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**SOCIOLOGICAL RESEARCH OF POPULATION VITAL  
ACTIVITY BASED ON A MUNICIPAL RESIDENTS' SURVEY**

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***Abstract***

The methodical tools development of a complex sociological research of the population activity assessment results based on residents' survey is the important mechanism of the analysis of socio-economic development conditions, strategic interests and scenarios of municipal unit. Definition of objective assessment of the population activity on the municipal formation territory "Staromajnskij district" of the Ulyanovsk region for practical actions of local governments based on the sociological research results "How is living in the Staromajnskij district" is an objective of this research. General scientific methods of research: questioning, system analysis, comparison and analogy method, generalization method, statistical analysis methods, content analysis, graphical and tabular methods of data visualization were used in the work. The organization and carrying out a sociological research of the population activity assessment of the municipal formation "Staromajnskij district" allowed to reveal the social well-being levels, life conditions, domestic territories arrangement, objects of social and cultural-consumer services, transport infrastructure, ecological situation, socio-economic problems of the Staromajnskij district, its competitiveness and development prospects. The research selection was 1100 respondents of local community, subjects of small and medium-sized business, local governments and public organizations representatives. The economic efficiency and significance of the work are due to the need to justify the system of goals, objectives and strategic directions of municipal unit development till 2030 providing its competitiveness and economic growth in the long term, as well as the formation of methodological recommendations for the organization of a work system to improve populations' livelihoods.

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**Keywords:** Municipal unit, vital activity, population, strategy, social well-being level, social and economic problems.



## 1. Introduction

The social and economic reforms undertaken in recent years have caused considerable changes in life of the Russian society. There was a need to identify priorities and make effective management decisions in the activities of local governments to improve the population's livelihoods for medium and long-term prospects. Programs of territories' strategic development are developed to create the comfortable environment, increase in level and the population life quality.

In recent decades, there has been a rapid decline in the population in many municipalities. Traditionally objective social and demographic and economic processes are the reasons of such dynamics, as well as lack of a regional agglomeration that contribute to the population outflow to large, more developed and attractive cities having the developed social infrastructure and providing more opportunities for labor and social individual's realization (Makarova, 2017; Bazzhina, 2015).

The development of methodical tools of a complex sociological research of the population vital activity assessment results based on a resident's survey is an important mechanism of the social and economic development conditions analysis, strategic interests and scenarios of the municipal unit development (Malganova & Zagladina 2015). Socio-economic monitoring is one of the tools that can monitor changes in the needs of the population that occur over time, identify the points of greatest social tension, allowing to carry out the action program that most gently overcome the negative phenomena existing in the social sphere of a particular region or municipal formation (Mishnina, 2014; Nazarova, 2014).

## 2. Problem Statement

Combination of such types of influence as administrative (state) and self-organization (self-government) is feature of municipal management in the social sphere. It is implemented at the local level, his object of influence is sustainable social and economic development of local population which provides his comfortable accommodation in this territory (Degtyareva, Chulkova, & Torbina, 2015; Bondarenko, 2016). Carrying out regular monitoring of lifes' quality of the municipal unit population, social problems identification is one of the Territorial Department improvement directions allowing to reduce uncertainty of the surrounding social environment and to develop mechanisms for protecting the social interests of the municipal unit population (Burova, 2009; Morgan, 2014). Regional sociological researches give the chance to really control the course of economic and social processes, based on the results of public opinion surveys (Ilin, 2014; Guschin, 2016).

The urgency of the research is the need to create a system of goals, objectives and strategic directions for the development of the municipality until 2030, ensuring its competitiveness and economic growth in the long term, as well as the formation of methodological recommendations for the organization of work on improving the livelihoods of the population (Gotlib, 2017). This work shows the special importance of carrying out similar researches as it provides to municipal unit materials for assessing the conditions of daily life and work of the "Staromajnskij district" of the Ulyanovsk region residents, as well as identifying key problems.

### 3. Research Questions

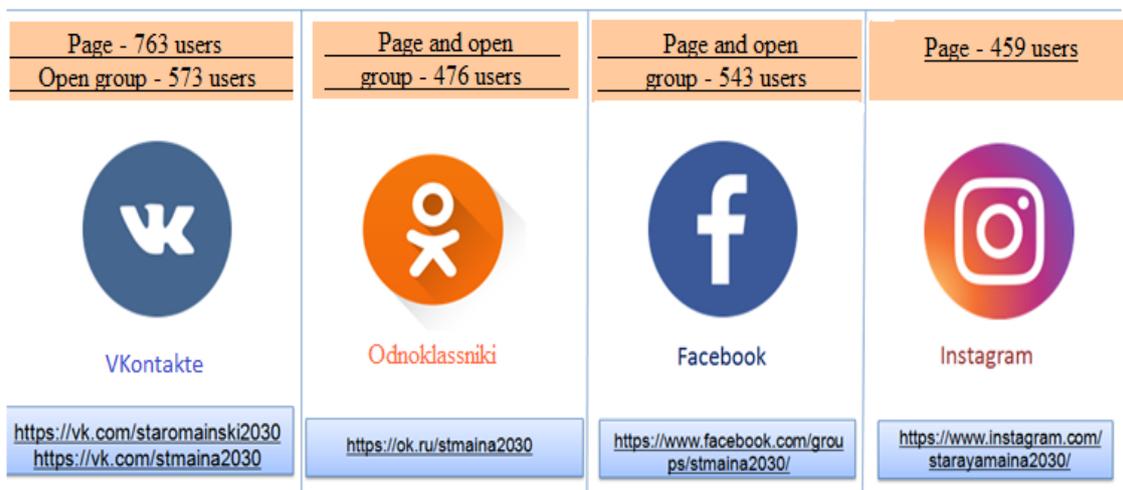
The organization and carrying out a sociological research of the population activity assessment of the municipal formation “Staromajnskiy district” allowed to reveal the social well-being levels, life conditions, domestic territories arrangement, objects of social and cultural-consumer services, transport infrastructure, ecological situation, socio-economic problems of the Staromajnskiy district, its competitiveness and development prospects.

### 4. Purpose of the Study

Definition of objective assessment of the population activity on the municipal formation territory “Staromajnskiy district” of the Ulyanovsk region for practical actions of local governments based on the sociological research results “How is living in the Staromajnskiy district” is an objective of this research.

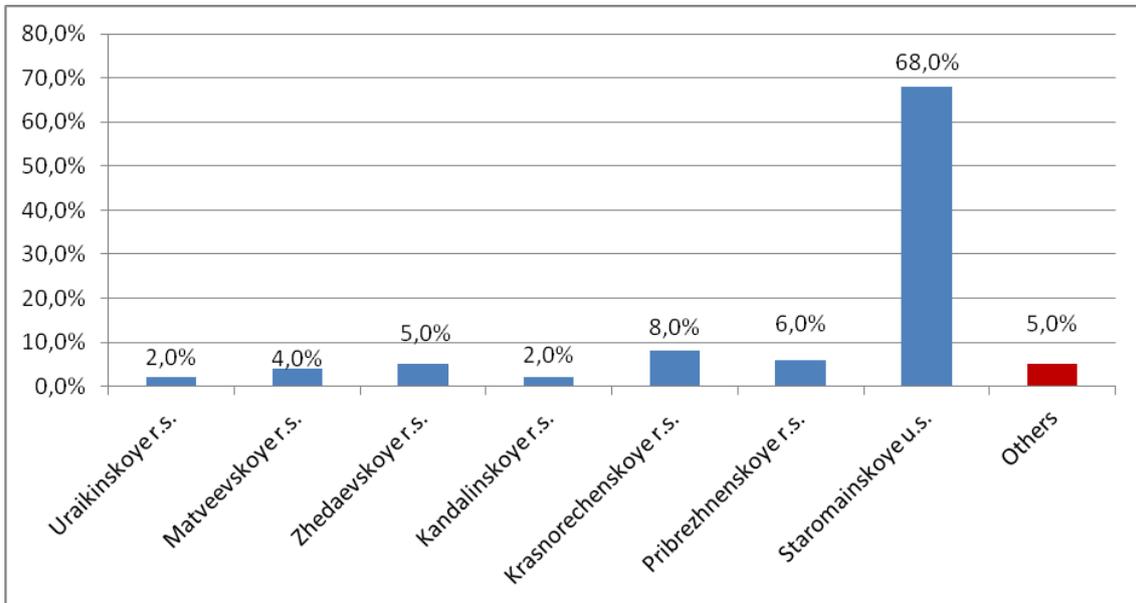
### 5. Research Methods

The sociological analysis which is carried out on the basis of application of the questionnaire method became the main method of a research. The group of research scientists of the regional development institute of the Samara state university of economics (SSEU) has conducted a research to identify an objective assessment of the population vital activity on the municipal formation territory “Staromajnskiy district” of the Ulyanovsk region. The research was conducted from October 2016 to February 2017. The research selection was 1100 respondents. Methodology for collecting sociological information: offline – through the work organization in Staromajnskiy district's rural settlements, and online - through groups and pages V Kontakte, Odnoklassniki, Facebook, Instagram (Baker, Bradburn, Johnson, 1995), official site of the municipal formation “Staromajnskiy district” (<http://stmaina.ulregion.ru>) and Internet portal “Staraya Mayna 2030” (<http://www.stmaina2030.ru>) (Figure 01).



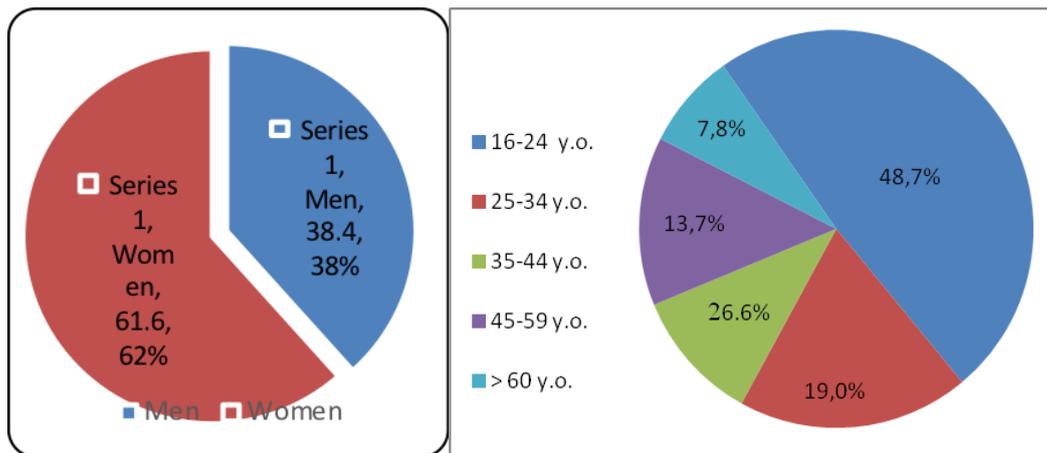
**Figure 01.** Methods of information collection, N=1100 people

The populations' survey has been conducted in all seven settlements of the area for life quality assessment. The number of selection has been distributed on geographical points in proportion to the number of adult population and according to gender and age structure in each municipality. Nearly 70% of the interviewed respondents live in the regional center (Figure 02).



**Figure 02.** Territorial section of the survey  
 Source: according to polls

Women predominate among the surveyed population - 62%. Residents aged from 19 up to 35 years were most active in the survey (68%) (Figure 03).



**Figure 03.** Gender and age structure of respondents  
 Source: according to polls

**81%** of respondents - economically active population living in the district since birth or more than 15 years old (pic. 3).

To achieve this goal, the following tasks were set in the framework of the study

based on a sociological survey:

- to give a retrospective assessment of residents' financial position of the area;
- to estimate living conditions in the Staromajnskiy district in comparison with area;
- to define attractive and unattractive aspects of life in the municipality;
- to assess the regions' socio-economic development;
- to define the migratory moods of residents.

## 6. Findings

### 6.1. Retrospective assessment of financial situation

The self-assessment of changes in personal financial situation is one of the most important indicators of the socio-economic districts' development. This indicator is especially important in the period of economic difficulties. Every second inhabitant of the Staromajnskiy district retained the level of its financial position over the past year, and almost one in five (20%) could even improve it, despite the difficult social and economic situation in the country. Deterioration of well-being during this period affected almost every third resident of the region (28%).

Among the different population groups of the Staromajnskiy district, age groups are particularly distinguished for this indicator of economic well-being. So, more often than not, young people - 16-34 years (29%) are noted for improvement, and less often - people over 45.

The category of entrepreneurs can also be classified as the most prosperous group of the region's population, where one in three (35%) for the current year was able to increase their material wealth.

In the context of territorial groups, the welfare of the population living in Zhedaevskeye, Krasnorechenskoye, Matveevskoye and Uraikinskoye rural settlements shows a downward trend, among which more than 40% felt a deterioration, while among other settlements of the region, the deterioration was noted by a smaller number of residents - 21%.

The change in the welfare of the population directly influenced the assessment of its income level. The income of every second respondent in the region is below 10 thousand rubles. And, among the part of the population that estimated its income above the subsistence minimum, more than half (55%) note improvement. But the population of the region with an income equal to and below the subsistence level more often notes the worsening of its material wealth in this particular year (32% vs. 28% among all).

Significant is whether the individual positively or negatively assesses his immediate future, despite the importance of assessing the changes that have already occurred in the personal financial situation for him in particular and society as a whole. Особую актуальность видение своего будущего имеет сейчас, когда страна, очевидно, находится в очередном кризисном периоде. The vision of the future has special relevance now when the country, obviously, is in the next crisis period. Nevertheless, residents of the area in general consider that further falling of their welfare won't happen: the share of optimists and those who consider that the financial position of their families in the next year won't change makes the convincing majority (70%).

55% of respondents consider that the level of their welfare at least won't change in the next year, and almost every sixth considers that the standard of living of his family, most likely, will improve. The pessimistic spirit concerning the future is declared by every third resident of the Staromajnskiy district

(30%), at the same time they feel small alarm for possible deterioration in financial position in the next 12 months.

In a section of rural territories more than a third of residents of the Uraikinskoye, Zhedaevskoye and Krasnorechenskoye rural settlement are sure of the welfare growth in the future (25%-42%). The estimates of other territorial groups significantly don't differ from the populations' mood of the area in general.

### **6.2. Assessment of living conditions in the Staromajnskij district in comparison with the region**

In the course of the survey, the inhabitants of the Staromajnskij district assessed the living conditions in the district in comparison with the region as a whole. As can be seen in Figure 6, every second respondent does not see any difference between the general living standard of living and the standard of living in his area (43%).

Worse than the region as a whole, the living conditions in the Staromajnskij municipal district are estimated by 38% of the population. They are opposed by a fifth of the respondents (19%), believing that the district lives still better than the region.

In general, the attitude of residents to their area can be characterized by the expression: «not worse than others», as almost 2/3 of the population believes that the situation in the district is the same as in the whole region, or even better.

The region is more likely to be perceived by a large group, which has a considerable length of residence (they were born and live more than 15 years). In this group, almost half (47%) answered that living conditions in Staromajnskij district are better than in the region as a whole. For this category of the population, one of the factors of the permanence of the place of residence is feelings of patriotism and love of the district.

### **6.3. Attractive and unattractive aspects of life in Staromajnskij district**

Attractive aspects of the life of the Staromajnskij district are considered as factors for the formation of a positive image: first of all, a favorable ecological situation, a beautiful landscape, rich recreational resources - 54% of the respondents.

Further on, attractiveness is followed by a calm, safe life (26%), a satisfactory state of secondary education - a sufficient number and good quality of schools, colleges, technical schools (25%), as well as a good social environment (“good neighbors”), a convenient place for people, actively engaged in tourism; cultural and historical heritage – 23%.

Nevertheless, it should be noted that 35% of respondents noted the lack of attractiveness of any development factors, and also found it difficult to answer. In this regard, it is necessary to intensify information support and popularize successful regional practices and projects among the local community.

Residents of rural settlements distinguish the same attractive features of living in the district as residents of the district center. Nevertheless, it can be noted that, for example, such a factor as “good neighbors” is more likely to attract people living outside the district center (32% versus 25% in the

residents of the Staromajnskij district). And such a factor as “housing is well-maintained and maintained in good condition”, on the contrary, residents in the regional center (16%).

Residents of the Staromajnskij district are primarily concerned with the problems of social infrastructure, such as the lack and (or) the high cost of utilities (water, heat, electricity), labor market problems - shortage of jobs and low earnings. These problems are topical for all residents, regardless of where they live - the district center or other villages.

In addition, the population considers the most actual “claims” to be poor quality of roads and transport facilities, lack of amenities for settlements, poor quality and quantity of medical institutions, and a lack of recreational facilities and cultural facilities.

#### **6.4. Assessment of socio-economic development of Staromajnskij district**

Residents positively assess the development in the physical culture and sports area (38% of respondents) and the sphere of culture (33%) in the context of the main spheres of life. These sectors were overwhelmingly rated by 4 and 5 points on a five-point scale.

Condition assessment of an enterprise climate, agricultural branch, availability and quality of education balances between “three” and “four”. A third of respondents have assessed on «three» a situation in the sphere of natural and historical heritage preservation.

The most acute problems for residents are related to the development of road infrastructure (71% of respondents complain of poor road coverage); low level of industrial development (70%); shortage of jobs and low earnings (68%). In the second place, three unattractive aspects of life in the district are immediately on the topicality: “there are no places for leisure, especially for children and youth» (60%), «poor transport provision and organization of public transport, it's hard to get out of the village to the district center, and to other cities and regions” (59%), “unsatisfactory quantity and quality of medical institutions” (56%).

It is important to note that the key problems of the Staromajnskij district are characterized by the problems of the regional center (according to the survey of 2016, N = 1000 people), in which all the Ulyanovskis allocate poor quality of medical care; lack of jobs; inaccessible housing; bad roads, low quality and high cost of utilities.

#### **6.5. Migratory moods of the Staromajnskij districts residents**

Migration attitudes, on the one hand, are an indicator of the prosperity of the situation in the region - in terms of economic development, labor market resources, ecology and so on. The increase in the number of people who wish to leave and have left for other settlements is the answer to the unfavorable situation in the district, city or region as a whole related to important spheres of human life. On the other hand, citizens' migration patterns are also affected by the resources available to them to move.

If we talk about individual settings for migration, then more than half of the residents do not plan to move anywhere from their native region (55%).

However, the migration threat exists, and it is rather high: every second plans to leave, and the most mobile and young category of citizens up to 30 years (20%). At the same time no more than a quarter of respondents seriously plan moving. The most popular option of moving — the Ulyanovsk city.

The developed public opinion in the area doesn't promote that the youth remained and worked in the area – nearly a half of the interviewed residents of the area would recommend to young people to begin the work in other city, at the same time, than the interviewed inhabitant is younger, he answers those about need of moving more categorically.

But as we see, the share of those who recommend to leave almost twice exceeds a share of those who plan to make it – 48% against 23%. It signals about formation of the adverse social context influencing public assessment of economic capacity of the area.

Deficiency of work places and a low wage, insufficient satisfaction with opportunities of carrying out leisure and rest in the area are the main reasons for potential mobility of the population, first of all youth.

The migration plans are also affected by the length of stay in the district. Thus, a group of citizens who moved to the Staromajnskij district no more than 5 years ago and reside in their village less than 3 years are much more likely to show a desire to leave the district. Aspire to leave, first of all, mobile people living in an area less than others and not yet rooted in it.

#### **6.6. Strategic initiatives of the local community**

Non-indifference to the destiny of the native region is manifested in the interest of residents regarding the prospects for its development.

Among the priority areas more than 2/3 of the respondents pay the greatest attention to the creation of a comfortable living environment and the development of infrastructure. More than half of the respondents believe that it is necessary to attract investments in the region, to shape the business climate and develop the agro-industrial complex. Every third resident noted the formation of a high level of culture and the tourist and recreational potential of the area, as well as the development of foreign economic relations.

The residents allocated road infrastructure, sports facilities (stadiums, sports complexes), places for leisure and recreation among the important objects of construction and reconstruction.

In the context of territorial groups, the most urgent are the reconstruction of social infrastructure facilities (schools, medical institutions, cultural centers, sports complexes, cultural heritage sites) in all settlements of the district; quality roads, job creation, housing for young people.

In the district center of Staraya Mayna there is a high demand from the population for the creation of comfortable public spaces, incl. accessible to people with disabilities: a park, a sports and health complex with a swimming pool, playgrounds, a stadium, a beach, a safe and well-groomed coastal zone, a museum, a shopping mall, a green parking. Especially these facilities are relevant for young people, who most often need a recreational component.

The residents consider the most attractive Staromajnskij Bay and the Temple of the Epiphany to the question “On the basis of what, in your opinion, it is possible to develop tourism in the region? What sights and brands can attract tourists?”.

In addition, the project “1700 of Staraya Mayna” - the history of one of the oldest villages in Russia is highly promising for the formation of a new tourist product.

More than 70% of the surveyed residents of the district (almost 800 people) actively joined the first stage in the process of creating the Strategy. And to the question: "How would you like to see Staromajnskij district in 10-15 years?" the survey participants answered that they want to see the region prosperous, environmentally friendly, beautiful, flowering and well-arranged with excellent roads, with lots of playgrounds and sports facilities, leisure centers, ennobled natural and cultural-historical monuments.

Important is the uniformity of development across the territory: a variety of choice of places for leisure, development, sports activities within the settlement.

Characterizing the area from the economic point of view, the social atmosphere and the conditions for work and growth, that the Staraya Mayna 2030 is a rapidly developing, independent, competitive, investment-attractive and innovative-advanced region with developed industry and agriculture, with a highly developed infrastructure, stable work and a decent standard of living.

Among the frequent offers are the tourist center, the territory of the historical and archaeological museum, a small resort town with polite, culturally educated and smiling people who want to move to live.

## **7. Conclusion**

The results of the research showed that every second inhabitant of the Staromajnskij district retained the level of its financial position over the past year, and a quarter could even improve it. This indicates a fairly favorable level of social well-being of the districts' residents.

Residents of the Staromajnskij district as a whole evaluate the living conditions in their area quite favorably - two-thirds of respondents believe that living in the area is at least «no worse» than in other regional settlements (the region as a whole). No less important is the fact that the majority of those surveyed positively assess the living conditions in their village, and not only in the region as a whole.

Residents of the Staromajnskij district are primarily concerned with labor market problems, which reduce the standard of living in the area - a shortage of jobs and low earnings. These problems are topical for all residents of the district, regardless of the place of residence - the district center or other villages.

In addition, the most relevant «claims» to the social and socio-cultural infrastructure of the district are such as the lack and (or) the high cost of public services (water, gas, heat, electricity, shortage of places of leisure and cultural objects, poor transport security, «get out» from the village to the district center, and to other cities and districts (especially for the residents of the non-district center), the lack of jobs and the unsatisfactory number and quality of health care facilities.

Attractive aspects of the life of Staromajnskij district can be considered as favorable factors for the formation of a positive image of the district - first of all, a good social environment («good neighbors»), security and environmental friendliness of the district, and a satisfactory state of secondary education - a sufficient number and good quality of schools, colleges, technical schools.

The migration threat for Staromajnskij district is low - the absolute majority of residents of the district plan to stay and work in the district. However, the qualitative analysis of those intending to leave Staromajnskij district as a place of permanent residence is alarming, since it shows that the most mobile and young category of citizens are planning to leave the area - people under 30 years old.

At the same time, public opinion in the district does not help young people to stay and work in their area - one out of every four residents of the district would recommend young people to start their work in another city. In addition, one of the significant factors of potential mobility of the population, especially young people, is low satisfaction with the opportunities for leisure and recreation in the area.

Conducting regional sociological research creates the opportunity to really monitor the course of economic and social processes, to give its independent assessment, based on the results of studying the changes in public opinion of the territorial community (Medvedev, 2016; Fetters & Freshwater, 2015).

The conducted research assumes practical use of the received results of interrogation at creation of forecasting-analytical complexes for support of acceptance of administrative decisions in public authorities and local government. The results of the work will be used in the program and project implementation of the Strategy for the Development of the Staromajnskij municipal district until 2030.

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