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SOCIAL SENTIMENT INDEX AS AN INTEGRAL INDICATOR OF THE SOCIAL WELL-BEING OF THE POPULATION (THE CASE OF KAZAN, RUSSIA)

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ABSTRACT

Social sentiment is the reflection of public reaction to the social reality and authorities' actions that should be constantly monitored by sociologists. Designing indexes that demonstrate the integral assessment of the dynamics of a complex of social, political, and economic public sentiment is considered to be the most valid method of researching the social sentiment. Based on the results of the representative mass survey of the citizens of Kazan (n=1500, December 2018), we discovered a reduction in the social sentiment index of the population of Kazan conditioned by a number of political, social, cultural, and economic factors. Specifically, the index of current personal situation dropped by 12.6% (in 2018, it showed 127.1); the index of the assessment of public authorities decreased by 10.4% (126.3); the expectations index lowered by 9.7% (122.5). The decrease in the index of current personal situation was the smallest in the Republic of Tatarstan with the value of 6.9% (125.1). The composite SSI (Social Sentiment Index) amounted to 124.6 in July 2018 in Kazan, which is 9.5% less than in 2017.

INTRODUCTION

KEY WORDS
social sentiment, social well-being, social sentiment index, mega events, regional research

One of the key factors of the socioeconomic situation developing in a particular society is the social behavior of its members. Researching and predicting public attitudes and behaviors is impossible without studying and understanding the mechanisms that spur social subjects into action. Social sentiment is the incentive mechanism that practically acts as an indicator of the public reaction to the living conditions of the people and of the influence that a complex of social, political, and economic factors has on their lives [1].

Thereby, analyzing current social policies and specific social programs becomes a difficult research task that requires the development of scientifically based methods that would allow to perform a complex assessment of the results of such government policies.

When social and economic researches related to this area were conducted in Russia, a method of analyzing social processes and events based on the integral assessments of the dynamics of a complex of social, political, and economic public sentiments through the calculation of composite indexes was formed, which was new for the country.

When it comes to studying the social sentiment (and designing the SSI in particular), the integral approach features a number of advantages, such as attracting the population to the multifaceted assessment of different areas of the social life in order to develop the means of effective social management and the opportunity to see the public assessment and social consequences of the political solutions that have been implemented. Another advantage is that such indexes are easy to design, which allows stakeholders (authorities, the business community, the academic sector, etc.) to refer to the results of such researches to receive up-to-date information on public assessment of the current situation in the country. Lastly, social sentiment indexes feature a predictive potential in the sense that monitoring such indexes allows to predict the economic and socio-political behavior of the population in the short-term perspective [2].

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The main goal of our research was to analyse the condition and dynamics of the social sentiment of the citizens of Kazan by applying a complex integral approach through designing a social sentiment index. The adult population of Kazan aged 18 and older was the object of the research.

A mass survey of the population of Kazan based on the representative stratified sampling (n=1500) was used as the research method; the average sampling error does not exceed 5%. The survey was conducted in December 2018. The data analysis was performed using the SPSS Statistics software package (version 20.0).

When researching the social sentiment, we found on the updated technique of drawing an SSI developed by the Levada-Center team [10] as it is considered to be the most comprehensive and reliable technique based on the extensive experience of conducting such researches. The SSI assessment technique we used suggests the analysis of the respondent responses to 10 indicator questions. During the first stage of index calculation, individual indexes are drawn based on the

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distribution of respondent answers to each question. They reflect the difference between the affirmative and negative answers (on a percentage basis) to individual indicator questions that are taken into account when calculating the composite index. 100 is added to the difference to avoid negative answers. Afterwards, the individual indexes are grouped into four separate indexes: 1) the index of current personal situation; 2) the index of the current situation in the Republic; 3) the expectations index; 4) the index of the assessment of public authorities. The composite (integral) social sentiment index (SSI) is calculated as the arithmetic mean of the individual indexes. The indexes vary between 0 and 200, where any index value below 100 signifies the prevalence of negative opinions, and vice versa. We believe that the four individual indexes distinguished based on this technique (the index of current personal situation, the index of the current situation in the country, the expectations index, and the index of the assessment of public authorities) reflect the most relevant aspects of the public sentiment. Yet another advantage of this SSI drawing technique is the simplicity and pithiness of the calculations and analysis of the results, as well as the comprehensiveness of the results for the public.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of the research we have conducted gave us basis to draw the individual indexes described above. First, we drew individual indexes based on every indicator question according to the previously developed technique. All the resulting values of individual indexes exceeded 100, which signifies the overall prevalence of positive respondent feedback. However, there are significant differences between the individual indexes we have calculated. The highest value (134.9) was deduced for the index characterizing respondents' answers regarding their personal future ("I believe that my family will live in better conditions in a year"). At the same time, the respondents' assessment of the future of the Republic turned out to be much leaner, as the corresponding indexes feature the lowest values ("Over the next few months, the economy of the Republic of Tatarstan will improve significantly" - 116.2; "Over the next few months, the political situation in the Republic of Tatarstan will improve significantly" - 117.1).

High index values were also received when analyzing the respondents' answers regarding their personal situation: "Lately, I've been in a great mood" - 126.9; "Over the past year, my life and the life of my family improved significantly" - 127.2. Besides, the population of Tatarstan tends to assess highly the political situation in the region ("I think that the political situation in the Republic of Tatarstan is favourable" - 127.7) and the authorities' actions ("I approve of the efforts of the current government of the Republic of Tatarstan" - 126.3). Remarkably, despite the fact that the citizens of Kazan often consider the changes that occur in Tatarstan to be positive ("In my opinion, everything is going well in the Republic" - 125.3), they do not expect the situation to improve soon ("Overall, in a year, the living conditions in the Republic of Tatarstan will be better than they are now" - 121.9).

Based on the individual indexes, we drew four separate indexes by distinguishing the indicators into four corresponding groups. The index of current personal situation featured the highest value (127.1), the index of the assessment of public authorities and the index of the current situation in the Republic of Tatarstan are a little lower (126.3 and 125.1). Despite the high hopes of the citizens of Kazan regarding their personal future, the expectations index features the lowest value (122.5) due to the extensive negative evaluation of the future of the Republic.

In this article, we also wanted to analyse the dynamics of the SSI of the population of Kazan. The authors conducted regular monitoring of the social sentiment of the citizens of Kazan from 2012 to 2015. In this article, we will review the dynamics of the SSI of the population of Kazan over the given period and analyze the way it changed by the time of the last sampling that took place in 2018. Overall, a different number of respondents was surveyed in different years: in 2012, 454 persons participated in the survey; in 2013, this number increased to 680; in 2014, the respondents were 1328; in 2015, 817 persons were surveyed; and in 2018, the number of respondents amounted to 1500. The survey technique and the method of selecting the respondents remained the same, which allows us to compare the results that were received in different years.

According to the results of the surveys, the social sentiment of the population of Kazan changed significantly over the period in question. During the first sampling (in 2012), the values of all four indexes were rather low. The composite SSI of the citizens of Kazan amounted to 109.3, which implies an insignificant prevalence of the positive assessment of the different areas of personal and public life. However, in 2013, there was a sharp spike in the values of the individual and composite SSI's of the population of Kazan. The index of the current situation in the Republic of Tatarstan underwent the largest increase (it amounted to 104.4 in 2012 and 146.8 in 2013). The expectations index grew significantly as well (it featured 144.3 in 2013), while the previous surveys discovered that the population considered their own future and the future of the Republic to be uncertain (in 2012, the index value was 106). Moreover, the index of the assessment of public authorities also increased (it featured 111 in 2012 and 146.1 in 2013). Notably, according to the survey of 2013, the index of the current personal situation of the citizens of Kazan was lower than other individual indexes, which contradicted the usual tendencies of SSI sampling. It could be preconditioned by a deeper social differentiation of the population of Kazan compared to the population of other cities and villages of the Republic [3].

What could explain such notable positive changes in the social sentiment of the citizens of Kazan? The fact of the matter is, the survey of 2013 was conducted in November, 5 months after the Universiade, which was a significant mega event for the whole Republic of Tatarstan. In summer 2013, Kazan hosted the World University Games that became one of the most discussed events of the year. The results of the survey indicated that the citizens of Kazan were optimistic and had positive expectations, they were satisfied with the event that took place in their city and highly appreciated the efforts of the local authorities regarding the preparation and organization of the Universiade. This data correlates with the research data of the Center for Strategic Studies of Rosgosstrakh, according to which Kazan is the leading city in Russia when it comes to such markers as the confidence of the population in the future and satisfaction with life [9]. The high level of optimism among the population of Kazan after the Universiade can be explained by the fact that mega events trigger significant infrastructural, cultural, and socioeconomic development in post-Soviet cities. It is preconditioned by the fact that the heritage of the Universiade covers numerous areas and includes both material objects (the Universiade Village, about 30 new sports facilities, repairs of the existing facilities, transport junctions, a new airport, etc.) and changes in the public image of the city (making Kazan known to more people at the international level, improving the public image of the city for its citizens, high appreciation of the authorities' actions by the population of the Republic, etc.) [4].

Nevertheless, such positive sentiment did not last. Thus, in November 2014, there was a drop in all individual indexes except for the index of the public authorities' assessment which has been showing constant growth. The drop in the level of the social sentiment of the citizens of Kazan in November 2014 occurred against the backdrop of the crisis developments in the Russian economy. Specifically, such events as the economic sanctions against Russia, weakening rouble, and feverish demand for certain types of products could not but take their toll on the social well-being of the population of Kazan and Russia as a whole.

Nevertheless, the citizens of Kazan demonstrated a sharp increase in all index values the following year during the sampling of 2015 [1]. At the same time, the economic problems remained unsolved, as the embargo introduced in 2014 was still in force, consumer inflation in December 2015 amounted to 10.7% compared to December 2014 (in 2014, it was 9.7%), including consumer inflation for food commodities that featured 12% (it was 14.2% in 2014), 11.3% for non-food items (which was 5.9% in 2014), and 8.2% for services (in 2014, it featured 8.9%) [5]. According to the data of the sociological survey, the majority of the population of Tatarstan, including the citizens of Kazan, noted the price increase for all groups of goods and services offered for evaluation (about 40 items). The population is mostly concerned about the increase in prices of food items required for daily consumption, such as bread, eggs, dairy products, fish (over 80% of the respondents noticed an increase in prices of these goods) [6].

Nevertheless, during the survey of 2015, the citizens of Kazan demonstrated a high level of optimism. The analysis of the statistical data and results of sociological surveys showed that the Russian economy has not yet adapted to the brand new operating conditions (international sanctions, low oil prices, high inflation rates, etc.), which is quite the opposite for the population that adapts to the new economic reality and preserves its social optimism. This tendency is typical both for the population of the Republic of Tatarstan, and for the Russian population as a whole, which signifies that the "Russians comprehend the difficulties of the socioeconomic situation in the country and are ready to bear the complications in a short-term perspective" [12].

At the same time, the public SSI is usually higher in Tatarstan than in Russia as a whole [7]. This can be explained by the well-developed economy and infrastructure of the Republic (that also occurred due to the investments made in the course of preparation and organization of international sports events). According to statistics, the Republic of Tatarstan is the region with a significantly lower increase in the consumer price index against the backdrop of the economic crisis than in other Russian regions [2]. Undoubtedly, all of this has a positive influence on the consumer sentiment, social well-being, and the living standards of the population.

Within the scope of this work, the authors measured the dynamics of the social sentiment index of the citizens of Kazan based on the results of a representative mass survey of the population. The authors determined that the decrease in the index is conditioned by a complex of political, social, cultural, and economic factors.

The results of the last sampling performed within the scope of this research scientific work in July 2018, signify a drop in the social sentiment of the population of Kazan compared to the previous sampling that had taken place in June 2015. Specifically, the index of current personal situation dropped by 12.6% (in 2018, it showed 127.1); the index of the assessment of public authorities decreased by 10.4% (126.3); the expectations index lowered by 9.7% (122.5). The decrease in the index of current personal situation was the smallest in the Republic of Tatarstan with the value of 6.9% (125.1). The composite SSI (Social Sentiment Index) amounted to 124.6 in July 2018 in Kazan, which is 9.5% less than the results of the preceding sampling.

First of all, the drop in the approval rating of the President and Government of the Russian Federation after the election that was widely debated by experts [13, 14] took its evident toll on the political

component of the SSI, as it was stated above, the index of the public authorities' assessment dropped by 10%.

The news of the upcoming pension reform implying the increase of the retirement age and the increase of the VAT was a significant factor in the negative dynamics of the social sentiment. Moreover, it is necessary to take into consideration the fact that the survey took place immediately after the World Cup that has been hosted in Russia. Kazan was one of the host cities, and the citizens could experience the energy of this football celebration in full. However, once the World Cup was over (given that there are no significant mega events expected in the near future), the optimism of the citizens of Kazan was shaken once they realized that there was no other large goal to look forward to.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

There is no conflict of interest.

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None.

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