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**STRATEGY OF SPATIAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE NORTH  
CAUCASUS: THEORETICAL AND APPLIED ASPECTS**

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***Abstract***

The paper addresses the topical strategies of the spatial development of the North Caucasus in conjunction with the specifics of the region's sociocultural space. The North Caucasus is a high-risk macroregion within the structure of the Russian statehood. This is conditioned, on the one hand, by the influence of the intra-regional factors, particularly the region's multi-ethnicity and multi-religiosity, religious extremism, demodernization of the economy, and low living standards. On the other hand, one of the reasons for the growth of territorial disproportions in Russia was the lack of an effective strategy of spatial development as a mechanism of the regions' balanced and sustainable development. The multi-factor and multi-religious nature of the sociocultural medium of the North Caucasus shapes its unique sociocultural features and brings relevance to the processes of implementing the Spatial Development Strategy in the North Caucasus with due consideration for these specifics of the region's sociocultural medium. Study of the provisions of the Spatial Development Strategy of Russia through to 2025 in conjunction with the sociocultural component allows to make a conclusion about the need for broadening the narrative of the concept of spatial development as a change in the territorial organization of settlement and economy factoring in the sociocultural specifics of the region. Peculiar features of the sociocultural medium of the North Caucasus shape the potential of social capital that can be demanded for the efficient spatial and strategic planning of territories.

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**Keywords:** Sociocultural dimension, strategy, spatial development, economy, North Caucasus.



## 1. Introduction

Within the structure of Russian statehood, the North Caucasus is a macroregion with the largest number of clearly pronounced risks. The causes of these risks lie both in the presence of the intraregional problem factors and in the absence of an efficient political and management strategy of spatial development. The central problem factors should be considered to be the high population density, multi-ethnicity and multi-religiosity, religious extremism, nepotism and corruption among political elites, and, as a result, government inefficiency (Starodubrovskaya, et al., 2011). Each of the factors listed above has a high conflict potential by itself, while in combination the destabilizing threats are intensified exponentially.

High population density together with the qualitative changes in production processes, demodernization of the economy, and prevalence of archaic business practices have led to a high proportion of the unemployed population in the region and, as a result, to low living standards and a dramatic increase in the gap between the rich and the poor. The present situation represents a factor of substantial risk.

Within the framework of the Spatial Development Strategy of Russia through to 2025, the North Caucasus is considered a geostrategic region. One of the main problems of Russia's spatial development is assumed to be the issue of serious disproportions in the socioeconomic area and the living standards in different regions of the country, particularly between the geostrategic regions and the other territories of the Russian Federation.

## 2. Problem Statement

This paper presents a study of the specifics of the Spatial Development Strategy of the North Caucasus and its sociocultural components as one of the factors that influence the sustainable and balanced growth of the region and its potential. The draft of the Strategy defines spatial development as changing the territorial organization of the system of settlement and economy of a territory. In our opinion, a systems approach to the spatial development of a region, particularly the North Caucasus, implies a broader interpretation of the definition of spatial development itself, taking into account its sociocultural specifics. We proceed from the definition of sociocultural capital proposed by F. Fukuyama (Fukuyama, 2008). Social capital closely correlates with social norms and values that dominate in this or that community. The ideal condition of social capital is the combination of "norms that appeared as a result of rational choice" and, on the other hand, those that were inherited by the society from its ancestors and are irrational in their essence. It is natural that, within the space of interethnic conflict interaction, irrational social norms will most frequently act as dominants of social capital, as they bear both the functional nature, uniting the members of a single ethnic community, and the dysfunctional one, preventing collaboration with other ethnic communities.

In this sense, the values in traditional societies are binary in their character because, on the one hand, they preserve a certain level of trust in the society where the system of values was being blurred throughout the post-Soviet period. On the other hand, they act as a sort of a limiter of cultural change in the context of the theory (Inglehart & Welzel, 2011) that postulates, on the basis of analyzing a large amount of data, that economic development or modernization in the socioeconomic area condition the movement from the traditional values towards the secular and rational ones, from the values of survival to those of self-expression. Cultural changes, in their turn, lead to democratization in the process of human development.

The object of this study is the North Caucasus as a macroregion with unique sociocultural specifics.

### **3. Research Questions**

The subject of this study are the processes of spatial development within the framework of the relevant Strategy and their main trajectories, as proposed for geostrategic territories. The applied aspect of the research is expressed in that assessing the possibilities and limitations of the Strategy will allow to make more accurate implementation forecasts and ultimately make the necessary adjustments to the Spatial Development Strategy of the North Caucasus.

### **4. Purpose of the Study**

The goal of this research is to study the trajectories of spatial development of the North Caucasus proposed in the Strategy in the context of the declared objectives and taking into account the region's sociocultural specifics. An important target function of the research is developing proposals for the improvement of the Strategy and the regulatory framework in what concerns regulating the processes of the spatial development of territories.

### **5. Research Methods**

The following composition of methods was used to achieve the stated objectives: state statistics data from the government agencies of the North Caucasian Federal District (NCFD), mass media content analysis, secondary analysis of sociological data.

### **6. Findings**

If one is to proceed from the thesis about the main contradiction of the modern culture as the competition between modernity and traditionalism, between the secular and religious models of the sociocultural revolution, it is necessary to note the sufficiently visible manifestations of this contradiction in the sociocultural medium of the North Caucasus (Aksiumov, 2013).

Since the region is markedly poly-ethnic, the so-called ethnic component is included in a number of important issues, which causes the high dynamics of ethnopolitical activity (Avksentev, Gritsenko, & Dmitriev, 2008), while ethnopolitical instability is dominant in the regional conflict process. The collapse of the Soviet Union caused a crisis of ethnic identity, which resulted in an upsurge of aggression and ignited several armed conflicts. It should be noted that at the moment the government has gained significant experience in restraining the escalation of ethnic confrontations without allowing new flashpoints of violence to emerge. But the topic of ethnicity still remains one of the most dangerous and hard to resolve, especially in the context of contested territories.

A particularly important risk factor for the region is religious extremism and terrorism. This problem is the catalyst that shapes the attitude towards the North Caucasus in the entire Russian society and influences the establishment of the nationwide identity.

All the risk factors mentioned above could have been overcome if corruption among government agencies were minimized. The crisis of management in the region is also caused by the absence of orderliness within agencies and lack of responsibility of the regional government bodies. The paradox of

the situation lies in the fact that the people in charge of virtually all republics of the North Caucasus are appointees of the federal center. Efficient development of this region can not be achieved without a fundamental reconstruction of its human resource policy.

But first of all, to overcome or minimize the risks in the region, the country's leadership should determine the status of the North Caucasus within the Russian state. If the federal government considers the North Caucasus as merely a frontier, peripheral, but at the same time geostrategic territory, then the policy towards the region will be mainly aimed at preserving the status quo. However, if the NCFD is considered as a peer territory within the federated state, the policy towards it will be built along the lines of stabilization and achieving its self-sufficiency.

It should be noted that the federal government makes certain attempts to enable the NCFD to develop in a qualitatively new progressive direction. However, the development and adoption of various strategies of development throughout the last decades have, unfortunately, yielded no adequate results. This is indicated by the results of the study by RIA Rating in 2016 that demonstrate the condition of different regions according to social and economic indicators. Among the regions of the North Caucasus, on; Stavropol Krai (ranking 37th) and the Republic of Dagestan (ranking 55th) have decent positions. All other republics are obvious outsiders: the Chechen Republic is 74th, the Republic of North Ossetia-Alania is 77th, the Karachay-Cherkess Republic is 78th, and Ingushetia is 79th. In the meantime, official sources claim that the government policy of the regional development of the Russian Federation is aimed at ensuring the sustainable socioeconomic development of its subjects, including that by means of removing the infrastructural restrictions and using the potential of regions and cities to a complete maximum.

The Federal Law of 28 June 2014 No. 172-FZ "On strategic planning in the Russian Federation" envisions designing a document, conceptually new for Russia, that would combine the approaches of strategic and territorial planning: the Spatial Development Strategy of the Russian Federation (hereinafter referred to as the Strategy), which is intended to be a "projection" of the socioeconomic development priorities upon a territory, evaluate the existing system of settlement in Russia, and provide suggestions for harmonizing it.

The Strategy should define the priorities, goals, and objectives of the regional development in the Russian Federation, as well as the measures that need to be taken to achieve them. As part of it, the Strategy includes preparing suggestions for improving the system of settlement in the territory of the Russian Federation and the priority directions of stationing the production facilities.

According to the Order of the Government of the Russian Federation of 20 August 2015 "On the content, composition, order of development and approving of the strategy of spatial development and on the order of executing monitoring and control of its implementation", the Strategy is developed to be applied to the entire territory of the Russian Federation with further detailing of its provisions with respect to the specifics of the subjects of the country.

The Strategy of Spatial Development of Russia is developed to ensure the implementation of the provisions of the Strategy of Social and Economic Development of the RF and the Strategy of National Security of the RF, which are legislated in the Federal Law "On strategic planning in the RF". The authors of the concept presume spatial development to be the progressive changes in the country's territorial organization that are the result of the government's actions to improve the organization of settling the

population in the territory of objects of infrastructure. The main idea of the concept could be reduced to creating the conditions for enlarging and broadening the geography of the centers of economic growth (Gimodeeva, 2016). No doubt, this is an interesting idea. But the fact that the concept of the Strategy of Spatial development is adopted for the purpose of implementing the proposals developed in another strategy is alarming.

If the document developed by the Ministry of Economic Development is approved, the first changes to the structure of the regions will become effective as early as 2020. The authors of the concept suggest structuring the regions for the efficient development of the subjects of the Federation based on two topologies: the structural-industrial topology and the problem-based one. In the first case, the republics, krais, and oblasts will be distinguished according to their economic specialization. In the second case, the structure of the regions will depend on the presence of social and economic problems, which are supposed to be resolved by allocating focused financial support from the federation.

If we proceed from the following conditions: low level of personal income (below 75% of the country average), high level of unemployment (over 2 times higher than the country average), low level of private investment activity, low level of actual fiscal capacity due to regional income (below 75% of the country average), and the low total level of business entity activity, the North Caucasus can be considered a problematic region by every measure.

The concept of the Strategy of Industrial Development also suggests dividing Russia into macroregions. They would include the territories of two or more subjects with individual directions of social and economic development assigned to them. A number of principles will be factored in to divide the country into macroregions: The subjects should be adjacent, have the possibility to create shared infrastructure, and supplement each other in terms of industrial development.

It is noted that own administrative subjects should be created for every macroregion. The Ministry of Economic Development suggests creating a federal-level body: a unified ministry or specialized ministries organized on the territorial basis, a number of departments in already existing agencies of an inter-agency spatial development commission.

Support of the geostrategic territories will be carried out by means of forming new and implementing old state programs in a way that their final goal is the increase in a territory's economic competitiveness and the development of human capital.

The interrelation of strategic provisions of spatial development and strategic planning can be performed by means of including the blocks of spatial development management into the latter (Kolmakova, Kolmakova, & Degtiareva, 2018). The unity of the strategy of spatial development and the strategy of social and economic development of a territory or, in other words, the unity of spatial and strategic planning can be considered an axiom that does not require proving.

Analyzing the Strategy of Spatial Development proposed by the Government, it is possible to make a conclusion that it bears little promise for the North Caucasus region because preference and priority is given to the regions with the post-industrial and industrial status, and even the formally significant status of a geostrategic territory, which does not have a solid foundation, does not change the overall situation..

The draft of the Strategy of Spatial Development of Russia through to 2025 determines the following as the main directions of development of the geostrategic territories, including the North Caucasus:

development of the social service industries with outperforming rates as compared to the average values across the country, facilitation of the increase in labor mobility, development of cross-border cooperation, stimulation of small and medium business, etc. Yes, the directions are right, but one can hardly assert that their activation would allow to resolve the main problems of the geostrategic territories.

The expert community also raises certain questions concerning the fact that the prospective economic specialization industries for the NCFD subjects are one and the same within the Strategy: horticulture, animal husbandry, production of food, drinks, and clothing, as well as tourism and health resort services. In the backdrop of the guiding plan for performing a scientific breakthrough in Russia in the nearest years, there appears the impression of a certain dismissal of the North Caucasus from the processes of developing smart economy, introducing high technologies, and other timely processes.

Consequently, the ruling elites of the country currently have no intention of pulling the North Caucasus out of the multiple risk zone. The presence of a problematic region within an enormous country allows the federal government to have a manipulative leverage in critical situations. Besides that, the presence of risks allows the government to keep the region's population in a certain expectation of the worst, in tension, which brings the population's reliance upon power structures and restrains the people from unnecessary passionary upsurges. The feeling of permanent instability in the region's inhabitants allows the political elites of the North Caucasus to use the administrative resource and ensure persistently high voting results in favor of the ruling party.

In this connection, specialists are apprehensive that the concept of the Strategy of Spatial Development may end up being "stillborn" just like many similar documents. Indeed, this is not the first experience: for example, the Strategy of Economic Development of the Federal Districts, including the Strategy of Social and Economic Development of the North Caucasus Federal District through to 2025, had been in the works already but resulted in nothing because it was either incomplete or did not work when the federal agencies were making their decisions. The risk that it would become a purely formal document is very large as it already happened with other similar documents.

However, specialists have a persistent opinion that the federal government bodies have a substantial management resource to shape in the North Caucasus a qualitatively new modernized and safe living space that would mutually complement the elements of the traditional ethnic archaicity. As a matter of fact, the country's government managed to reduce terrorist activity in the region on the eve of the Olympics in Sochi. In the preceding years, federal powers insisted that terrorism can not be overcome. However, 2013 saw terrorist attacks reduced by 19.5% while 2014 was marked with their decrease by 46.9% more. According to the estimates by the National Antiterrorism Committee, in 2015, the number of acts of terrorism in the North Caucasus decreased 2.5 times.

This way, if the state policy shifts from monotonous reacting to situational challenges to the domain of measured and prospective strategy, the ethnopolitical issues and other risk factors in the North Caucasus will receive a qualitatively different analytical context.

According to some researchers (Litvinova, 2018), an undoubtedly significant direction of social modernization should be the actual integration of the inhabitants of the North Caucasus into the Russian society, including the increase in social mobility of the population and solidification of the nationwide identity. The influence of the sociocultural identity on the formation of various behavioral strategies is very

strong in the North Caucasus. Unlike other subjects of the RF, the ethnic and territorial subjects of the NCFD in many of their parameters represent traditional societies, where the so-called "achievement" characteristics, such as the level of education, the prestige of certain professions, and the social status that comes with them, in many ways have different aspects than in other regions of the RF. At the same time, the worldview attitudes and behavioral stereotypes that are determined by modern education trajectories are largely perceived by traditional societies, above all, the rural population of the republics, as a threat to traditional sociocultural identity.

For this reason, during the design and implementation of the Strategy of Spatial Development in the North Caucasus, it is necessary to take into account the specifics of the sociocultural space in the region as it has a multi-factor and multi-layered character. On the one hand, the process of shaping the sociocultural medium of the North Caucasian republics is actively influenced by the ethnic identification matrix dominant in the area of residence, which constructs the local ethnic, religious, and cultural values and spaces. On the other hand, sociocultural identity relies both on the basic components of civic identity, first of all, the purely political ones: "state" and "politics", and the temporal characteristics: "country", "culture", "nation", etc. That is why the shaping of sociocultural identity in the people of the North Caucasus largely depends, on the one hand, on the actualization of the mechanisms of "traditional" identity based in the constant reproduction of the same archaic practices. On the other hand, the shaping of sociocultural identity is significantly affected by certain *modernization* processes that, under the influence of both the objective and subjective factors, can actualize and become dominant in particular circumstances.

In our opinion, successful implementation of various state strategies in the North Caucasus will always depend on the basic components of the common Caucasian sociocultural model, for example, such as: civic identity values (*attitudes to and impressions of the country called Russia, the "state", federal-level leaders, Russian cultural values: writers, musicians, etc.*); values of the area of residence (*attitudes to and impressions of the ethnic culture and basic ethnic patterns, influence of family on the shaping of the system of values and regulations, attitude towards the regional leadership, etc.*); images within the "friend-or-foe" dichotomy.

Modern economics includes a large number of various schools and approaches with different interpretations of the reasons for the inequality of the distribution of the world's wealth, the prosperity of some countries or territories or the others, and the prospects for economic development.

For example, some researchers (Bodrunov, 2018) link the priorities of the breakthrough in science and technology with the notion of *noonomics*, which means such qualitative changes in material production that, in a certain sense, symbolize the end of the economic civilization and the domination of economic rationality and mark the development of humans' ability for sensible self-restraint and cultural imperatives.

J. Stiglitz (Stiglitz, 2015), a recipient of the Nobel Memorial Prize in Economic Sciences, while noting that an economic system with a large "social capital" is more productive, considers that, in a broad sense, trust is the foundation of social capital, when the social interaction between people is built in the principles of justice and respect for the individual.

Regardless of which economic school does a person adhere to, whether one speaks of geographical determinism that considers geographical location as the most significant factor determining the major trends in the development of the territory's economy, or if one speaks of the school of cultural determinism that

postulates the idea of the domination of cultural values and traditions in the process of economic development, what matters is the discussion to identify certain basic factors of successful development of territories, organizations, and people themselves.

In the context of the issue that we are addressing, a particularly interesting idea is that of the significance of the extractive and inclusive institutions (Acemoglu, 2015), or in other words the institutions that extract or squeeze and those that include, unite. Extractive institutions exist to ensure the maximum enrichment of small social groups at the expense of the society, while inclusive economic institutions are linked to protecting property rights and the freedom of contracts and trade.

The issue of the efficiency of inclusive and extractive economic institutes in the context of societies that preserve a certain degree of traditional practices gains special significance and requires further research.

When analyzing the situation in the North Caucasus, one needs a clear understanding of that the issues that currently exist in the region are systematic in their nature and there exists no single solution for the economic, ethno-demographic, and cultural problems: they are not just interconnected, they are mutually conditioned. The national and territorial subjects of the NCFD need a long-term policy of complex regional modernization that would include both the economic and cultural determinants (Kanukova, Kulova, & Fedosova, 2011). In order to form a solid foundation for the national strategy of Russia in the North Caucasus, it is necessary to, first, determine the constants in the socio-political, economic, and sociocultural development of the region throughout the entire period of its Russian constituency and, second, identify the basic social processes in the current situation that will determine the future for a sufficiently long term.

## **7. Conclusion**

The multi-factor and multi-layer nature of the sociocultural medium of the North Caucasus shapes its unique sociocultural features and brings relevance to the processes of designing and implementing the Spatial Development Strategy in the North Caucasus with due consideration for these specifics of the region's sociocultural medium. On the one hand, there is the influence of the ethnic identification matrix on the process of shaping the region's sociocultural space. At the same time, on the other hand, sociocultural identity relies on the basic components of civic identity. It is this duality that determines the multidirectionality of the processes of forming the sociocultural identity of the people of the North Caucasus when the mechanisms of "traditional" identity based on the perpetual reproduction of the same archaic practices coexist with innovative practices that appear in the course of certain processes of modernization.

Studies of the specifics of the Strategy of Spatial Development through to 2025 in conjunction with the sociocultural component allow to make the following conclusions.

Section 1 of the Strategy should be supplemented with the definition of spatial development in a new edition: spatial development is the change in the territorial organization of the system of settlement and economy with consideration for the sociocultural specifics of the region.

When analyzing the sociocultural medium of the NCFD, it is necessary to factor in the dichotomy "individualism/collectivism" that shows that the level of collectivist values in the North Caucasian societies

is higher than that of individual values. The domination of collectivism over individualism is rather traditional for the peoples of the North Caucasus because the archaization of everyday life also led to the archaization of social and cultural interactions.

Peculiar features of the sociocultural medium of the North Caucasus shape the potential of social capital that can be demanded for the efficient spatial and strategic planning of territories.

The uncertainty of the status of geostrategic territory in the draft of the Strategy of Spatial Development of Russia through to 2025 and the lack of effective mechanisms to support this status undoubtedly decrease its significance.

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