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Transformation of Festive Culture of the Russian Rural Population: Regional Dimension

Abstract. In this article various dimensions of the festival of Russian folklore *Karavon* are considered in the context of the general ethnic situation in Republic of Tatarstan (RT), which is defined on the basis of official statistics and the state policy description in the sphere of interethnic cooperation. The place of *Karavon* among other ethnic fests of the region is shown. The fest is considered in terms of the concept of “cultural nests” and also as the tool of symbolic political techniques of demonstrating state power.

Keywords: cultural nest, festive culture, *Karavon*, the Republic of Tatarstan, Russian rural settlements.

Introduction

The topicality of the theme is defined by:

- the necessity of preservation and use of ethno-cultural potential of Russian rural settlements of the region so as to reduce the possibility of conflicts, to form sustainable favorable living conditions for people, preserve and develop the ethno-cultural heritage, and improve the tourist attractiveness of the places;
- the opportunities to be gained from researching regional projects, including the benefit of further development of the cultural environment of Tatarstan through such projects as the restoration of cultural-historical objects in Bolgar and Svijazhsk;
- the special status of Russian rural settlements in the Middle-Volga region. They, in comparison with settlements of the titular ethnic groups, are characterized by more unfavorable demographic processes in the form of population decrease. A detailed historical and statistical analysis of the demographic state of the Russian rural settlements with prognosis for the future is necessary;

– the very important cultural role of the rural settlements. Of all the negative phenomena inherent in Russian settlements, the village in new formats often remains the generator and the keeper of ethnically marked forms of folk spiritual and material culture. Research of the ethno-cultural landscape provides opportunities to study how transformations of forms of ethnic culture and interethnic cooperation support life in the settlements nowadays and what kind of trends exist in these transformations;

– lack of ethno-cultural research of Russians, against a background of large-scale research of the titular ethnic groups conducted in the national republics of Ural-Volga region during the last decades.

Statistical review

On 01.01.2015, the population of the Republic of Tatarstan was 3 855 037 people including urban population—2 939 724, rural population—915 313 (23,74 % from total population).¹ Rural settlements—3073, their numbers are being gradually reduced. According to available data, there are about 740 Russian rural settlements. In 2010, the Russian rural population was 21,2 % of all country people in RT.

The ethnic structure of the population of the Republic is given in table 1.

Table 1.

*Ethnic structure of population of the Republic of Tatarstan²
(The data of population censuses in % of those who indicated their national identity)*

| Nationalities | 1989 | 2002 | 2010 |
|----------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| Tatars | 48,5 | 52,9 | 53,2 |
| Russians | 43,3 | 39,5 | 39,7 |
| Chuvashs | 3,7 | 3,4 | 3,1 |
| Udmurts | 0,7 | 0,6 | 0,6 |
| Mordvins | 0,8 | 0,6 | 0,5 |
| Maris | 0,5 | 0,5 | 0,5 |
| Ukrainians | 0,9 | 0,6 | 0,5 |
| Bashkirs | 0,5 | 0,4 | 0,4 |
| Azerbaijanians | 0,1 | 0,3 | 0,3 |
| Other nationalities | 1,0 | 1,2 | 1,2 |

The state regional policy in ethno-cultural sphere

In the 2000s, the tendency of consolidation of Russian society was firmly outlined. Ideas of integration began to prevail in the official federal documents on ethno-confessional and ethno-cultural subject matter. The leaders of the state very often spoke about the formation of a united Russian nation. Under these conditions, regional leaders, particularly in national republics, began to adjust the regional policy in the ethno-cultural sphere.

In the Republic of Tatarstan, this period was characterized by a policy on parity of the development of Tatar and Russian, Muslim and Orthodox cultures. It was shown in approving some regional programs and documents aimed at restoring and opening architectural monuments and giving the official status to a number of national festivals, and similar kinds of actions. Multiculturalism has been recognized as a fundamental principle of the official policy of the RT (Makarova 2010).

The Republic of Tatarstan is one of the most socially and economically developed regions of the Russian Federation. There is a compelling notion that there is a versatile causation between the attractiveness of social and economic sectors and a competent national policy in the region, as well as involving the level of interethnic cooperation in its territory (Drobizheva 2012: 9).

Festivals (about 30), holidays (about 20) and contests (about 15) are the most widespread forms of conducting national creativity events in the Republic of Tatarstan. Among the traditional festivals of Tatar people consolidated in Republic one is particularly prominent: *Sabantuy* is held annually after the spring sowing campaign in all the cities and rural areas of Republic of the Tatarstan, as well as in the regions of dense population clusters of Tatars in the Russian Federation. On June 6, 2015 *Sabantuy* was widely celebrated by Crimean Tatars in Simferopol for the first time. *Navruz* has been annually celebrated since 1991–1993 and is mainly held in cities, regional centers, 30% in rural areas; *Nardugan* has been actively celebrated since 1992 and has become a part of republican festive calendar in 25% of the Tatar areas, cities, villages and settlements; *Sombel* has been actively celebrated since 1990 and is held in September in each

district and city of the RT, where it is considered the Crop festival. *Kaz omese* has been enacted for the past 15 years. It is held everywhere in October—November.

Nowadays, along with the following festivals, other festivals have been given republican status, each of them associated with a particular nation living in Tatarstan: the Russian festival *Karavon*, Chuvash feasts *Ujav* and *Uchuk*, the Mari fest *Semyk*, Udmurt festival *Gyronbydton*, Mordovian *Baltai*, Ukrainian *Ivan Kupala*, Kryashen's *Pitrau* and others.

In RT, over the last ten years great attention has been paid to the Russian folk culture. In 2003, the Cabinet of Ministers approved the decree *On conducting the Republican festival of Russian folklore Karavon*. The Pancake week symbolizing the beginning of spring is more actively celebrated. In 2004, in Kazan the first folk and ethnographic festival *Kuzminki* was organized. The church bell festival has been held in Alekseevsky village. Since 2007, youth ethno-cultural festivals *Oberezie* and *Krutushka* have been organized. The system of secondary schools with a Russian ethno-cultural component has been opened. The subprogram *Preservation and use of historical and architectural heritage* includes a number of architectural monuments connected with Orthodoxy such as the Annunciation Cathedral in the Kazan Kremlin, many Christian churches in different cities and areas of the republic, Russian manors. The Chamber of crafts and craftsmen's associations are becoming more active popularizing national Russian crafts.

***Karavon* as a festival of Russian folklore**

Annually in the Russian Nikolsky village of the Laishevo district, during the festival of Russian national folk groups, a festival *Karavon*, established in 1992, is held. Its sources are centuries old. According to the old chronicles it is known that in the middle of the 16th century guests from all over the country gathered in the Russian Nikolsky village to celebrate the day of the prelate and miracle-worker St. Nikolas. People prayed and sang songs and danced in a special ring called *Karavon*. Hence, it appears the name of the holiday absorbed all the richness of the Russian spirit and ancient beliefs (Davletshina 2011: 13; Minikhanov 2011: 86). *Karavon* has turned into a unique and

inimitable festival, a uniquely Russian festival in its folklore, which at first was local and then became regional.

In the old days the patronal feast of Nikolsky village was celebrated for three days: having begun with the church service, it passed to family festive feasts, and then to the street where festivities and a special round dance, the *Karavon*, were performed, danced, and enacted. In this round dance, all the participants, young and old alike, join with little fingers and dance with special *Karavon* steps in several lines. In 1955, all folk festivals in rural settlements were banned by a special resolution of the USSR Government. In the 1980s, the enthusiasts of the local House of Culture, along with popular support, revived this festival which achieved Republican status in 1993. Unlike in past times, the core of participants now are folk groups rather than villagers. At first, only 7 folk groups from cities, towns, and districts of the Republic of Tatarstan took part in it. In 2015, this festival included 160 folk groups (Shafigullina 2013: 5).

The result of acquiring a new status was transformation of this festival into the official event with active participation of administrative representatives. 23th all-Russian festival of Russian folklore *Karavon-2015* took place on May 23, 2015. The acting President of the Republic of Tatarstan, Rustam Minnikhanov, the main federal inspector on RT, Renat Timerzjanov, the chief of the President of RT staff, Asgat Safarov, the minister of culture of RT, Airat Sibagatullin, and other officials became guests of honor of this festival.

At the entrance to the festive ground, girls in folk costumes with *chak-chak* (national Tatarian sweets), and bread and salt, met guests. The official delegation, headed by Rustam Minnikhanov, walked among the participants of the festival to the folk craft alley where craftsmen presented their products, all the while accompanied by traditional Russian folk songs.

On the main scene, the grand opening of the festival, with the dramatized prologue “Treasury of national spirituality—Nicholas festival *Karavon!*” took place. It was devoted to the 70th Victory in the Second World War anniversary. At the ending of the prologue, in honor of the anniversary, 70 white balloons were released to the sky in memory of the fallen in the Great Patriotic War. The festival

continued with a magnificent concert of original folk groups and talented performers.

Presenting a rural backyard, and a Russian log house (*izba*), a town of craftsmen were traditionally presented at the festival. The main guests of *Karavon-2015* were members of the Russian song choir *Golden Ring* with the soloist Nadezhda Kadysheva, and the Russian folk band *Slavic Tunes*. The festival concluded with general round dance on the traditional round dance ground.

As we see, this shift of the festival to the republican level determined the presence of elements of Tatar culture at the Russian festival and also merging of the festive occasions (the Day of St. Nickolas and the Victory Day).

Functions of *Karavon*

Nowadays, the world, national, and regional ruling elite have worked out excellent means of management of interethnic cooperation in multicultural societies. The usage of ethno-cultural symbols has become one of the effective tools of this kind of management. In Tatarstan, tools of symbolical political technologies are ethnic and religious symbols:

- the facts of ethnic history of the republic (1000th anniversary of Kazan, 900th anniversary of Elabuga);
- monuments and historical sites (Bulgar site of ancient settlement and Svijazhsk monastery, Kul-Sharif mosque);
- individual municipalities and villages;
- Christian icons (Kazan God's Mother icon);
- elements of traditional and religious culture—festivals (Tatar *Sabantuy*, Russian *Karavon*, Kryashen *Pitrau*, Chuvash *Ujav*, Spasskaya fair, etc.);
- myths and legends about holy places and springs.

Tatarstan's experiment shows that a combination of qualitatively different symbols (ethnic, religious, cultural, social) and their use in the united strategy of the development of the region can give evidence of the considerable potential of pragmatism. The fund of multiculturalism is becoming a unique resource for the development

of the region and Russia as a whole. Tourism growth, enterprise initiative, strengthening of identities that stimulates creative actions, and improving the image of Russia as a state possessing culture and science of global significance, are the dividends of symbolical management having national importance. In addition, the use of symbols increases the social and interethnic stability of Tatarstan by means of regional identity formation among representatives of different social and ethnic groups and religions.

Scholars of various fields of research actively develop models of images of regions and locations, as well as methods and ways for their research. In this activity, one can mark out various theoretical and cultural-historical dimensions. In connection with the latter, the reference to the concept “cultural nest” offered in the first decades of the 20th century by the Russian scholars and regionalists is prominent. The concept “cultural nest” was introduced for the first time by N.K. Pikanov in the 1920s.

The conceptual metaphor “cultural nest” is understood as a way of describing the cooperation, and interconnection, of all areas of cultural life of a province in the period of its prosperity, during such period when this province is not becoming indifferent to the centre it gravitates to.

The study of the cultural processes through “cultural nests” is carried out in a three-dimensional coordinate system: “country—province—region.” Using this method takes into consideration common processes of the country’s development; levels of cultural process characterizing specific features for all provinces; specificity and the level of development of culture of a province studied.

N.K. Pikanov lists the following basic signs of sustainable territorial-cultural formation (“nest”):

- presence of a well-established circle of leaders—cultural workers;
- permanent activity;
- continuity support (mentoring of young people by seniors).

According to another scheme, we can mark out “cultural nests” of the rural type corresponding to peasant, monastic, and lordly cultures

respectively. One can point to the ethnographic nature of peasant “cultural nests” as distinctive features and in this sense the *Karavon* festival is a typical example (Hutorova 2009: 68—69).

It is important to pay particular attention to another dimension of socio-cultural significance of *Karavon*, specifically the importance of religious factors in the spiritual revival of the people. In this sense the historical tradition of the festival, the St. Nicholas Church in the Russian village Nikolsky was originally a sacred centre. The establishing of *Karavon* as a local and republican festival gives a second life to this religious architectural monument, providing the backdrop to the restoration of the nebulous connections between material and spiritual, earthly and heavenly, festive and daily basis in people’s lives. The above example fits well with the concept of event marketing of places, a trend evident not only in modern Russia but in Western Europe as well (Dijk 2013).

The list of scientific publications analyzing this festival is, at most a few dozen titles. Of these publications and the research described, most are limited to the Republic of Tatarstan. The content of these publications regarding *Karavon* to date has been primarily descriptive in nature. The revival process of the cultural-historical traditions of the Russian rural population of the Tatarstan and the Volga region as a whole, and in the long term probably of Russia, is still waiting for its researcher.

Brief conclusion

Karavon, as the festival reviving old Russian traditions, exemplifies the function of the “cultural nest.” At the same time *Karavon* is one of the tools of a symbolical political strategy of the regional state power in the Republic of Tatarstan.

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Notes

1. Srednegodovaya chislennost naseleniya Respubliki Tatarstan. [Mid-annual population of Republic Tatarstan (in Russian).] Available at http://tatstat.gks.ru/wps/wcm/connect/rosstat_ts/tatstat/resources/8ae7b9004e76ba2bbf20bfcc5af035be/Среднегодовая+чис-ть+населения+РТ.pdf (last accessed on December 1, 2016).
2. Vserossiyskaya perepis naseleniya 2010 goda v Respublike Tatarstan. Okonchatelnye itogi. Natsionalnyy sostav naseleniya Respubliki Tatarstan. [The All-Russia Population Census of 2010 in Republic Tatarstan. Final Results. National Structure of the Population of Republic Tatarstan (in Russian).] Available at http://www.tatstat.ru/VPN2010/DocLib8/нац_состав.pdf (last accessed on December 1, 2016).

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