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## THE IMPACT OF URBANIZATION ON THE TRANSMISSION OF CULTURE AND LANGUAGE OF THE SAKHA PEOPLE: A SOCIOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

*The article discusses the impact of urbanization on the transmission of the Sakha people's identity, culture, and language in the Sakha Republic (Yakutia). Based on the results of a sociological survey, the ethno-cultural identity of villagers, and first and second generation urban dwellers is assessed. People living in towns, especially the descendants of townfolk, are significantly different from villagers in several respects: they plan to have fewer children, have weaker ties with tribal clans, their ethnic identity is transformed, they are adopting Russian as an everyday language, and are less involved in folk culture. It is predicted that the impact of urbanization will fully manifest itself in 20–25 years following a rise in the share of second generation urban dwellers in the Sakha population.*

**Keywords:** *Northern peoples, Sakha, Yakuts, urbanization, demographic changes, cultural changes, culture transmission, language transmission.*

### Introduction

In 2011, scholars from the Siberian and North-Eastern Federal Universities conducted an ethno-sociological study of the indigenous population living in Yakutia as a part of the “Foresight of the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia) – 2050” project. The concept of the project and the main results have been published (Efimov, Lapteva, 2012, 2014a, b; Borisova, Popova, Efimov, 2013; Efimov, Lapteva, Borisova, 2014; Respublika Sakha..., 2014; Mikhailova, Lapteva, Efimov, 2014). The study included fifty-four in-depth interviews of experts as well as a sociological survey among the representatives of indigenous ethnic groups living in the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia), in total

1800 respondents. The sample was representative in terms of age, gender, and territorial distribution\*. The survey provided quantitative data on socio-demographic and socio-cultural changes, triggered by urbanization. One of the key hypotheses of the study was that urbanization is a factor which largely determines the present and the future of the Sakha people. In 1900, the share of urban dwellers in Yakutia amounted to 3.7 % (Sivtseva, 2010: 295); by 2012 this number reached 64 %, and by 2050 it may increase up to 75 % (according to the “middle”

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\*Field research and gathering of the database of the survey was made by a team of sociologists from the North-Eastern Federal University under the direction of Dr. U.S. Borisova.

version of the demographic prediction) (Respublika Sakha..., 2014: 178). Presumably, urbanization should be accompanied by changes in a number of important socio-demographic and ethno-cultural features of the Sakha people: transition to a small number of children in the family (one or two), a decrease in the use of the Yakut language and a simultaneous greater use of the Russian language, decrease of interest in the Sakha traditional culture, and the transformation of self-identity.

The impact of urbanization on the demographic and socio-cultural transmission of the Sakha people (the Yakuts) has already been studied in the past. Thus, demographic reproduction was analyzed by S.A. Sukneva, who showed a decrease in birth rate both among rural and urban populations (2007); the functioning of the Yakut and Russian languages, in particular, in family communication was discussed in the studies of N.I. Ivanova (2013a, b), while the relationship of local, ethnic, and national Russian identities was investigated by L.M. Drobizheva (2002; Drobizheva et al., 2012). The novelty of the present study is in its scientific model and methodology. We formulated the questions of the sociological questionnaire such that it was possible to explore a number of important social and ethno-cultural features of the Sakha people (the Yakuts). We also conducted a comparative analysis of corresponding features among rural dwellers as well as first and second generation urban dwellers and compiled the “portraits” of these categories of respondents.

It is important that the Yakut society is characterized by a large share of first generation urban dwellers (whose parents are still rural dwellers), amounting to 60 % of the urban population according to the study. Such dwellers were usually brought up in a rural environment; they keep in touch with relatives who live in rural areas, and spend their free time there. The large number of first generation urban dwellers “smoothes out” the impact of urbanization processes. Therefore, for assessing a possible long-term impact of urbanization, it would be necessary to compare three settlement groups:

1) second generation urban dwellers, whose parents also live in urban areas;

2) first generation urban dwellers, whose parents are rural dwellers; and

3) rural dwellers whose parents also live (or lived) in the village.

Corresponding subsamples were made for analyzing the data of the sociological survey (the first subsample included 260 respondents, the second 385 respondents, and the third 538 respondents). The subsamples varied according to the age structure: the group of urban dwellers included a considerably larger number of young people, while the group of rural dwellers included a larger number of people from older age groups. In order to eliminate the effects of age, age structure in those subsamples was “evened up” using as a benchmark the age structure of the entire sample, corresponding to the structure of the general population. The age groups within the subsamples, which were represented insufficiently or excessively, were supplemented by duplicating the questionnaires of the respondents belonging to the desired age or reduced by removing the excessive questionnaires (the questionnaires were chosen randomly).

### Comparison of socio-demographic and cultural-linguistic features of the various groups

**Inclusiveness into the family clan.** The family and family clan have been one of the basic social institutions of the Sakha people for centuries. It was a wide group of related people which fostered the transmission of language, ethnic traditions, worldview, and mentality from generation to generation. The majority of the respondents answered “yes, definitely” to the question from the questionnaire, “Can you call yourself a part of a family clan?” (Fig. 1). The respondents from the second generation urban dwellers included a much larger group of those who did

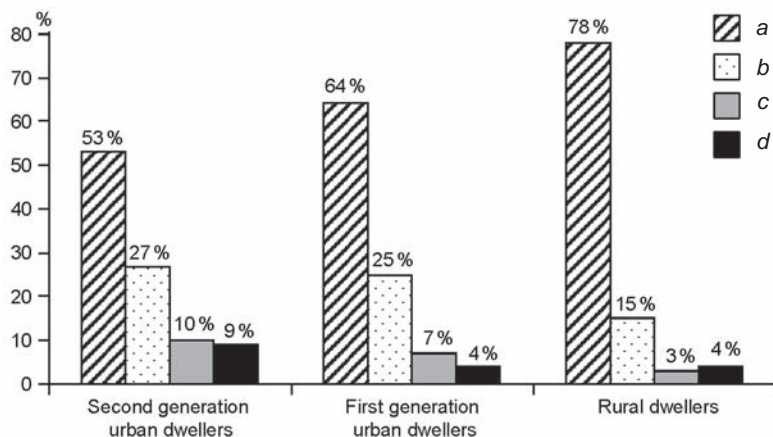


Fig. 1. Distribution of respondents from different settlement groups according to their engagement in/disengagement from family clans.

Answers to the question of the questionnaire, “Can you call yourself a part of a family clan?”: a – “yes, definitely”; b – “rather yes than no”; c – “rather no than yes”; d – “no, I cannot”.

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