

Epilogue

Some results from the study of culture of the Russian provinces and prospects for future research in the context of integral history

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The first all-Russian conference on the complex problems of the 'Culture of the Russian Provinces in the eighteenth to twentieth centuries' took place in Moscow in April 1991. The first seminar of the 'Dutch-Russian Integral History' programme then being set up was conducted by Professor P. Kooij in Moscow in October of the same year. This was not a coincidence. Russian historians V. Kozlov, S. Mironenko and V. Afiani had met P. Kooij a year before in the Dutch city of Groningen at the centennial celebration of the Dutch Association of Archivists. There they had become acquainted with the Dutch project 'Integral Regional History' and decided to apply the methods of this project to Russian regional history.

That was more than ten years ago and it is now time to evaluate some of the recent results and take a look into the future. The programme 'Culture of the Russian Provinces in the eighteenth to twentieth centuries' originated from a seminar held at the Cultural Institute of the Russian Ministry of Culture which was organized by Professor S.O. Schmidt, A. Sundiev and V. Afiani. As a result of this, the Archeographical Commission of the USSR Academy together with the Cultural Institute and Moscow University started to organize seminars for those scholars interested in the history of Russian culture and the Russian provinces. At one of these seminars, the acquaintance of historians Dr I. Schustrova from Yaroslavl and Professor Y. Mizis from Tambov was made. Their research groups joined the Integral History Project and both researchers visited the Netherlands in 1992 to attend a second seminar there.

As time has passed, some of the original participants in the Dutch-Russian Integral History Project have left while others have joined. V. Afiani has remained involved, but unfortunately, due to other work, he cannot participate as much as he would like and some of his tasks have been taken over by S.G. Kachtchenko of St Petersburg. The two projects mentioned here were not able to be combined.

Annual conferences on the Culture of the Russian Provinces Project have been held in Moscow, Elec and Penza. In total, more than 350 people attended one or more of these conferences, among them researchers from over 35 cities in Russia and scholars from Freiburg and Paris. The aims formulated at the first conference, which was opened by the academician D.S. Lihachev, may be summarized as follows:

Research into the mechanisms of the formation and functioning of the culture of provinces (regions), definition of the local features, tracing of the interaction between the culture of regions and their capitals and determining the influence of provincial cultures on the general culture of the country.

It was necessary to work in association with historians from various specialist areas in order to avoid the negative effects of the branch method, which was very common in the Soviet period.

Originally, the conferences were planned along the lines of different cultural centres: city, village, estates, and monasteries. The second conference was, therefore, devoted to small Russian cities. Around this time, however, some fragmentation took place with separate societies being created for the study of small cities and estates, for instance. As a result of this, subsequent general conferences were arranged to discuss particular problems, such as 'the realities of culture' and 'culture and local history'.

From the start, historical theory formed a major theme at the conferences. Concepts such as culture, civilization, provincial culture, regional culture and Russian culture were discussed by S.O. Schmidt, V. Afiani, I. Belenkij, L. Kochman, L. Sizintceva, L. Troitskij, D. Chevarov, E. Chulepova and others. The problem of westernization was also discussed by many contributors, while others attempted to distinguish between universal and specific, temporal, or spatial characteristics of the culture of the Russian Provinces.

Many contributions to the conferences were also devoted to the history of the Russian country town, especially its role and place in culture, while villages received less attention. A few papers were devoted to the culture of monasteries (Y. Mizis, P. Roschevskaj). Other areas to receive attention were social-cultural groups, the provincial 'intelligentsia' (arts, scientific, technical), clergymen, statesmen, education and schools, museums, libraries, printing houses and theatres. Some very interesting studies concerned the cultural potential of provincial Russia (V. Ermakova, L. Kochman). The conclusion was drawn on more than one occasion that more precise definitions were needed for the terms culture and civilization. It was also proposed that in the context of quantitative comparisons between Russia and European

countries, it was necessary to consider regions which had been colonized by European states.

The necessity for the use of quantitative methods was put forward at the first conference. Requests were made later on for research of the kind undertaken in the programme of Dutch-Russian Integral History, but unfortunately there was not much response and this type of research has been somewhat neglected. There were some contributions, however, which could be related to themes in the Dutch-Russian project. For instance, the research carried out by the young scholar S. Mozorov, who studied the influence of urban and village culture on demographic processes in Russian regions (from the end of the nineteenth century until 1914). This continues the work described in the books written by S. Novoselsky, V. Paevsky, M. Ptucha and others, who were primarily interested in average parameters and did not pay attention to regional differences.

Mozorov made comparisons of demographic development in cities and in the countryside. One of his conclusions was that in around 1900, men in a village lived 3–4 years longer than men in a city. There was a negative correlation between the degree of urbanization and life expectancy. In the cities tuberculosis was one of the major causes of death of people between the ages of 20 and 40. Many children died of contagious diseases such as scarlet fever or measles, as well as diseases of the digestive organs. Heart disease, cancer, and what was labelled as decrepitude were the dominant causes of death among older people.

There was a traditional type of reproduction with high birth rates and high mortality rates in Russia at this time. High birth rates and large families were not confined to the peasantry. Leo Tolstoy had 13 children, the famous surgeon Pirogov was the thirteenth child in the family of a Moscow official, and the famous chemist Mendeleyev was the seventeenth child in his family.

The birth rate in the villages, though, was higher than elsewhere and there were also regional differences. The birth rate was less than 30‰ in the three Baltic states in 1896/1900 while in the European part of Russia the average birth rate at that time was 45‰ and in Poland it was 38.5‰. By the First World War, however, the relatively low birth rate of less than 30‰ had reached the line St Petersburg – Kovenskaja. There was a simultaneous rise in the average life expectancy from 26.3 years for men and 29.1 for women in 1897/98 to 31.9 for men and 34.0 for women in 1911/14.

The reduction in the birth rate and the increase in life expectancy were related to the gradual disappearance of the traditional way of life, the influence of new attitudes, the influx of urban cultures, changes in religious opinions and a different position of the church in society.

At the present time, an enormous amount of theoretical and empirical material has been collected within the framework of the programme 'Culture of the Russian Provinces,' sufficient to warrant the preparation of a collective monograph. This does not imply, however, that all the problems which have been put forward will be discussed and solved but rather that this monograph will point out the directions for further research. The centres for regional research, which developed almost independently in the past years and have gathered a great deal of valuable material, are also important in this context.

When the two projects – 'Culture of the Russian Provinces' and 'Dutch-Russian Integral History' – started it was thought that they could be pulled together. But, as has already been mentioned, quantitative research within the framework of the 'Culture of the Russian Provinces' programme did not develop sufficiently. On the other hand, the Dutch-Russian Integral History has concentrated mainly on historical demographic research and has, so far, paid almost no attention to social, political, cultural and religious influences. The Dutch-Russian project could benefit in the future from the material collected by the 'Culture of the Russian Provinces' programme to investigate these neglected domains.