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Competing for a citizen: “Visible” and “invisible” forms of state identity in Russia

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ABSTRACT

This paper is dedicated to the characteristics of phenomenon of state identity in the modern Russian society which has been affected for last 20 years by the processes of virtualization, informatization and political transformation. Today, the Russian Federation, like any other state in the world, is closely connected to non-local events and ideas; the “title nation” and “strong state” ideas are routinely confronted by challenges from multiple agents including immigrants, the mass media and especially the Internet. In the present study, empirical findings from several studies developed with methods of visual sociology, expert interviews and public opinion research are used to understand how people in Russia tend to realize their desire to be the unit of the state forming so-called “invisible” state identity, which is not absolutely loyal to the government institutions and is very stable. This type of identity has been formed under alternative institutional logic which isn’t preordained by acting of the state but is shaped as well by cultural, social, and cognitive processes in “real”, but especially in “virtual” spaces of communication. And despite “Russia as a state” is still a way of maintaining the symbolic power of political leaders, there are some strong but hidden tendencies forming “Russia as a community of citizens” under the influence of information technologies, global values, norms and outlooks.

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1. Introduction

Russia as a newly formed state with a contradictory and diverse past has been meeting serious problems of state, national and civil integrity forming since the collapse of the

USSR. Meanwhile, the necessity of overwhelming of economical and political crises which the country has been suffering during the last twenty years of new country’s life, led to the low level of power structures’ attention to the problem of state identity.

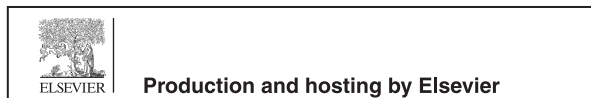
P. Kolste investigated symbolic expression of priorities and strategies of “national formation” in the countries which came to existence or gained independence recently; he researched state symbols of Russia and affirms that there hasn’t been any “unified, well known national symbols” even 10 years after the dissolution of the USSR (Kolste, 2000, 246). The State Duma officially passed the federal constitutional law about national emblem, flag and hymn of the Russian Federation and this fact itself can be perceived as a significant political event which legalizes a certain set of state values and state identity.

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The discussion about the state identity has been livening up during the last 3–5 years. It is caused both by the forthcoming elections of 2012 and by the entry of Russia into the so-called “reflexive period” (Beck, Giddens & Lash, 1994) of development related in a certain manner to the influence of globalization. The state is concerned about social peace, tolerance, loyalty to the government institutions and formulation of interaction frames between different social groups inside the country and abroad. Nevertheless, the investigation of self-identification of the Russian citizens in the aspects of territory and nationality is quite necessary; the modern society needs to find the answer to an important question: what is “Russia as a state”? Is it a unity of citizens or a way to maintain the symbolic power of the Russian leaders?

2. State, national and civil identity: the problem of concept explication

2.1. Forming of terminological continuum

A researcher of state identity usually comes across an obstacle in constructing a system of notions to use in discussion. The Russian science inherited the Soviet terminology which was created with the purpose of an ideological substantiation of the national policy. The Soviet discourse was strongly determined by the ideas of patriotism, amor patriae, responsibility to the state and its leaders. ‘Patriotism’ became a key concept of political socialization and state identity; it functioned as a discourse mechanism which could have regularly reproduced the necessary type of political loyalty. The main task of patriotism reproduction was to unite individuals around the state; the “globalists” and “cosmopolitans” were blamed in neglect of the national culture.

The Russian Science of 1990-ies discovered the foreign sources: using western conceptions, orientation to the works of some European and American, researchers

became a trend and a certain quality mark of an investigation regardless of the research object. New terms appeared in the area of identity studies, e.g. “corporate consciousness”, “cosmopolitan identity”, etc. New notion interpretations described another type of social reality and had their own semantic and connotative nuances, which were losing a part of their precise meaning due to the translation and using the foreign notions to describe Russian contemporary reality. This “westernism” was criticized by some researchers who turned to the “eternal Russian” topic of search of a “special Russian way” and “National Idea”; they recreated an old pre-revolutionary interpretation of the state identity where “Russian conciliarism” and “Orthodoxy” took an important place (see Andreeva, 2003; Sagatovskiy, 1999; Shevchenko, 1992).

As a result of this conceptual mixture the notion of identity is now described by the huge amount of terms and expressions, which certainly have the same meaning: self-determination of individuals and social groups within the Russian state. The terminological continuum consists of the following: the subject's of identification characteristics; processes which lead to changes in a subject; tools to achieve the result; the result of identity forming, including its sense and properties. We have analyzed more than 100 monographs and scientific papers in Russian edited during the last 15 years, and we marked out the most common notions (Table 1).

These terms usually are copied from paper to paper and are used on default as synonymic or ampliative forms. The shades of meaning can be understood intuitively, but the difference isn't verbalized normally.

2.2. Competition between the terms

Despite the existence of a wide synonymic row, the main two notions which are commonly used to speak about “the state construction” correspond with the international practice. Those two notions are “national/ethnic identity”

Table 1
The terminological continuum of state identity.

| Subject | Process | Tools | Result |
|----------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------|----------------------------------|
| People(s) | Political socialization | National idea | National identity |
| Nation | Political culture | National values | National-and-state identity |
| Ethnos(es) | Political participation | National character | National-and-ethnic identity |
| Citizens | Political consciousness | National soul | Ethnic identity |
| State | Political values | National consciousness | Civil identity |
| State people | Civic participation | (self-consciousness) | State-and-civil identity |
| Country | Civic culture | Civil patriotism | General civil identity |
| Political nation | Civil consciousness | Soul of people | Political identity |
| Civil nation | Civic values | Soul of nation | National homogeneity |
| Civil society | Civil socialization | Readiness to participate | Civil solidarity |
| Community | Ethnic consciousness | | All-Russian identity |
| Ethnocultural people | Ethnic culture | | Identity of place |
| National ethos | Patriotic upbringing | | Local identity |
| Political community | Patriotic values | | Regional identity |
| | | | Territorial identity |
| | | | Patriotic identity |
| | | | Civilization identity |
| | | | National-and-state consolidation |
| | | | Corporate national state |
| | | | Fellow citizenship |

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