

## All-Russian Identity: Incomplete Project and Modern “Agenda”

G. Volkov Yu, A.V. Lubsky, V.P. Voytenko and S. Panfilova Yu  
Institute of Sociology and Regional Studies,  
Southern Federal University, Rostov-on-Don, Russian

---

**Abstract:** The study considers various projects of the formation of all-Russian identity as the factor of national integration. In today’s Russia a multiethnic political nation has formed. It unites the citizens of the Russian federation where national-state identity has become dominant. However, the identity “we are the citizens of Russia” in polyethnic Russian society is experiencing some competition from the ethnonational identity. In this regard, various projects aimed at the formation of a Russian nation-civilization and all-Russian identity of a civilizational nature as well as trans-ethnic Russian nation as a multiethnicsociety of Russia and accordingly an all-Russian identity based on the national idea and values that consolidate Russian society are proposed.

**Key words:** Identity, national-state identity, national-civil identity, ethnic identity, polyethnic political nation, civil nation, nation-civilization, state-civilization

---

### INTRODUCTION

In multiethnic states globalization posing a serious challenge to national and cultural differences and localization in the framework of which ethnic communities are able to reconstruct their identity and cultural uniqueness are followed by the crisis of national identities (Huntington, 2004). Re-ethnicization processes in the Russian society the increased role of ethnic and religious identities also actualized the problems associated with the search for those common ideological and value grounds that can become a space for the formation of national identity. In the course of these searches intellectual elite in Russia was engaged in the development of the projects aimed at the formation of Russian national identity. The difficulties faced by the researchers of these projects were due on the one hand to the fact that intellectual discourse concerns very different ideas about the nature of this identity; on the other hand to the fact that in discursive practices the concept of the all Russian identity is constantly “loaded” with various ideological and political connotations. In this regard, discursive practices being a space for the opposition of value judgments become a field for designing ideologically engaged models of the all-Russian identity. As a result the projects of this identity formation proposed in the discourse are not implemented, since they do not always correspond to the mental programs of Russians (Lubsky *et al.*, 2016).

**Literature review:** In discursive practices, the all Russian identity is often equated with national or civil

identities. In this case, the concept of “national identity” in relation to the Russian society is used primarily in the Western sense, suitable as the researchers note to describe completely different social realities (Sanina, 2011). In the Western sense, the concept of “national identity” is associated with society and state while in the Russian sense with ethnos or nation. In this regard, “national identity as some Russian researchers note can be defined as the basic idea set by the national vision of the world and national history, the one for which a society lives in a concrete historical epoch and therefore acceptable for its majority. Thus, identity holds the answer to the question about the nature of its people, its place, role and tasks in the world history and ideal forms of its existence” (Gorshkov, 2016).

Scientific discourse also engages different ideas about civil identity with reference to the specifics of its formation in Russian society. At the same time, some researchers believe that the emergence of such an identity is a matter of the future since the country lacks civil society. Other scholars believe that in modern Russian society, two models of civil identity formation can be distinguished: state-civil and national-civil. The basis of state-civil identity is the state self-consciousness of individuals and statist culture, suggesting loyalty to the state. The basis of national-civil identity is civil self-consciousness and civil culture which suggests the identification of the individual with the civil community as a civil political nation. At the same time, researchers emphasize that in the Western European tradition, state-civil and national-civil identities began to coincide

at a certain stage, therefore in relation to the West they often speak of a civil political nation. In the Russian tradition, the concept of the state and civil consciousness are not the same so the Russians, answering the question about their citizenship, civil identity, mean their nationality (Drobizheva, 2012).

The researchers usually detect the specific features of Russian national identity in the slow nature of the Russian nation formation and unformedness of full-fledged nation-state in Russia (Zvereva, 2009), unique by its multi-ethnic composition a single state with the state-forming role assigned to the Russian people as well as the special role of politicians, media and education in the process of formation this identity (Pantin and Lapkin, 2004).

The question of the all-Russian identity levels is debatable. Thus, some researchers single out the following levels: macrolevel including the national-state and civilizational identities, mesolevel represented by social-group identity and microlevel that shows the individual as uniquely related to the society. Other scientists distinguish in the Russian national identity civilizational, ethnic, religious, regional and socio-group levels (9). On the whole, it can be noted that the issues related to the definition of the concept of the all-Russian identity, its specifics, the factors of its formation, structure and ideological basis are currently the subject of discussions hampering its development and implementation of its various projects in Russian society.

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

Scientific studies of Russian national identity, being mostly of disciplinary nature are based on different paradigm grounds in the frameworks of which there are different concepts of identity in general (Lubsky, 2013). These ideas were formed as a rule, in line with essentialist or constructivist approaches to the interpretation of identity. The supporters of essentialist approach believe that the identities sought by individuals or social groups are set "in a natural way". Therefore, according to essentialist approach, they are assigned an invariable set of identification characteristics. This identity is unique and stable, it requires a fundamental identity of "strong feeling" as well as the basis for identification.

The constructivist approach interprets identities as discursive constructs which turn out to be mobile and dependent on the context. In this regard some researchers emphasize that "identities are mobile not only in time and space but even when they relate to the same subjects in the same point of time and space" (Neumann, 1998).

The interpretation of identity as a discursive construct entailed the conclusion that the notions of identity are the result of the symbolic struggle or competition of different narratives for identity. However, some researchers note that there are always several narratives about identity that coexist competing with each other and "people can choose one of them" (Martin, 1995). As a result, some identity narratives can be predominant while the other will be sidelined but "victory" can never be considered as ultimate.

Thus, thanks to constructivists in the scientific discourse, the notion that the identities dependent on the information context are always plural, relative and changeable became firmly established. At the same time, it has now become evident that the concepts of identity developed within the framework of the essentialist and constructivist approaches by virtue of their paradigmatic one-sidedness are heuristically inadequate and the very modern notion of identity needs to be rethought. At the same time, researchers note that constructivism and essentialism shouldn't be contrasted, since in everyday discourse essentialist identities continue being adverted and deeply felt at the level of everyday life practices. In this connection, it is necessary to extend the field of possible identities research study strategies using other methodological tools (Calhoun, 1995).

Overcoming the paradigmatic one-sidedness in the study of the all Russian identity presupposes the development of the multidimensional methodological construct of its scientific research as an integral social reality on the basis of a synthesis of the methodological guidelines of the essentialist and constructivist approaches, keeping in focus not only stable ("naturally" preset) and changeable (as discursive constructs) parameters of identities but also the ways of their interaction. This can be achieved through constructive realism as a methodological principle of the neoclassical model of scientific research (Lubsky, 2017). From the standpoint of constructive realism identity is considered as a "process of constructing the sense based on a certain cultural property" (Castells, 1997).

Thus, from the standpoint of constructive realism, the all Russian identity is the result of both cultural actualization and information impact. Therefore, it is simultaneously interpreted as "natural" (cultural), unique and stable and as "artificial" (designed), plural and changeable. At the same time, "natural" identity is non-reflexive, it is formed in the process of cultural socialization; "artificial" identity is of a reflexive nature it is formed as a result of information impact and an informed choice of socially significant referents.

Within the framework of the multidimensional methodological construct of the all-Russian identity scientific study, paramount importance is attached to the study of the universal and the particular therein. However, some researchers believe that in today's society "which is increasingly shaped by information and determined by cultural dimensions" (Melucci, 1996), there is no particularism that would not use the more general principles in the construction of its identity and therefore the particular exists only in the contradictory movement for the simultaneous proclamation of distinctive identity and its elimination (Laclau, 1995).

Within the multidimensional methodological construct of scientific research, the all-Russian identity can be viewed as social and collective one. Social identity is the result of identifying the individual with Russian society. Collective identity is the identity of "We" as an imaginary national community (nation). It should be noted that the all-Russian identity is formed as a result not only of constructivist efforts (information impacts) but also of cultural predisposition as well as the social readiness of individuals to perceive images and ideas about the national community (nation) as the basis of this identity.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The deconstruction of various projects for the formation of the all-Russian identity allows concluding that they interpret it, first of all as a collective or "We" identity of an imaginary national community (Russian nation). However, the question of what the Russian nation is currently becomes a matter of debate. This is largely due to the fact that discursive practices use different approaches to "nation" notion. In the framework of one of them, formed under the influence of nation-building practices in Western European countries, nation is viewed as a social community with common national interests and civil values, united by a common political system. At the same time in the understanding of the nation, the French tradition in which the nation is viewed as a political and civil community and the German tradition associated with understanding it as an ethnonation, i.e., community of cultural origin are singled out. Another approach to the understanding of nation is associated with "nation-building" practice in the USA as an immigrant country. According to this approach, the concepts of the American people and the American nation are identified as a political community based on allegiance to the US government and commitment to American values, constituting the core of the political culture of American Society (Inozemtsev, 2013).

Within the framework of cognitive modeling methodology, several variants of nations and national

identities formation can be identified. First, it is the formation of monoethnic nation based on the commonness of ethnic origin, religion, language, economic interests and the unity of the political system (nation-state). On the basis of this nation, national-ethnic identity is formed. Secondly, it is the formation of polyethnic nation based on the commonness of state (national) interests and values (political nation). On the basis of this nation, national-state identity is formed. Thirdly, it is the formation of multiethnic nation based on civil society (civil nation). On the basis of this nation, national-civil identity is formed. Fourthly, it is the formation of trans-ethnic nation based on the commonness of state interests and ideological values (an ideological nation). On the basis of this nation, national-ideological identity is formed. Fifthly, it is the formation of trans-ethnic nation based on the community of state interests and civilizational codes (nation-civilization). On the basis of this nation, national-civilizational identity is formed.

In the 1990's the modernization efforts of Russian reformers were aimed at changing the vector of society development in line with "catching-up development" in the liberal direction. In connection with this a liberal project for the formation of civil nation and civil identity in Russia was proposed. However, due to the specifics of the Russian state-organized society and the peculiarities of the Russian mentality, this project was not realized. In the early 21st century a new project aimed at forming the Russian nation simultaneously as a political and civil nation was developed. This project resulted in the formation of the Russian multiethnic political nation uniting the citizens of the Russian Federation. The results of sociological studies show that in today's Russian society national and state identity is dominant ("We are the citizens of Russia") (Gorshkov, 2016). In Russian discourse this identity is often called state-civil, the basis of which as the researchers note, consists of the public consciousness of individuals and statist culture, implying loyalty to the state (Drobizheva, 2012).

However, the existence of Russian polyethnic political nation uniting the citizens of the Russian Federation and the domination of national-state identity in Russian society do not remove the item of the relevance of ethnic identity in modern Russia from the Russian "agenda". Moreover, this identity is predominant in ethnic regions among the representatives of titular ethnic groups. In this regard, some researchers believe that the national and state identity formed in Russia is experiencing strong competition from ethnic identity and therefore the national and state identity formed turned to be incapable of "relieving" the society from interethnic and interfaith contradictions (Avksentiev and Aksyumov,

2013). However, other researchers point out that the issue of ethnic identity opposition, despite the high level of its distribution in the Russian society as well as national and state identity currently becomes irrelevant. Moreover, case studies, they believe, confirm the possibility of compatibility in the context of Russian national identity (Gorshkov, 2011). However, the question of how to combine state-civil and ethno-national identity in the context of Russian national identity is still as researchers believe, open (Volkov and Lubsky, 2017).

Contemporary discourse offers a variety of options for the formation of nation and the Russian national identity in the Russia. Firstly, it is the formation of nations-civilizations within the framework of the models of Russia as state-civilization or nation-civilization. The catalyst for special attention to the model of Russia as a state-civilization was the "Message of the President of the Russian Federation Russian to the Federal Assembly" in December 2012 in which he pitched an idea that "Russia has evolved as a multinational state, state-civilization for centuries". Speaking in September 2013 at a meeting of the Valdai Club President of Russia, developing the idea, said that "Russia as philosopher Konstantin Leontyev vividly put it has always evolved in "blossoming complexity" as a state-civilization, reinforced by the Russian people, Russian language, Russian culture, Russian Orthodox Church and the country's other traditional religions. It is precisely the state-civilization model that has shaped our state polity. It has always sought to flexibly accommodate the ethnic and religious specificity of particular territories, ensuring diversity in unity" (VIDC, 2013).

Another civilizational model of Russia as a state-civilization was proposed in October 2013 by Patriarch Kirill of the Russian Orthodox Church in the speech at the opening of 17th world Russian people's Council dedicated to the theme "Russia as a country-civilization. Solidary society and the future of the Russian people". The Patriarch emphasized that Russia is an independent civilization "with its own set of values, its own laws of social development, its model of society and state, its system of historical and spiritual coordinates" and then he added that "the value of any civilization is that it brings to humanity". In this connection he stressed that "Russia as a country-civilization has much to offer to the world". Firstly, it is the experience of building just and peaceful international relations; secondly, it is the experience of multipolar and multiform existence; thirdly, it is the tradition of self-restraint, so important in a situation of impending scarcity of resources and acute environmental crisis; fourth, it is the concept of moral values; fifth, the idea of human solidarity as a particular national idea that permeates our history and culture for

many centuries. Emphasizing the special importance of the spiritual part, the Patriarch said that "perhaps the highest stage of the establishment of the Russian sovereignty as a unique state-civilization is spiritual sovereignty".

Thus, the modern two models of Russia are the model of Russia as a civilization-state, proposed by the President of the Russian federation and the Model of Russia as a country-civilization, proposed by his Holiness Patriarch. However, the statist and church models of Russia as a civilization are not alternative but as if complementary to each other in the spirit of "authorities symphony". Both models emphasize that Russia as a civilization is a multinational local-historical community but the state-civilization model emphasizes that this community is state-organized while the state-civilization model that this community is solidary and spiritual.

The relevance of the project of constructing national and civilizational identity based on the image of Russia as a state-civilization or country-civilization is now stipulated by the fact that the conservative wave that has captivated the mass mentality of Russians at the turn of the century strengthened the doubts of many of them, "about the very fact of Russia's civilizational affiliation to Europe" (Gorshkov, 2011). As a result, the doubts about the legitimacy of Russia's civilizational identity disappeared in the public consciousness.

However, the implementation of nation-civilization project in Russia and accordingly the construction of national and civilizational identity is now associated with great difficulties caused by the fact that firstly, in the intellectual discourse there are various images of Russia as an independent civilization (Lubsky, 2005) and secondly, civilizational identity matrix is still at the periphery of the Russian's mass consciousness. The project of the construction of trans-ethnic Russian nation as the multinational people of Russia and consequently, of Russian national identity on the basis of national idea and public values, consolidating Russian society now appears to be more realistic.

Researchers noticed that it is not easy to promote the concept of united Russian people as the Russian nation and the formation of Russian national identity because it is as they emphasize not so much about "respecting parity" between belonging to the Russian people and a certain ethnic group as about the synthesis of state-civil and ethno-national consciousness not depersonalizing national languages and cultures (Gorshkov, 2011). Based on what such a synthesis can be realized? In Russian society it can be realized based on the transition of the state management to the value policy in which the synthesis of state-civil and ethno-national consciousness is possible, first of all due to a unitive national idea and

the general public values. In this regard, it should be noted that the national idea, set by the state, plays a special role in the functioning and development of the Russian state-centered society, consolidating it and setting the “common cause”. That is why the Russian authorities and apart of the Russian intellectuals affiliated with them are in constant search of the national idea. In 2015-2016, Russian society was proposed the idea of patriotism as such (Volkov and Lubsky, 2016). Will this idea take root in the Russian mass consciousness and if it will in what interpretation (Volkov, 2016).

The results of sociological studies show, firstly that the greatest support among Russians enjoys primarily the idea of the Russian peoples unity with a view to its revival as a great power (42%). In the second place is the idea to make Russia a law-governed state (38%), the third the unification of nations to address global problems (26%). Other variants of the national idea including the creation of a common European home, return to socialism, establishment of liberalism principles enjoyed little support among Russians (Gorshkov, 2011). As for patriotism as an idea, it is as noted by sociologists, quite positively perceived by the mass consciousness of Russians but Russian patriotism is not too critical and self-critical (Gorshkov, 2011). In this regard in the Russian society the national idea of patriotism as a love for the country should be combined with the idea of citizenship as a person’s readiness to actively participate in the life of the community and the responsibility for his deeds and actions. However, citizenship is a problematic aspect of the Russian society, since according to sociological data, “only 11% of the Russian population mentioned the desire to be useful to society and to contribute to the development of the country as one of their three main wishes” (Gorshkov, 2011).

The synthesis of state-civil and ethno-national consciousness presupposes not only a unitive national idea but the common public values, consolidating Russian society. Public values are inherent in different social including ethnic groups, diverse and variable. Therefore, the value policy as a management activity should be carried out not just relying on the current state of public values as social preferences but also purpose fully diversifying the structure of these values in the context of dialogue between the government, national community and ethnic groups.

It should be noted that the formation of the Russian nation as an imaginary community and hence of Russian national identity should be the result of not only state but also social construction based on the values that have been established in the Russian society under the influence of moral and spiritual traditions, first of all,

under the influence of such basic values as justice, peace, freedom, unity, morality, dignity, honesty, solidarity, family, good, diligence, self-restraint, sacrifice, faith, homeland, freedom (SG, 2011, 2013).

## CONCLUSION

The formation of Russian national identity is one of the most significant “challenges” for today’s Russia because this identity is seen on the one hand as a factor in the consolidation of Russian society and national integration as well as a necessary condition for Russia’s entry into the international community and promotion its influence in the international arena, on the other hand as a basis for setting the general life goals and developing a sense of security as part of the Russian society.

The liberal project proposed under the conditions of modernization that began in 1990's was aimed at the formation of civil nation and civil identity in Russia but however, it was not realized due to the social and cultural specifics of the Russian society and the peculiarities of the Russian mentality.

The early 21st century marked the formation of Russian multi-ethnic political nation, uniting Russian citizens and in the Russian society national-state or state-civil identity became predominant. The basis of such identity was composed by public awareness and statist culture, involving, primarily, loyalty to the state.

At the same time, the dominance of nation-state identity in the modern Russia (“we are the citizens of Russia”) does not remove from the Russian “agenda” the item of the relevance of ethnic identities which are predominant in the national regions among the titular nationalities. Despite some compatibility of the national government and ethnic identities, it was not enough to reduce the potential disintegration of ethno-national differences in the Russian society. In this regard, the question of strengthening Russian national identity became more urgent in line with the intensification of the national policy aimed at the harmonization of interethnic relations in today’s Russia.

As a result, the scientific discourse has increased interest in the problems associated with the formation of national civilizational identity in Russia as a state-civilization (or country-civilization). However, various options for designing this kind of identity faced with a number of difficulties which are due to the facts that, firstly at the present time, there are different views about what is civilizational identity; secondly, different civilizational images of Russia as an identity matrix are offered; thirdly, civilizational identity matrix is on the periphery of the mass consciousness of Russians.

In this regard, a project of the formation of trans-ethnic Russian nation as multinational people of Russia and consequently of Russian national identity on the basis of national ideas and values, consolidating Russian society currently appearsto be more realistic.

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The study was supported by the Russian Humanitarian Science Foundation, the project No. 16-03-00545 "Institutional practice in interethnic and interreligious cooperation in the South of Russia: the interdisciplinary analysis and evaluation of potential use in the strengthening of Russian national identity".

#### REFERENCES

- Avksentiev, V.A. and B.V. Aksyumov, 2013. Russians: From the civil to civilizational identity. *Sci. Meaning Caucasus*, 4: 31-37.
- Calhoun, S., 1995. *Critical Social Theory: Culture, History and Challenge of Difference*. Wiley, Oxford, England, ISBN:9781557862884, Pages: 356.
- Castells, M., 1997. *The Information Age: Economy, Society and Culture, the Power of Identity*. Wiley, Cambridge, England, ISBN:9781557868749, Pages: 461.
- Drobizheva, L.M., 2012. Russian identity and harmony in inter-ethnic relations: Experience of 20 years of reforms. *Russ. Nation Rep.*, 5: 17-18.
- Gorshkov, M.K., 2011. Russian society as it is: Experience of sociological diagnosis. Ph.D Thesis, Russian Academy of Sciences, Moscow.
- Gorshkov, M.K., 2016. Russian Society as it is: Experience of Sociological Diagnosis. New Chronograph Publishing House, Russia, Pages: 176.
- Huntington, S., 2004. *Who are for We? The Challenges to America's National Identity*. Simon & Schuster, New York, USA., ISBN:0-684-87053-3, Pages: 433.
- Inozemtsev, V.L., 2013. *Lost decade. The Moscow School of Political Studies*, Moscow, Russia.
- Laclau, E., 1995. Universalism, Particularism and the Question of Identity. In: *The Identity in Question*, Rajchman, J. (Ed.). Routledge, New York, USA., ISBN:0-415-90618-0, pp: 93-110.
- Lubsky, A.V., 2005. Civilizational image of Russia. *Socio Humanitarian Knowl.*, 4: 47-61.
- Lubsky, A.V., 2013. Identity: Methodological problems of discursive practices. *Socio Humanitarian Knowl.*, 11: 96-103.
- Lubsky, A.V., 2017. *Methodology of Social Research*. INFRA-M Publisher, Moscow, Russia.
- Lubsky, A.V., E.Y. Kolesnykova and R.A. Lubsky, 2016. Mental programs and social behavior patterns in Russian society. *Intl. J. Environ. Sci. Educ.*, 11: 9549-9559.
- Lubsky, A.V., Y.G. Volkov, G.S. Denisova, V.P. Voytenko and K.V. Vodenko, 2016. Civic education and citizenship in modern Russian society. *Indian J. Sci. Technol.*, Vol. 9, 10.17485/ijst/2016/v9i36/102035.
- Martin, D.C., 1995. The choices of identity. *Soc. Identities*, 1: 5-20.
- Melucci, A., 1996. *Challenging Codes: Collective Action in the Information Age*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, ISBN:0-521-57843-4, Pages: 447.
- Neumann, I.B., 1998. European identity, EU expansion and the integration/exclusion nexus. *Altern.*, 23: 397-416.
- Pantin, V.I. and V.V. Lapkin, 2004. The transformation of national and civilizational identity of modern Russian society: Problems and prospects. *Social Sci. Present*, 1: 52-63.
- SG., 2011. Speech of his holiness patriarch at the opening of 15th world Russian people's council. Stack Group, Bootle, England. <http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/1495312.html>.
- SG., 2013. Speech of his holiness patriarch Kirill at the opening of 17th world Russian people's council. Stack Group, Bootle, England. <http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/3334783>
- Sanina, A.G., 2011. Formation of Russian identity: Civil-state approach. *Sociological Stud.*, 12: 1-58.
- VIDC., 2013. Meeting of the international discussion club Valdai. Valdai International Discussion Club, Veliky Novgorod, Russia. <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/19243>
- Volkov, Y.G. and A.V. Lubsky, 2016. Patriotism in Russia: National idea or propaganda?. *Institute of Modern Russia, Rostov-on-Don, Russia*. <https://imrussia.org/en/special-projects/2565-patriotism-in-russia-national-idea-or-propaganda>.
- Volkov, Y.G. and A.V. Lubsky, 2017. Reflection upon Russian sociology and Russian reality. *Socio Humanitarian Knowl.*, 2: 184-205.
- Volkov, Y.G., 2016. Construction of all-Russian identity in the context of ethnic and religious interactions. Science and Education Foundation, Rostov-on-Don, Russia.
- Zvereva, G., 2009. How should we be called now? Formulae of collective identity in modern Russia. *Publ. Opin. Rep.*, 1: 1-83.