensus of three younger generations where the number of nonconsenting respondents is approximately identical - from 44, 0% to 45, 5%, the most senior Soviet generation differs obviously. The number of respondents who are not concordant with that thesis here is equal to 64, 4 % (2/3 actually). It is important that a considerable part of respondents have simultaneously agreed both that Russia should develop on «the western way» and that Russia is not similar to other countries and it has «a special way» of development (**Figure 6**).

The question concerning an actual vector of development of Russia has been taken as the generalized one. The majority of respondents have noted the partial approval of an existing direction of development of the country. In all researched groups the partial consent was expressed by more than a half of the respondents (from 54, 3 % to 57, 1 %). The most insignificant part of interrogated have completely approved the present course of development of the country. The stability generation was the most not consent (33, 7 %), the late -Soviet generation has appeared to be the least not consent (26, 2 %).

You would like to see Russia as a ( % )

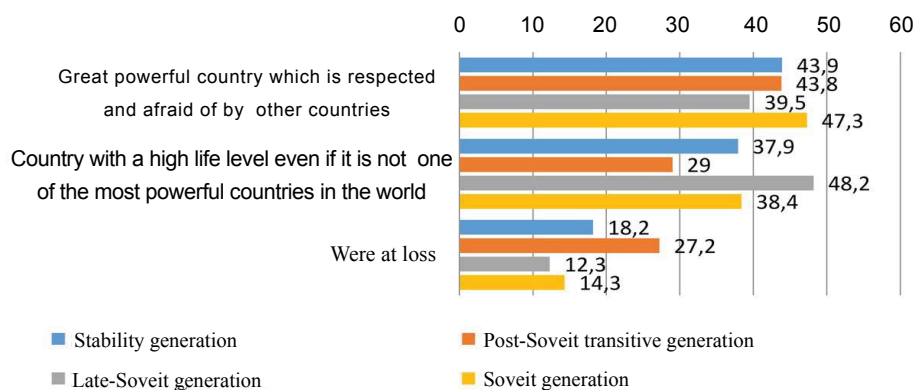


Figure 3 Results of Comparison.

«Russia- is a component of the western civilization» ( % )

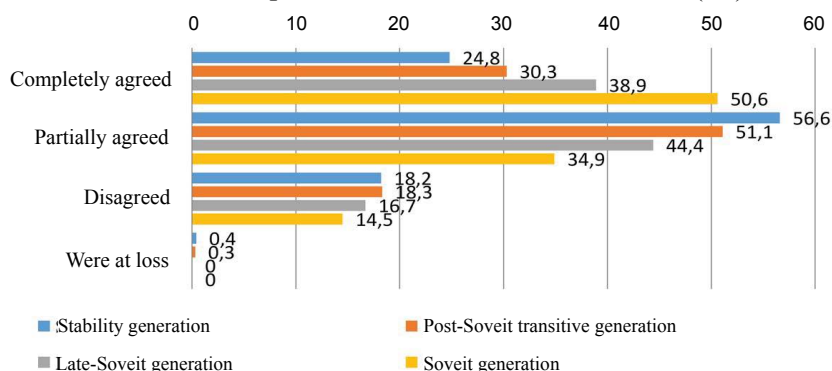


Figure 4 Russia is a component of the western civilization.

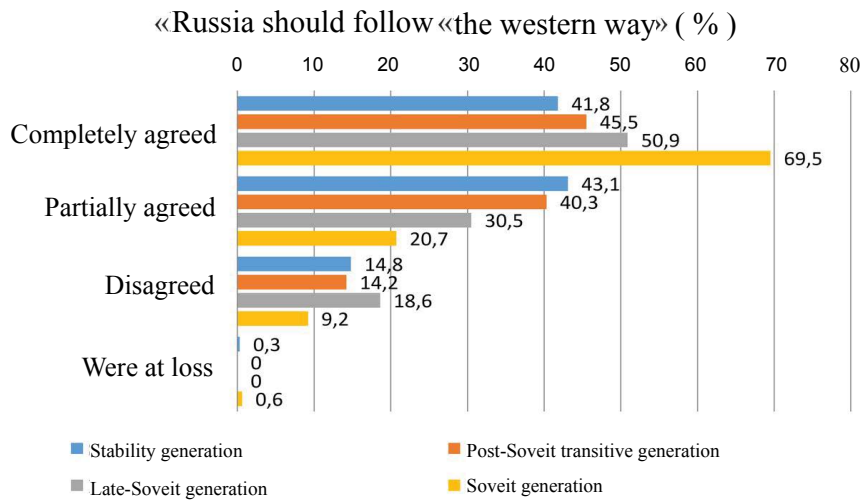


Figure 5 Russia should follow the western way.

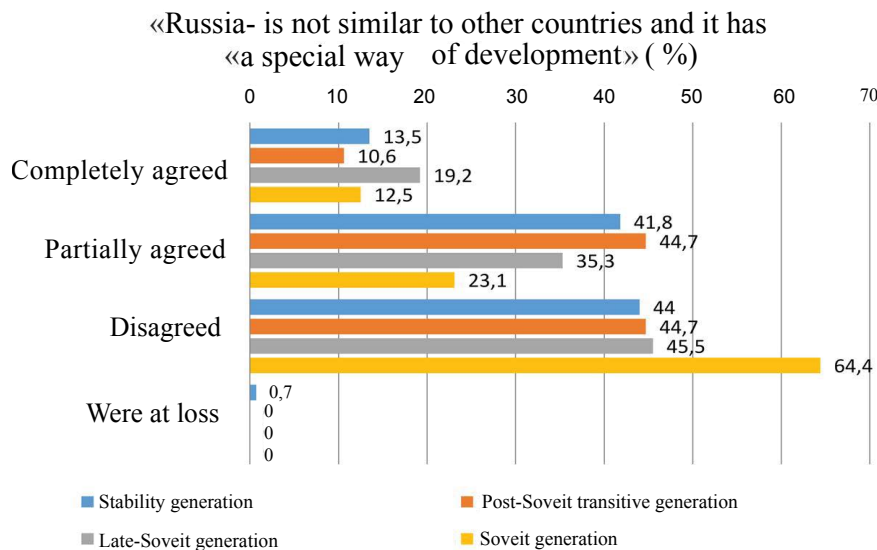


Figure 6 The Special Way of Russia.

## Conclusion

Thus, despite the broad support of a modern course of Russia, there is a considerable protest potential among the youth. Possibly, their representations about the country future do not coincide with a vector of its development. How much these representations will be reflected in social practice - whether they will pour out in protest and constructive movements or will be leveled under the influence of becoming stronger socializing institutes - only time will show.

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