Chapter 9

The Influence of Population Migration and Settlement on Social and Economic Effectiveness of Russia’s Northern Regions

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ABSTRACT

The features of population settlement in the North of Russia have been highlighted in the article. The interest and necessity of such research can be explained by the determining role of the North for Russia’s national economy, escalation of various socioeconomic problems in the related region and progressing depopulation of these underpopulated areas. The article reveals the major contradictions in the development of Russia’s northern territories at the present stage. This problem has been studied from two viewpoints. First, on the basis of the authors’ own methodology, the demographic indicators of Russia’s northern territories were compared with the average ones within the Russian Federation. Second, we have made an attempt to assess how special the management of these northern territories is in comparison with other Russian regions. According to the results of our research, directions in migration and population resettlement management have been proposed. These directions will contribute to ensuring higher social and economic efficiency of Russia’s northern regions.

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INTRODUCTION

Contradictions in Development of Russia’s Northern Territories at Present Stage

The relevance of the presented here research has been determined by a persisting contradiction between strengthening geopolitical and economic importance of the northern regions of the Russian Federation and simultaneous aggravation of social and economic losses on these territories which are mostly caused by the strengthening urbanization and accelerated migration processes among the northern population.

At least four contradictions of objective and administrative (subjective) nature form the basis for the local problems. The first one is the objective contradiction between real public processes causing the effect of “northern rise in prices” in economy and social sphere functioning and the need to secure funds for further economic development (by means of Russia’s budget replenishment) and social development of Russia’s northern regions.

Most of the qualitative transformations in the social and economic fields of the Russian North took place during the times of the Soviet Union. Some of the local problems were solved thanks to the potential of the socialist socioeconomic regime and the effects from the USSR economy being closed one. The socialist model allowed Soviet authorities concentrate all kinds of huge resources on the solution of strategic tasks. Closed nature of the economy partially levelled the problem of the extremely high fixed costs. At the same time, all positive effects from the development of the North (geopolitical, economic, sectoral, social) belonged only to the state. All of this exerted the strongest influence on population accommodation.

Industrial development of the northern territories has led to active growth of cities in the region. The pronounced migration movement was observed from central and southern regions to the northern areas. People were attracted by high salaries, easier opportunities to get apartments (quickly and free of charge), to buy cars, furniture, household appliances and to provide themselves with some other material benefits inaccessible as such for the rest of the Soviet Union.

Today state authorities continue to work under the effect of the “northern price rise” for the economy and the social sphere functioning, but without an opportunity to level the price by appropriation of all the effects from the development. Under market economy the state cannot really guarantee high pay as it was back in the Soviet Union. People do not have the opportunity to get state-owned apartments as it used to be. Cars, furniture, expensive household appliances etc. are not deficit anymore. Moreover, people today are able to get good salaries in other regions that are at the same time much more comfortable for accommodation, especially when it comes to weather and climate. This socioeconomic contradiction determines the direction of migration processes.

At the same time state actions are limited by the second contradiction of nature. This is a contradiction between the declared orientation of the development, the need to fill up the budget and the urgent necessity to innovate the local industries. The harsh reality is that in the foreseeable future already the mineral and raw materials sector will still determine Russia’s competitive advantages within the global economy as it is still serving as the largest budget donor, as the basis for economy’s modernization etc. This sector is also the most interested consumer of advanced technologies (Arkhipov et al., 2018). Finally, this sector determines the directions of nearly all urbanized migration processes. Therefore, it also predetermines the trends in population placement in the northern territories.