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Urban planning policy in the context of levelling spatial heterogeneity in the development of Russian regions

The paper deals with the problem of spatial heterogeneity of development of the regions of the Russian Federation and the role of urban planning policy in balancing the dynamics of socio-economic development of the country's territories. It is revealed that main factors contributing to imbalances in socio-economic development of territories are disproportions in distribution of funds and human capital which are the most important economic resources. The author claims that urban planning policy, which provides a high-quality living environment, plays a crucial role in increasing the attractiveness of the territory in terms of attracting investment and human resources. The author analyzes several provisions of the new Spatial Development Strategy of Russia and concludes that these provisions may further increase spatial inequality of the regions' development.

Keywords: *spatial heterogeneity, distribution of investments and human capital, urban planning policy, urban development policy, spatial development strategy*

INTRODUCTION

The issues of spatial development heterogeneity are typical for all macro-territorial states including Russia. Heterogeneity of spatial socio-economic development is primarily caused by imbalances in distribution and consumption of economic resources. In economic theory, studies of the notion "economic area" have been carried out since the beginning of the 20th century. A detailed retrospective analysis of these studies is presented in the works of K.S. Goncharova & G. Shelomentsev (2022) [1], and N.V. Zubarevich & S.G. Safronov (2024) [2]. However, extensive research of spatial economic development heterogeneity began to be carried out only in the second half of the 20th century when the problems of socio-economic inequality started worsening worldwide. The issue of spatial development heterogeneity can be considered in three domains:

1. Global — cross-country distribution of economic resources.
2. National — interregional distribution of economic resources.
3. Regional — territorial distribution of economic resources between settlements.

This article deals with the problem of spatial development heterogeneity of the Russian Federation which manifests itself in heterogeneity of socio-economic development of the country's regions. Analysis of various aspects of this problem is given in the works of many Russian scientists including O.V. Artemova & A.N. Savchenko [3], A.N. Bufetova [4], N.V. Zubarevich [2, 5], E.A. Kolomak [6], V.Yu. Maslikhina [7], P.A. Minakir [8], T.P. Skufina, [9], S.G. Safronov [2] et al.

The author believes that major economic resources that determine the level of development of a particular region are financial capital and human capital. At the same time, distribution of these resources is considerably pre-determined by

the development level of a particular territory. The research conducted by P. Mourao, A. Popescu [10] contains the results of an in-depth bibliographic analysis of various authors' works of theoretical and empirical studies of causal connection between investment, economic growth and competitiveness of a national economy. These studies extend the classic theory of the role of investment as a multiplier-accelerator of economic growth and prove that the relationship between investment, economic growth and national competitiveness is complex and multi-faceted. Apart from that, almost all studies show that there is a reciprocal impact of investment on economic growth, which means that investments act as a multiplier and accelerator of economic growth and an increased national competitiveness, but economic growth generates new investments at the same time.

In our opinion, the theory of economic growth can be supplemented by the inclusion of human capital as an accelerator which is the main economic resource at the present time. Not only is human capital the recipient of funds invested into its formation, but also the attractor of new investments into healthcare, education, culture, housing, and infrastructure which are ultimately the drivers of further economic development.

The higher the level of economic development of a country, region, and municipal education is, the greater the generation of economic resources that are further reinvested in the economy of a territory can be, the higher its investment attractiveness and competitiveness in commodity markets, primarily in the markets of investment and human capital, will become.

DATA AND METHODS

An excellent illustration of the issue of spatial heterogeneity in the development of the Russian Federation is the map of distribution of Russian



Fig. 1. Results of Urban Environment Quality Index calculation (the range index values increase from dark blue to light green)¹

cities by value of Urban Environment Quality Index (Fig. 1). The above-mentioned map clearly depicts intense concentration of cities in the European part of the country in terms of quantity and better quality of urban environment.

Significance of the urban environment as the most important factor in attracting human capital and its spatial distribution is confirmed by widespread development of the following urban planning concepts: “Livable City”, “City for People”, “Smart City”, and numerous city ratings such as: ESG-rating², Rating of Sustainable Development of Russian Cities, Index of Development of Russian Cities’ Public Infrastructure, etc.³

According to surveys (Roscongress, 2024)⁴, not all citizens are satisfied with the level of modern urban development. While 87 % of Moscow and St. Petersburg residents are content with urban environment in their cities, only 60 % are satisfied with this aspect in cities with populations under 100,000.

Meanwhile, the level of urban development of territories which determines the quality of the human environment is one of the most important factors in attraction of human capital into the territory and human capital’s spatial distribution, which, in turn, is the main factor of accumulating investment and economic growth (Fig. 2).

The research carried out by the author using the method of multi-dimensional statistical analysis confirmed serious spatial disparities in distribution of investment and human capital across Russian regions and the role of urban development in this process [11]. For example, analysis of demographic dynamics in Russian regions showed that within the period between 2000–2023 the Volga Federal District lost 9.5 % of its population, the Siberian Federal District — 8.9 %,

and the Far Eastern Federal District — 13.2 % (calculated by the author according to Rosstat data⁵). Simultaneously, the analysis of the dynamics and structure of investments showed that in 2023 the volume of investments in the Central Federal District amounted to 33 % of the total amount of investments in the Russian Federation. What is more, the difference between the maximum and the minimum amounts in the regional investments into fixed assets was 537 times — from 7,154 billion rubles in Moscow to 13 billion rubles in the Republic of Kalmykia (calculated by the author according to Rosstat data⁶).

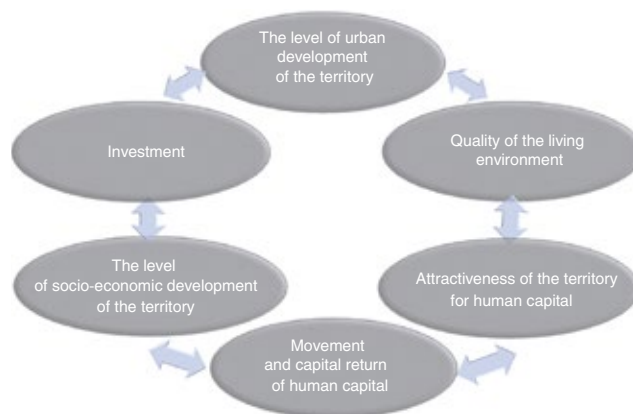


Fig. 2. Reciprocal influence of urban development level on the attractiveness of the territory for human capital and financial capital (Source: compiled by the author)

1 The Urban Environment Quality Index is a tool to assess the quality of a city’s material environment and the conditions in which it is created. URL: <https://xn----dtbcccddstypabxk.xn--p1ai/#/>
 2 ESG-assessment of the development of Russian cities: new conditions – new challenges for territories. *Expert. Rating Agency*. URL: <https://raexpert.ru/docbank/943/216/da5/96383c6a235518f8c09d79c.pdf> (rus.).
 3 Brief information about the ratings of sustainable development of cities and regions of the Russian Federation. URL: <https://irsup.hse.ru/ratingsinfo?ysclid=m7uasnk4qj395202471> (rus.).
 4 The trajectory of Russia’s economic growth, Roscongress. URL: <https://roscongress.org/en/materials/traektoriya-ekonomicheskogo-razvitiya-rossi> (rus.).
 5 The population of the subjects of the Russian Federation as of January 1. Demographic Yearbook of Russia 2023, Rosstat. URL: [torage/mediabank/Pril_Demogr_ejegodnik_2023.xls](https://rosstat.gov.ru/storage/mediabank/Pril_Demogr_ejegodnik_2023.xls) (rus.).
 6 Investments in fixed assets by regions of the Russian Federation. Rosstat, 2024. URL: [torage/mediabank/invest_sub.xlsx](https://rosstat.gov.ru/storage/mediabank/invest_sub.xlsx) (rus.).

► DISCUSSION

Spatial heterogeneity in distribution of funds and human capital across Russia is not only of socio-economic significance, but also of geopolitical importance: lack of investment and loss of human capital inevitably led to a recession in economy, gradual degradation of territories, social unrest and increased migration of people from underdeveloped territories to developed economic regions of the country.

Formation of a balanced system of spatial development of the country aiming to achieve national goals, improvement of territorial economic conditions as part of the national economy, measured placement of production and population are the most important tasks of the state economic policy at this time.

The report⁴ considers main factors determining the trajectory of Russia's economic development. The authors of this document draw attention to the fact that "there is a need to reconsider traditional approaches to the spatial development of territories. New approaches must be based on polycentric development models, balanced regional growth, and stimulating investment attractiveness not only in major megacities but also in smaller towns and rural areas".

In order to form a new model of regional development, the new Spatial Development Strategy of Russia has been adopted⁷.

The strategy is designed to reconcile the priorities of spatial and industrial development in order to ensure a balanced spatial development of the state economy (Fig. 3). Despite the relevance and significance of the new document, it should be mentioned that it does not say anything about how the new urban planning policy should be put into practice in terms of levelling the spatial development of the country. In addition, Strategy contains provisions that in our opinion will further aggravate the uneven spatial development. In particular, the following aspects of Strategy:

- ensuring infrastructural development based on economic efficiency indicators which means making a decision

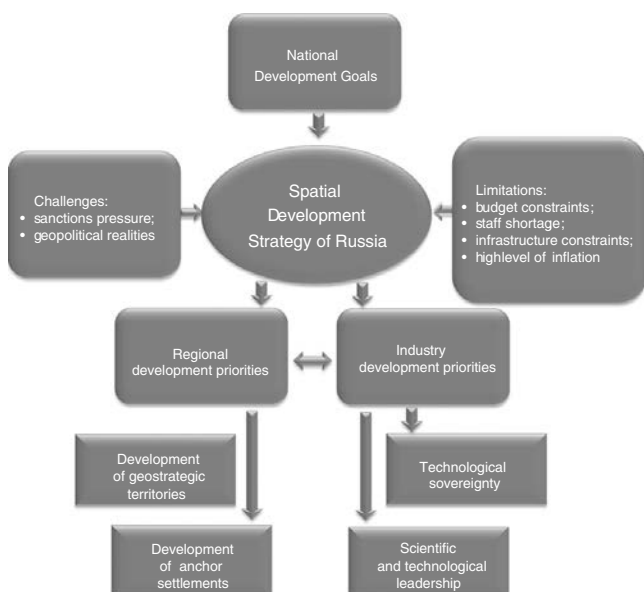


Fig. 3. Challenges, Limitations and Priorities of Russia's Spatial Development Strategy (Source: compiled by the author)

on implementation of a project based on assessment of socio-economic effects of the project and prioritizing projects based on this assessment. It is obvious that any development project will have a greater efficiency when implemented in a large agglomeration with a large population and high incomes. This means that infrastructure projects will continue to be implemented in regions with a high level of socio-economic development;

- increasing the level of independence of territories in solving issues of socio-economic development because of growth of their own incomes and measured policy in the field of inter-budgetary relations. This means that the issues of socio-economic growth in limited-budget territories will not be solved due to budget constraints. It is obvious that this will primarily affect urban planning policy.

Urban planning policy is the prerogative of local authorities. Development of territorial planning documents, as well as development of norms for urban planning regulation require considerable financing. In addition, implementation of investment projects within the framework of government programs and national projects often requires co-financing using local budgets, while participating in such programs presupposes pre-emptive financing from local budgets of pre-investment feasibility studies and project designs. They all require significant financial expenditure on the part of local authorities. Meanwhile, the total amount of local budget revenues in 2023 amounted to 7,136.9 billion rubles which is only 26 % in the budget system of the Russian Federation. At the same time, budget transfers amount to 4,811.0 billion rubles within local budgets⁸. Only 13 % of local budgets is spent on economic development as the major part of budget funds is invested into education and housing and utility services.

CONCLUSION

Levelling spatial development heterogeneity of the Russian territory is crucial for socio-economic and geopolitical situation. Urban planning policy plays a crucial role in formation of a balanced system of spatial development of the country designed to ensure improvement of territorial organization of the national economy, placement of production and infrastructure facilities. Urban planning regulation needs to be the main tool of implementing schemes of production facilities' placement, comprehensive programs of the development of transport, utility, and social infrastructure.

Urban planning regulation needs to ensure achievement of the most important national development goal – creating a comfortable and safe environment for life, and thus contribute to the achievement of other national goals — preserving the population and improving people's well-being, realizing the potential of each person.

The most important area of urban planning regulation is to be spatial levelling in distribution of funds through tools to support urban development activities in low-budget regions, to stimulate transfer of new investment projects to regions with an evident tendency to depopulation, and to support development projects in anchor settlements.

7 The Spatial Development Strategy of the Russian Federation for the period up to 2030 with a forecast up to 2036. Approved by Government Decree No. 4146-r of dated December 28, 2024. URL: <http://government.ru/docs/53917/> (rus.).

8 The results of monitoring the execution of local budgets and inter-budgetary relations in the subjects of the Russian Federation at the regional and municipal levels for 2023. URL: https://minfin.gov.ru/common/upload/library/2024/06/main/Rezultaty_monitoringa_2024.pdf

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Градостроительная политика в контексте выравнивания пространственной неоднородности развития регионов России

В статье рассматривается проблема пространственной неоднородности развития регионов Российской Федерации и роль градостроительной политики в выравнивании динамики социально-экономического развития регионов страны. Показано, что основными факторами неравенства в социально-экономическом развитии территорий являются диспропорции в распределении инвестиционного и человеческого капитала как важнейших экономических ресурсов. Выдвинуто положение о том, что градостроительная политика, обеспечивающая качественную среду жизнедеятельности человека, играет важнейшую роль в повышении привлекательности территории для инвестиционного и человеческого капитала. Анализируются отдельные положения новой Стратегии пространственного развития России и делаются выводы, что эти положения могут усилить пространственное неравенство в развитии регионов.

Ключевые слова: пространственная неоднородность, распределение инвестиций и человеческого капитала, градостроительная политика, стратегия пространственного развития

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