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# RUSSIA'S SPATIAL DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY: THE BALTIC VECTOR

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## DEVELOPMENT AS A KEY EVALUATIVE CONCEPT OF SPATIAL SYSTEM TRANSFORMATION

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Received 18 May 2024  
Accepted 07 August 2024  
doi: 10.5922/2079-8555-2024-3-1  
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*This article examines the spatial socioeconomic development problems that have emerged prominently in Russia in recent years. A special focus is the notion of 'razvitie' (development) gaining mainstream traction in the vocabulary of Russian politicians, researchers and media professionals. Authoritative scholarly opinions are cited, describing development as a process of changes in objects and phenomena without implying a positive connotation. Using the example of external regulation of anthropogenic spatial systems, it is shown that development should enhance the stability of the systems' functioning, considering their equifinality and potential for self-organisation (self-development). A genetic connection is established between the concept of 'spatial development' and the global advances in economic geography. Attention is paid to the features of spatial and regional development as strategic planning objects. The article also examines the feasibility of accurately assessing the outcomes of a spatial development strategy by quantifying the achievement of its goals and targets. It is emphasised that results highlighting regional disparities and settlement patterns should be compared within groups of similar regions and macro-regions, such as northern, central and southern provinces of European Russia, Siberian territories, the Far East, the Arctic Zone and the republics of the North Caucasus. For demographic processes, comparisons should be based on specific population groups: children, youth, the working-age population, pensioners and migrants. Specific changes in productive forces distribution that align with target indicators should be verified by population assessments based on annual surveys.*

### Keywords:

spatial systems, spatial development, regional development, strategic planning

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**To cite this article:** Leksin, V. N. 2024, Development as a key evaluative concept of spatial system transformation, *Baltic Region*, vol. 16, № 3, p. 4–20. doi: 10.5922/2079-8555-2024-3-1

## Problem setting

The term *razvitie* [development] has been widely used in Russia to describe abstract improvements without specifying their causes or direct and indirect effects. This usage is prevalent in the media, official statements, documents, and in research and popular science publications by social scientists — economists, sociologists, regional scholars and political scientists.<sup>1</sup> It is deemed justified as among over forty most frequent synonyms of development — from ‘anagenesis’<sup>2</sup> to ‘evolution’ — half have a positive connotation. These are ‘renewal’, ‘rise’, ‘movement forward’, ‘progress’, ‘advancement’, ‘prosperity’, ‘expansion’, ‘growth’, ‘enhancement’, ‘maturation’, ‘formation’, ‘improvement’, to name a few. All this translated in the popularity of the word in federal and regional, strategies, plans, programmes, and projects.<sup>3</sup> Although ‘development’ has become a household term, both this concept and its derivative phrases have entered common lexicon only recently. Prof. Viktor Vinogradov wrote in his seminal *History of Words*: ‘In the standard Russian language, verbs *razvivat’-razvit’* and their reflexive counterparts *razvivat’sya-razvit’sya* only expressed concrete meanings (sometimes with professional implications) ensuing from their morphological composition (*razvit’ verevku* [unravel a rope], *razvit’ venok* [undo a wreath], *razvit’ kosu* [undo a braid]). In the last quarter of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the verb *razvivat’* assumed the abstract meanings of the French verb *développer* (and the noun *développement*). A dictionary issued in 1847 contains new, abstract meanings of *razvivat’* (to uncover one’s intellectual abilities) and *razvivat’sya* (to get into grand motion; to multiply, increase, unfold). In his work *Philosophical Principles of Integral Knowledge*, Vladimir Soloviov wrote: *razvitie* “is that series of immanent changes in an organic being that proceeds from a known origin and directs itself toward a known, definite goal”. The change in the meaning of the word *razvitie* occurred under the influence of synonymic convergence with

<sup>1</sup> The word ‘development’ is a common occurrence in everyday speech, where it is usually modified for semantic precision, cf. ‘arrested development during childhood’.

<sup>2</sup> Anagenesis is the evolution of species characterised by the complication of organs, the improvement of their functioning and natural self-development.

<sup>3</sup> A typical example is Russia’s national state programme Industrial Development and Competitiveness. It encompasses 12 projects, the title of each starting with the word *razvitie*. These are federal development projects pertaining to the manufacturing of agricultural machinery, specialized machinery, machinery for the food and processing industries, materials, automotive and transport machinery, capital goods, as well as metallurgy, rare and rare earth metals industry, the forestry industry, staple food industries, industrial infrastructure and regional production cooperation, and the system of technical regulation, standardisation, and metrological assurance.

the scientific term “evolution”, which took place in the 1820–1840s<sup>1</sup>. In recent decades, the lexicon of Russian social science has incorporated the phrases ‘regional development’ and ‘spatial development’ — both a common occurrence in academic writings, political journalism and regulatory acts.

The relevance of this article lies in the potential and often real risk of misapplying the terms ‘development’, ‘spatial development’, and ‘regional development’ to complex, multi-faceted shifts in sociopolitical and socioeconomic environments. As the saying goes, the devil is in the details. Indeed, the details of such shifts, traditionally labelled as ‘development’, tend to conceal phenomena that can undermine, and at times even negate, the seemingly positive result. This contribution aims to demonstrate the possibilities and limitations of the above definitions in evaluating transformations of spatial systems — the elements of the anthropogenic environment of human existence.<sup>2</sup> To this end, I will explore the academic understanding of development as a pivotal and highly complex concept for interpreting changes in both material and ideal phenomena and objects. I will prove the thesis about the stable functioning of spatial systems, highlighting the role of their equifinality and potential for self-organisation (self-development) in their successful transformation. The international origins of the concepts of ‘spatial development’ and ‘regional development’ will be examined, alongside an analysis of their features as objects of government regulation through strategic planning. An integrated evaluation of its effectiveness will be attempted. In preparing this text, I have drawn on my previous research, which is referenced in the third section of this article.

### **Development as the assertion of change**

In his “Rules for the Direction of the Mind”, Descartes wrote (rule XIII): almost all controversy would be removed from among philosophers if they were always to agree as to the meaning of words<sup>3</sup>. I am uncertain whether this is entirely feasible (particularly, ‘among philosophers’), but agreeing to ‘the meaning of words’ becomes a necessity for everyone at some point, and attempts to define development are a proof thereof. The brilliant philosopher, methodologist of science and one of the founders of Russian systemic studies, Erik Yudin, defined development as ‘irreversible, purposive and orderly change in material

<sup>1</sup> Vinogradov, V. V. 1999, *Istoriya slov [History of Words]*. Moscow, Vinogradov Russian Language Institute Press, p. 588–590 (own translation). The quote from Solovyov is cited from: Solovyov, V., *Philosophical Principles of Integral Knowledge*. Translated by Valeria Z. Nollan. Grand Rapids, Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2008, p. 21.

<sup>2</sup> The specifics of spatial systems have been discussed in several of my earlier publications [1–4].

<sup>3</sup> Descartes, R. 1911, *Rules for the Direction of the Mind*. In: Elizabeth, S. Haldane et al. (translators). *The Philosophical Words of Descartes*, Cambridge University Press, p. 51.

and ideal objects... Capacity for development is a universal property of matter and consciousness. Development results in a new qualitative state of an object, a state manifesting itself in a change in its composition and structure (i. e. the emergence, transformation or disappearance of its elements or connections). One of the principal methodological objectives is to form representations of the structure and mechanisms of development, as well as their interconnections with processes of functioning'.<sup>1</sup> The authors of pertinent articles in the *New Philosophical Encyclopedia* share this view. For instance, philosopher, sociologist and methodologist of historical and sociological research Boris Grushin defines development as 'the highest form of motion and change in nature and society, associated with the transition from one quality or state to another, from the old to the new... Naturally, not any change is development, but only that which is connected with transformations in the internal structure of the object, in its system, representing a set of functionally interconnected elements, relationships and dependencies... The emergence or disappearance of any component in its structure is never just a quantitative change, a simple addition or subtraction of "one". It leads to the emergence of many new connections and dependencies, the transmutation of old ones, and so on, i. e. it is accompanied by more or less significant substantial and/or functional transformation of the entire mass of components within the system as a whole'.<sup>2</sup> In the same tome, Lyudmila Markova, a renowned expert in the methodology of history of science, epistemology, and philosophy of science, contributes to Grushin's definitional endeavours: 'Development is the irreversible, progressive change of objects in the spiritual and material world, occurring over time and seen as linear and unidirectional. Ancient philosophy lacked the concept of development as such, primarily due to the cyclical understanding of time... In the Modern era, the notion of linear time and, consequently, the concept of development have become dominant'.<sup>3</sup>

Remarkably, none of the aforementioned authors puts development on a par with improvement, but all refer to changes as such. The idea that such changes must necessarily lead to a positive outcome (improvement) is not inherent in the concept of 'development' itself but is instead suggested by a significant portion of its previously mentioned synonyms. However, in the modern world of numerous highly complex, isolated, systemically interconnected, internally contradictory and even conflicting realities, the well-honed philosophical definitions of development appear in a variety of forms, and the very concept of

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<sup>1</sup> Yudin, E.G. 1975, Razvitie, *Bol'shaya sovetskaya entsiklopediya* [Great Soviet Encyclopedia], Moscow, Publishing House of the Soviet Encyclopedia, vol. 21, p. 409—410.

<sup>2</sup> Grushin, B. A. 2010, Razvitie, *Novaya filosofskaya entsiklopediya* [New Philosophical Encyclopedia]. Moscow, Mysl', vol. 3, p. 397—398.

<sup>3</sup> Markova, L. A. 2010, Razvitie, *Novaya filosofskaya entsiklopediya* [New Philosophical Encyclopedia]. Moscow, Mysl', vol. 3, p. 398—400.

'development' begins to assume new interpretations, becoming an object not only of cognitive but also of regulatory-political nature (for example, 'sustainable development').

In Russia and abroad, scholars absorb the ideas of development acquainting themselves as students with Hegel's vision of the progressive and irreversible movement of scientific knowledge, whose every achievement incorporates the previous in a 'sublated' form. Another important influence is positivists, such as Auguste Comte, John Stuart Mill, and Herbert Spencer, who, following Turgot, Marquis de Condorcet and Henri de Saint-Simon, never doubted the progressive development of human thought and society. The works of adherents of existentialism, phenomenology and post-positivism provide our contemporaries with the idea that the traditional understanding of time as linear and progressive was replaced by a notion of time as a synthesis of the past and future in the supersignificant 'now'. Later, ideas of bifurcations, the transition of equilibrium systems into non-equilibrium states, self-organisation, and 'order out of chaos' came into vogue, alongside the notion that even '[a] small fluctuation may start an entirely new evolution that will drastically change the whole behaviour of the macroscopic system' [5, p. 14]. The pursuit and establishment of new concepts viewing development as both progress and a phenomenon of probabilistic nature have commenced, exemplified by the work of Immanuel Wallerstein, Amitai Etzioni, and Walter Buckley.

Judgments about the consequences of development, progress or evolution are influenced by systematic evaluations of established and new phenomena and objects. For example, the unequivocally positive perception of development as directed towards a beneficial goal increasingly coexists with notions of the crisis-generating nature of concomitant globalisation, urbanisation, and digitalisation. So does the belief in the linear nature of development with its empirically confirmed phenomena of new forms of cyclicity, recurrence and the like. This largely explains the uncasing scholarly exploration of the idea, or theory, of development [6; 7], epistemology and the functioning of sociopolitical systems and institutions [8], commercial and educational organisations [9], and so on. An outstanding study into the reasons behind the growing interest in development issues is found in the work of the well-known Soviet and Russian historian and political scientist Marat Cheshkov [10]. These views on the essence of development cannot be ignored when analysing the possibilities and limitations of applying the concept of 'development' to the transformations of complex objects such as spatial systems.

### **Genesis of the notion of 'spatial development'**

The phrase *prostranstvennoe razvitie* [spatial development] has entered Russian academic vocabulary quite recently, with its emergence closely tied to the growing prominence of the concept of 'spatial economy'. The latter has suppl-

mented the entrenched term ‘regional economy’, sparking discussion on differences and the hierarchical relationship between the two. It is safe to assume that Russian social sciences borrowed the phrase in question from international science exploring the connection between space and the economy in a broad sense. Like any other borrowing, it was selective and, what is more important, adopted in a different, post-perestroika, reality. Until that time, the USSR had garnered unique experience in theoretical understanding and practical implementation of spatial development. Soviet geographers, economists and sociologists created a solid knowledge-based foundation for the spatial organisation of the unique socialist state.<sup>1</sup> Considering its overwhelming administrative control exercised by the party, predominantly popular ownership and planned management of all and everything, they devised a theoretical framework for production deployment and a well-ordered system for settlement and spatial organisation of society. Aware of the ‘capitalist camp’s’ research advances, Soviet scientists could only employ some of the international methodological practices, for instance, mathematical techniques used in economics.

Since the late 1980s, Russia’s social and political system has radically changed; its market economy has opened to the whole world. At the same time, the planned elements in public administration have been considerably reduced, while many uncompetitive companies have closed down. Moreover, growing labour mobility has spurred the concentration of economic and demographic strength in major cities. A new country, classified by analysts as a ‘catching-up state’, has formed over a historically brief period. The same happened to the ‘catching-up’ Russian social science, which was compelled to quickly adopt recent global advances in studying and regulating sociopolitical and socioeconomic processes — something that had been impossible under Soviet rule. Lexical borrowings became commonplace everywhere — from constitutional law to mortgage banking. A particularly significant contribution to the strategy and practice of Russian spatial development has come from the works of Western geographers and economists, as illustrated by several examples below.

Among the 19<sup>th</sup>-century works, modern Russian scholars most frequently reference Johann Heinrich von Thünen’s *Der isolierte Staat in Beziehung auf Landwirtschaft und Nationalökonomie* [11], where the basic principles of spatial economics are examined through a specific example. Another commonly cited book dating back to the same period is Alfred Marshall’s *Principles of Economics* [12], which reveals the reasons for economic concentration in cities. As for 20<sup>th</sup>-cen-

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<sup>1</sup> A. G. Aganbegyan, G. A. Agranat, A. D. Armand, M. K. Bandman, P. Ya. Baklanov, N. N. Baranskiy, A. G. Granberg, N. N. Kolosovskiy, I. M. Mayergoiz, V. P. Maksakovskiy, P. A. Minakir, G. M. Lappo, O. P. Litovka, V. Ya. Lyubovny, E. N. Pertsik, A. E. Probst, O. S. Pchelintsev, B. B. Rodoman, Yu. G. Saushkin, B. S. Khorev, R. I. Shniper, and others.

tury ideas, Russian researchers have embraced Walter Christaller's central-place theory [13], which postulates geometric regularities in the distribution of cities of different sizes.<sup>1</sup> August Lösch's ideas about the economic landscape and the possibilities of reconciling the interests of political, market and transport structures, which he formulated in the 1940s, have been known since the Soviet times [15]. Recognising the growing spatial inequality of economic activity over the last thirty years, Russian researchers have shown particular interest in theoretical concepts about growth poles and centres inducing positive changes in a hinterland economy. All these theories have had a major impact on the ideology and language of future regional development policies and spatial development strategies. According to François Perroux, who first advanced the growth pole hypothesis [16], manufacturing organisations are divided into declining, with a decreasing share in the economy; rapidly developing but loosely connected with other economic entities; and briskly developing ones that give rise to 'growth centres' and spur the development of the entire economy. Another growth pole theorist, Jacques Boudeville [17], further expanded these ideas, shedding light on the formation of regional growth poles. He sees these poles as concentrations of developing entities causing their environments to develop as well. These entities may emerge (a) in smaller towns, influencing their immediate surroundings; (b) in larger towns and smaller cities in need of transfers and external investments; (c) in large urban agglomerations; and, finally, (d) within systems of such poles. Later, Pottier [18] proposed an idea, which has attracted keen interest from Russian regional scholars, namely, the concept of development axis — transport networks transmitting development momentum from one growth pole to another, thus shaping their spatial structure. Unfortunately, the ideas of another growth pole theorist, Lasuen [19], have been largely overlooked — specifically, his argument that, despite reflecting the realities of space and the economy, economic growth (and this is a crucial consideration) is not necessarily the result of polarisation.

The principles of the so-called new economic geography have provided considerable impetus for refining academic spatial development concepts. The history of these principles and the outcomes of their theoretical and practical applications are well studied. They have been shown to be a product of intensified international competition and the need to provide a rationale for the cyclical nature of national technological leadership [20], as well as revise economic geography models through the lens of a more serious attitude to geography and history [21]. As an independent school of thought, new economic geography is often linked to the names of Nobel Prize winner Paul Krugman and his co-authors. The

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<sup>1</sup> There were earlier attempts at 'geometrising' economic space. For example, in 1882, Wilhelm Launhardt [14] described a model for optimal location of production as a 'location triangle'.

initially studied the phenomenon of increasing returns amid monopolistic competition in international trade [22], trade policy in third-world metropolises [23] and the link between globalisation and national inequality [24]. Krugman formulated the ideas of new economic geography proper while still focusing on the results of scale economies, production differentiation and patterns of trade [25]. Enthusiastically embraced in the country, these ideas have been applied in Russian governmental documents on spatial development. Krugman's remarkable article 'Increasing Returns and Economic Geography' [26] has been received in much the same way, amply referenced in Russian publications since the late 1990s. Today, every proficient regional scholar in Russia can answer Krugman's question, which he used as the title of his article: 'Where in the world is the new economic geography?' [27].

The theory developed by Paul Krugman and his adherents is not solely based on an analysis of the causes and motives behind the relocation of economic activities at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century [28; 29]. It also draws upon the extensive body of knowledge regarding the spatial development of capitalist economies, from Johann Heinrich von Thünen to John Vernon Henderson [30]. Their theory encapsulates principles regarding the forces driving spatial shifts in economic activity and resources, as well as the mechanisms through which a self-organizing economy 'selects' the required space: where transportation costs are low but the cost of acquiring products is high, a 'core-periphery' spatial structure is formed. One of Krugman's contributions [28] presents a theoretical model of a 'circular economy' with population distributed circularly and production randomly located, leading to the emergence of a core whose scale is inversely proportional to transport costs. Russian regional scholars and policymakers, aiming to combine the principles of market economy and spatial development, have widely adopted Krugman's notions of territorial competitiveness and competitive advantages. The ideas of new economic geography are anything but speculations of ivory tower theoreticians unaware of global economic realities. Instead, they are grounded in the analysis of concrete, but yet universal, situations serving as a snapshot of those realities. Using data from 1970 to 1990, Gordon Hanson examined 3,000 administrative counties in the US to demonstrate the factual relationship between market size, population migration and economic concentration in the 'core-periphery' model [31]. Likewise, Steven Brakman, Harry Garretsen, and Marc Schramm validated these conclusions in the context of the German economy [32], while Takanori Ago, Ikumo Isono and Takatoshi Tabuchi used the principles of the new economic geography to explain population redistribution across different countries over several centuries [33].

'Cluster' and 'agglomeration' are among the terms widely used in Russia and rooted in the spatial development practices of economically advanced countries. They have been frequently employed in Russian publications, dissertations, and



official documents at both federal and regional levels. The concept of 'Russian-style cluster' has quickly gained traction and become well-established, in part due to its resemblance to the Soviet 'territorial production complex'. This similarity is, however, merely superficial, as the latter were theoretically grounded and created as planned structures, while Western researchers described territorial-economic complexes that naturally developed under the influence of spatial systems' self-organisation. The concept of an 'economic cluster', which emerged in the 1990s, is conventionally attributed to Michael Porter, who linked a company's competitiveness to its spatial environment [34]. The factors and outcomes of such clustering have been studied and popularised by dozens of Western scholars, including Peter Maskell and Anders Malmberg [35], Stuart Rosenfeld [36], Allen Scott [37], Christian Ketels [38], Karl Wennberg and Göran Lindqvist [39].

As previously mentioned, the idea of clustering and, what is more important, the possibility to refer to territorial complexes in a Western style became in Russia a symbol of development in itself. In most regions, clusters have emerged beyond the industrial and innovation sectors, including those centered on culture, education, tourism, recreation, creative industries, northern design, winemaking (Don Valley), and others. The administrative encouragement of the formation of large urban agglomerations, followed by medium-sized and even rural ones, has similarly become a symbol of spatial development and an implicit indicator of the 'progressiveness' of regional and municipal authorities. One of my recent works [40] analyses the views of prominent Russian scholars on the systemic effects of sweeping agglomeration.

These and other global research advances have been uncritically adopted by many Russian regional scholars, despite the vast differences in the sociopolitical, economic and spatial environments between Russia and the West. What were initially research findings, descriptions of actual conditions and their theoretical generalisations in the West have often taken on the character of an imperative in Russia, becoming an object of strategic spatial planning. This marks the key difference between the two approaches.

### **Spatial development as an object of strategic planning**

Article 3 of the federal law "On Strategic Planning in the Russian Federation" of 28 June 2014, № 172-FZ (referred to below as 172-FZ) states that 'the spatial development strategy... is a document... aimed at maintaining the sustainability of the settlement system in the Russian Federation'. However, government regulation № 870 On the Content, Composition, Procedure for the Development and Approval of the Strategy for Spatial Development of the Russian Federation and the Procedure for Monitoring and Controlling its Implementation, issued a year

later on 20 August 2015, supplements the above with the ‘removal of infrastructure constraints in the socio-economic development of territories’ and the ‘priority placement of productive forces’, a concept borrowed from the Soviet lexicon.

This understanding of spatial development coexists with a more defined concept of regional development. Paragraph 8 of the Foundations of 2025 State Policy for Regional Development of the Russian Federation, approved by Presidential Decree of 16 January 2017, №13, describes its goals as ‘a) narrowing the disparities in living standards and quality of life of Russian citizens residing in different regions, urban and rural areas; b) reducing disparities in regional socio-economic development; c) providing adequate infrastructure for all populated areas of the country; d) furthering the urbanisation process, particularly the development of large urban agglomerations, as a necessary condition for economic growth, technological development and enhancing the investment attractiveness and competitiveness of the Russian economy in global markets; and e) increasing the level of satisfaction among the population with the government bodies of Russian regions and local self-government bodies’. Paragraph 6 of the said Foundations effectively equates the objectives of regional development with the overall goals of national development, this trend becoming evident in other official documents. One of them is the Concept of the Strategy for Spatial Development of the Russian Federation, approved by the Deputy Chairman of the Government of the Russian Federation (May 22, 2017, №DK-P16-3247), which blurs the boundaries between spatial, regional and socio-economic development.

In Section 1 of the 2025 Strategy for Spatial Development of the Russian Federation, approved by Government Decree №207-r on 13 February 2019 (referred to below as the Strategy), the concept of spatial development is defined as ‘the improvement of the settlement system and territorial organisation of the economy, including through the implementation of effective state regional development policies’. It is noteworthy that this goal is to be achieved not solely through the Strategy. This conclusion is confirmed by the Report from the Centre for Strategic Developments of March 2024 on the interim results of the Strategy’s implementation. The document states: ‘The attainment of the indicators analysed in the report is not always directly related to the implementation of the Strategy; a range of decisions and measures taken by the Government of the Russian Federation has influenced the actual outcomes’. This is indeed the case, as the results of transformations in spatial systems are influenced by a full range of regulatory decisions and natural factors, including self-organisation and self-development.

Russia’s state policy on spatial development combines several immutable principles with specific actions. These principles include the country’s territorial integrity, the prevention of significant disparities in socio-economic conditions across regions, and the dominance of the capital with partial redistribution of centralised resources to subsidised regions. The actions involve designating

territories with special, often preferential regimes, such as territorial fragmentation of a unified legal space, special economic zones, and territories of advanced development. However, few of these practical measures have had the expected positive impact on the regions and the country as a whole. The same applies to changes in the administrative and political structure of the state. The Strategy for Spatial Development of the Russian Federation, identified in the aforementioned law 172-FZ as the primary 'strategic planning document', was intended to be the quintessence of state policy in this area.

It is beyond question that the government-led transformation of all parameters of a country's spatial organisation is an incredibly complex task, one that no state except the USSR has ever undertaken or approached. Such transformations occur naturally under the influence of various factors, including the shifting interests of population groups in different settlements and regions, changes in external and internal business operation conditions, the emergence of new economic zones, the depletion of natural resources, environmental and climatic changes, and the political ambitions of elites. Today's Russia faces an entirely different problem of national space restructuring, one that both stems from the qualitative changes in the country's fundamental societal structure and largely defines its major conflicts. Although this issue may eventually resolve itself, the process would take decades of ongoing crises for tens of thousands of settlements, millions of their inhabitants, and Russia's social and economic sectors. Therefore, the state's intentions to exert a positive influence on changes in the national spatial reality are entirely understandable.

Nevertheless, the implementation of objectives outlined in the aforementioned government regulation, № 870, seems largely unfeasible as Russia, one must admit, lacks the necessary experience and resources, both informational and institutional. For example, one of these objectives was 'to analyse the characteristics and challenges of spatial development in the Russian Federation and evaluate factors, conditions and risks of spatial development... including the current national settlement system; natural resource availability and the industrial landscape; transport and energy infrastructure; spatial aspects of interregional, cross-border and international cooperation; and assessments related to the spatial aspects of the economic and social development of the Russian Federation'. Additionally, among other objectives, it sought to set priorities for improving the national settlement system and create mechanisms to encourage settlement according to these priorities; to outline avenues for restructuring the economy at a regional level; to determine future competitive advantages and the economic specialisation of Russian regions within the interregional division of labour, considering their typological profile and the need to harmonise sectoral and regional development priorities; to forecast regional labour resource needs based on their prospective economic specialisation and expected socioeconomic performance;

to assess the need for federal engineering, transport, and social infrastructure placement and development in line with prospective territorial specialisations; to compile a list of potential territories of advanced socioeconomic development, based on a comprehensive evaluation of conditions and capacities for spatial development in the country; to draft proposals for the spatial distribution of national technological platforms; and to outline areas for national integration.

Although addressing these tasks is essential for developing a comprehensive strategy, the real issue is the complete lack of detailed studies, forecasts, projects, or calculations, with around a hundred needed. Additionally, no public discussions on these matters have taken place. In private expert discussions of the new Spatial Development Strategy concept, doubts are emerging as to the very possibility of evaluating its outcomes.

### **On the indicators of the Spatial Development Strategy implementation**

A systemic assessment of the Strategy's implementation has never been conducted. Approximately a hundred measures outlined in its implementation plan (Government Decree № 3227-r of 27 December 2019) were to ensure the 'effective organisation of economic space in Russia by creating and developing promising centres of economic growth, unlocking the economic potential of various types of territories and developing human capital'. These measures were framed as 'proposal preparation', 'recommendation production', 'strategy development', 'rule formulation', 'amendment of previously adopted regulations', 'mechanism provision', 'forecast production', 'development of composite urban development index' and 'establishment of a centre for spatial analysis'. Reporting on a plan that lacked spatial development indicators was not an arduous task. Unsurprisingly, accounts of Strategy implementation failed to cover several aspects, namely: (1) how the introduction of preferential regimes in the territories of 'advanced development' or the focus on large urban agglomerations would affect the economic, social, demographic, settlement and other parameters of regions and settlements; and (2) which of the planned or forecasted changes in spatial systems resulted from achieving the Strategy's goals. Is it even possible to accurately assess the achievement of these goals? The following considerations suggest a positive answer to this question.

1. The results of the Strategy's implementation should be assessed not by the outcomes of the previously discussed 'action plan,' but by the quantitative measurement of goal achievement, using target indicators (TIs). These indicators should be grounded in statistical data and the metrics of other strategies, implementation plans and regulatory documents aimed at addressing spatial development problems. It would be appropriate to assign Rosstat the responsibility

for the methodological support of TI calculations, presenting the indicators in a special section of annual federal and regional statistical reports and ensuring the timeliness and accuracy of reporting.

2. TIs should be presented in tabular form, indicating for each indicator the initial value at the launch of the Strategy and the reporting year, the value at the end of the reporting year and quantitatively assessed measures that have influenced the results achieved. The list of these measures should include as separate items: a) specific target solutions outlined in the Strategy; b) financial support for regions within interregional transfers; c) preferential regimes in certain territories; d) special tax regulation measures; e) specific measures adopted within national projects, federal and state programmes, and government decisions on the construction of economic and infrastructure facilities.

3. The TIs that reflect a reduction in regional disparities should be accurately compared across similar groups of regions and macro-regions, taking into account the specific national context. These groups include northern, central, and southern regions of European Russia, regions of Siberia, the Far East, the Arctic zone, and the republics of the North Caucasus. Indicators may include the size of the permanent and working-age population, the region's own budget resources and per capita budgetary revenues, the ratio of federal support (see point 2 of this list) to regional budgetary resources, and GRP per working-age individual, as well as contributions from national projects, federal and state programmes, and state decisions regarding the construction of economic facilities and infrastructure.

4. The TIs related to the improvement of the settlement system should be categorised according to the same regional groups (see point 3). These could include urbanisation rates, the number of small rural settlements, medium and large cities, population concentration, and economic potential in major cities and regional administrative centres (separately for urban agglomerations), as well as the spill-over of economic and innovation potential beyond agglomerations.

5. The TIs assessing demographic situations in the regions and macro-regions specified in point 2 should be compared across different population groups (children, youth, working-age individuals, retirees, and migrants). This comparison should be based on indicators such as birth rate, mortality rate, life expectancy, employment rates among the working-age population in the region, the share of migrants in the regional labour force, and the availability of social infrastructure in rural settlements, administrative centres and large cities.

6. The TIs that describe the impact of changes in the placement of productive forces on spatial development parameters should also be categorised according to the groups of regions and macro-regions (point 3). This should highlight how the region-specific manifestation of the factors discussed in point 2 affects the

distribution of productive forces and their impact on the parameters of regional disparities, the settlement system and the demographic situation as outlined in points 3 to 5.

It would be helpful to enhance these parameters with residents' assessments of the Strategy target achievement, based on annual sociological surveys conducted independently in the northern, central, and southern regions of European Russia, as well as in Siberia, the Far East, the Arctic zone, and the republics of the North Caucasus. The surveys should start by asking if the respondent is aware of the national Spatial Development Strategy and its counterpart adopted in their region of residence. The above considerations, developed in collaboration with Prof. Aleksandr Shvetsov for submission to the relevant committee of the Federation Council, are based on the idea that the updated Strategy will serve as an informal object of public governance. We also considered governance possibilities in the context of sanctions pressure, investor uncertainty and other factors, where the incremental logic of decision-making described by Charles Lindblom and adapted by James Quinn may be warranted. This logic holds that the success of any strategy depends on the ability to act appropriately in unforeseen circumstances and to redistribute resources wisely in the face of new constraints [41; 42]. Irina Klimova identifies several basic tenets of incrementalism that pertain to 'infinitesimal increments. In the context of this article, these principles may help ensure the stability of administratively transformed spatial systems. Summarising Lindblom's postulates, she writes: 'It is essential to proceed moderately and in small steps, breaking large problems into manageable parts while employing a trial-and-error approach... Given the constant deficit of knowledge, information, resources, and time, as well as the limited capacities of human intelligence and the prevailing uncertainty and weak controllability of the external environment, the goal should not be to find efficient solutions, but rather to pursue non-radical changes that improve the political situation and overall state of affairs' [43, p. 69]. Probably, in the real-world conditions of the third decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the practice of managing spatial system transformations should also adopt an incremental approach.

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