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O.N. Shelegina and G.M. Zaporozhchenko

*Institute of History,
Siberian Branch, Russian Academy of Sciences,
Nikolaeva 8, Novosibirsk, 630090, Russia
E-mail: oshelegina@yandex.ru; galinakoop@yandex.ru*

Ethno-Cultural Aspects of Siberian Regional Identity (Late 20th to the First Decades of the 21st Century)

Using the social constructivist paradigm, we analyze the model of Siberian regional identity, focusing on the ethno-cultural aspects, shaped by sociocultural practices relating to institutes such as museums and theaters and by integrated forms such as cultural projects, festivals, etc., constructing ethnic identity in the late 20th to the first decades of the 21st century. The role of landscape and ethnographic museums, which introduce natural and cultural legacy to the public, in modeling and translating collective and individual identity is highlighted. Theatrical performances in natural languages and ethnographic festivals contribute to the construction of regional identity and strengthen the idea of Siberia as part of the Russian state. We describe symbolic interpretations of Siberian images, enhanced by festivals, tourism, etc. Municipal authorities, regional cultural centers, and theatrical performances shape and propagate the image of “manifold Siberia”.

Keywords: Model of regional identity, social constructivism, Siberia, sociocultural practices, construction of regional identity, ethno-cultural aspect of regional identity.

Introduction

The issues of ethno-cultural identity have now turned into the big challenges of modernity (Mikhailova, 2013). They are faced by states, communities, social groups, and individual citizens, which is evidenced by materials of the International Scientific Conference “Ethno-Cultural Identity of the Peoples of Siberia and the Adjacent Territories” (Etnokulturnaya identichnost..., 2019). To overcome the identity crisis, some new approaches to the study and identification of its features in relation to individual countries and regions are developed. For example, A.V. Golovnev was the first to define “the northernness as a pivotal identity for Russia” (2022: 5), which stimulates further comprehensive study of the proposed concept.

In the Russian science, the issues of the identity formation, which are associated with national self-

consciousness, improvement of civil society, and harmonization of intercultural communications, form an actual interdisciplinary research space. On the cusp of the 20th and 21st centuries, social constructivism became the main trend in this research space. It focuses on “the ability of regional identity to generate/regenerate, to interpret/reinterpret, and to rebirth and rethink in accordance with historical, social, political, and other situations” (Kazakova, 2020: 74).

In the cultural and ideological space of modern Russia, Siberian identity is among the actively growing and leading regional forms. In the political rhetoric, it is considered as a resource for the formation of the all-Russian identity (Golovneva, 2018: 4).

In the Siberian Branch of the Russian Academy of Sciences, the following large-scale projects have been and are being implemented: preservation and study of

historical legacy, ethno-cultural identity of the peoples of Siberia, and analysis of regional institutional processes in the cultural sector (Molodin, 2019; Sibir i sibiriyaki, 2022: 5–26, 109–176; Identichnost..., 2022: 19–48, 72–93, 138–162). The development of the actual and promising trend of “culture – legacy – identity” is of major scientific and applied importance (Zaporozhchenko, Shelegina, 2023), taking into account modern theories of ethno-cultural identity and its systems (Golovneva, 2018: 5–7; Krasovskaya, 2020) in the context of regional sociocultural practices.

In the given scientific and sociocultural circumstances, it seems appropriate to integrate the results of theoretical and applied interdisciplinary studies on the basis of social construction approach. This may help to highlight the ethno-cultural aspect of regional identity in the Siberian region in the late 20th to early 21st centuries. The specificity and novelty of this work consists in the solution of the task using the analysis of a complex of sociocultural practices implemented by basic institutions of culture (museums and theaters) and of the creative forms (projects and festivals) with a high cognitive, adaptive, and emotional potential of the impact at the collective and personal levels related to the ethnic culture. This will contribute to the development and improvement of the approaches to construction of regional identity in the modern culture of the multi-ethnic space of Siberia, one of the macro-regions of Russia.

Methods

It should be emphasized that, despite the active scientific reflection, there are different interpretations of such a complex phenomenon as identity, particularly ethno-cultural identity. The model of regional identity in terms of the philosophy of culture was proposed by E.V. Golovneva (2013; 2018: 14–15), having been based on the materials from Siberia. It provides insights into the following aspects that are significant for our work: the cognitive aspect—historically constructed images of Siberia and the Siberians at the level of everyday consciousness and conceptual development; the value aspect—orientations related to the natural-landscape, toponymical, resettlement, ethno-cultural, historical, and the mental-psychological narratives; the sensual-emotional aspect—a complex system of meanings and senses of the emotional attachment to the place of residence; and the regulatory aspect—specific behavioral strategies and practices

of the Siberians, including the commemorative and performative channels of constructing and implementing of regional identity in the contemporary culture. Notably, the aspect related to ethno-cultural identity is not represented in the model as an independent one. We focus on it and, in solidarity with the position of N.R. Krasovskaya, consider ethno-cultural identity “as the awareness by social groups and individuals of their belonging on the basis of common territory of residence, stable features of culture, and language” (2020: 76). The criteria of ethno-cultural identity distinguished by this author—territorial, cultural, and linguistic—can be correlated with the concept of regional identity and sociocultural practices. In this regard, the logic of the study was developed in the social constructivist paradigm, according to which the sociocultural activity is the construction (formation) of images, concepts, and social practices in the process of social interactions (Kabanov, 2021: 12).

We consider the sociocultural practices correlating with the ethno-cultural identity as “the integrated action forms of culture, aimed at actualizing the social aspect in its cultural diversity, at mastering the historical and cultural legacy, and at transmitting the identity. These forms of culture facilitate the communication and help the population to adapt to the transformation processes of modernity” (Shelegina, Zaporozhchenko, 2021: 91).

The aim of this article is to present the ethno-cultural aspects of regional identity in the Siberian region in the late 20th to early 21st centuries, on the basis of the social constructivist paradigm and modelling. The object of the study is the ethno-cultural Siberian identity. The subject are the traditional and new sociocultural practices associated with ethno-cultural development of the Siberian region. The practices under study are structured on the following grounds: the scale (level)—global, national, and regional; the functions—communicative, commemorative, performative, and educational; the forms of inclusion in the processes of social reality—integration, adaptation, legacy development, and creative industries.

Given the considerable empirical base on the research topic, we focus our attention, in the “case-study” format, on environmental museums and national theaters of Siberia, which are the most related to the ethno-cultural legacy. We also analyze the modern forms (projects and festivals) meeting the main criteria of ethno-cultural identity (territorial, national, cultural, and linguistic).

Role of museums and museum-tourism projects in the development of ethno-cultural legacy and the translation of regional identity

With regard to the modern period, we can point to the interdependence of the Siberian identity and the development of historical and ethno-cultural legacy, the interdependence manifesting itself in the project activities and museumization of the region's territory. Since their appearance in Siberia (the late 18th century) to the present day, museums have played a leading role in the development of legacy, the formation and translation of regional identity, and the implementation of traditional and innovative sociocultural practices (Rol muzeyev..., 2012).

According to our earlier analysis of the history of creation and the current trends in development of environmental museums in Siberia, the traditional historical practices of ethno-cultural legacy assimilation can be correlated with the value aspect of the model of regional identity. The widely known museum-reserves (“Tomskaya Pisanitsa”, “Shushenskoye”, “Valley of the Kings”, “Starina Sibirskaya”), open-air museums (Historical and Architectural Museum of the Institute of Archaeology and Ethnography SB RAS, Ethnographic Museum of the Peoples of Transbaikalia, “Taltsy”, “Torum Maa”, “Cholkoy”, etc.), ethnographic museum-parks of the Khanty-Mansi Autonomous Okrug (KhMAO) – Yugra contribute to the spatial museumization of the territory. They also reflect its multi-ethnicity, being an important means of identification of modern ethnic groups with their cultural traditions and natural environment. The environmental museums have a high adaptive potential, form the image of the region and the people inhabiting it, and translate the regional and local identity into the society (Shelegina, 2019: 156–167, 174–196). Ethnographers believe that the indigenous peoples of Siberia and the Far East tend to rely on their kinship and ethno-local communities, as well as the values of traditional culture, for consolidation and self-preservation (Nikolaev, Oktyabrskaya, 2021: 137). Thus, we can consider the environmental museums created in the territory of their settlement as a mechanism for regeneration of ethno-cultural identity. In the Siberian museums, considerable attention is given to the actualization of intangible cultural legacy (Zolotova, 2021); and the ethnopedagogy is being actively developed (Kuryanova, Zolotareva, Charyshova, 2021). All that is very significant in the context of regulatory aspects of regional identity,

corresponds to the cultural and linguistic criteria of ethno-cultural identity, and plays an important educational role for young people.

We also present two museum and exhibition projects related to ethno-cultural legacy and regional identity. In 2019, the Omsk State Museum of Regional History created a large-scale “Ethnic Panorama of Siberia” (20 ethnic cultures, 700 items) as a result of fruitful cooperation with the Friendship Center and six ethnic cultural associations. The majority of the exhibits belonged to the 19th–early 20th centuries. The exposition displayed complexes characterizing the features of dwellings, traditional economy, national outfit, and spiritual culture of the indigenous peoples of Siberia (Siberian Tatars, Altai peoples, Buryats, Tuvinians, Yakuts, Nenets, Khanty, and Mansi) and new settlers. It reflected the folk architecture, domestic life, ritual practices, religious beliefs, traditional experience of bringing up children, and samples of artistic endeavor of not only large ethnic groups living in the region—Kazakhs, Russians, Ukrainians, Belarusians, and Germans—but also small ethnic groups: Armenians, Moldavians, Romani, and Jewish people. The album-guide to the exhibition, designed for professionals and a wide range of readers who are not indifferent to the legacy of their ancestors (Etnicheskaya panorama..., 2020: 4–16), became a finalist of the All-Russian Contest of Regional and Local Lore Literature “Small Motherland” (2021).

Commemorative turn in the museum practice, aimed at the formation of historical awareness and ethnic self-identification, has led to the use of socio-anthropological approach, technologies of narrating personal, family, and local histories oriented towards the sensual experience, imagination, and critical thinking. In this respect, the experience of the Museum of Local History “Zaeltsovka” (now a department of the Museum of Novosibirsk) is noteworthy, which conducted the regional interdepartmental sociocultural and educational project “We are Fellow Countrymen”. The project included the exhibition “Manifold Zaeltsovka” and was carried out in cooperation with national-cultural associations (Shatova, 2020).

The given examples provide evidence that four main ways of determining ethno-cultural identity are actualized in museums for visitors: linguistic, territorial, national, and cultural (Krasovskaya, 2020: 78).

Two projects can be considered consolidating the historical past and the modernity of the Siberian region and intended for the external representation of its identity, including ethno-cultural identity. These

are the subject construction (based on historical, sociological, and ethno-cultural studies) of the “Museum of Siberia” as an adaptive and creative form of mastering the regional legacy (Shelegina, 2014: 336–355), and the design project of the “Museum of Siberia” (publicly discussed on March 28, 2019)—an imaginative, high-tech permanent exposition of the Slovtsov Tyumen Museum and Educational Association. Its implementation will be a significant event in branding the region in the Russian cultural space.

At the international level, noteworthy is the project “Great Silk Way. The Siberian Road”. It included a tourist route through the territories of the republics of Southern Siberia and the Kuznetsk Basin. The tourist route was developed with due regard for the archaeological and ethno-cultural legacy, as well as modern sites with ethnic specificity. The bronze stirrups became the main symbol of the project—forward movement (Shelegina, 2019: 96–102). The following tourist projects are being created and tested: the ethnographic tour “Cossack Horseshoe of the Altai”, the loop route “Tyumen Circumnavigations” passing through some well-known Siberian cities and towns, Russian and Tatar villages, and a Khanty settlement (Pakhomchik, Shelegina, 2023), the interactive archaeological and ethnographic trail “CheloVechnost” in the tourist attraction of regional importance “Barsova Gora” in the KhMAO–Yugra.

Hence, the sociocultural practices implemented by the museums, together with scientific, educational, and cultural institutions, the museumization of multi-ethnic areas and places of residence of the indigenous population of Siberia, the development of legacy in the form of cultural tourism create a representative ethno-cultural content in the model of constructing the regional identity of the Siberian region.

Role of theaters in the sensual-emotional construction of identity

By 2020, there were 87 professional theaters of different genres in the Siberian Federal District: 31 theaters in million-plus cities, 22 in large cities, 25 in large towns, 6 theaters in medium-sized towns, and 3 theaters in small towns (for the categories of cities and towns by population, see (Goroda..., (s.a.)). Out of the 113 urban settlements, two large towns (Angarsk and Berdsk), six medium-sized towns, and 47 small towns had no theaters (except for a few folk groups). Krasnoyarsk, Omsk, and Novosibirsk

showed themselves to be recognized theatrical capitals. Each of them had more than a dozen different theaters, which reflected the productive nature of “competing localism” (as defined by E.V. Golovneva) manifested in the rivalry for the status of the cultural capital between the Siberian cities.

In the conceptual framework of the performative turn (Antonyan, Sokolova, 2022) as a vector of cultural turn, the theater emerges as a public communicative environment for the identity construction, manifesting its new quality in the conditions of changed social life. Having survived the difficult 1990s and strengthened in the 2000s, it has harmonized a combination of three vectors of development in its activities. The core of the theater sphere was based on the classic legacy of the world and domestic drama, including the plays by two great Siberians—A. Vampilov and V. Rasputin. The innovations have actualized an appeal to the socio-psychological “new drama” with its life-like, intellectual, and analytical character, which was different from the socio-political keenness of the theater productions of the Perestroika period. The “new drama” was also marked by a new expressive language, different from the “Aesopian” language of the Soviet time (Merkulova, 2011). The third component were the sociocultural performative practices with ethno-cultural dominance. Internet resources contain a considerable amount of information about the theater life. We have used it along with the results of the included observation.

The mechanism of qualitative renewal of the theater business was based on a wide exchange of creativity within the festival movement that was launched in 1987 by the Vampilov Irkutsk Theater Festival of the Contemporary Drama. In 1997, it received a high status of the all-Russian festival, and later came to be called “The Baikal Meetings at Vampilov’s”. Since the late 1990s, the leading theaters of Siberia have been regularly nominated for the national theater award “Golden Mask”. The tours, the participation in international theater projects, and the invitation of metropolitan directors and their foreign colleagues to stage productions gave impetus to a profound reform of the theater tradition. Notably, these processes were also active in the musical and dramatic theaters working in natural languages.

In the 2010s, with state support, the Yakut Olonkho Theater, in cooperation with the Olonkho Research Institute at the Ammosov North-Eastern Federal University, created a qualitatively new stage form of Olonkho, for better understanding and presenting the universal nature of the unique Yakut heroic epic.

The institute promotes the activities of the Olonkho Theater by organizing conferences, folklore expeditions to the uluses, and forming a large archive of the Olonkho artifacts. Since 2014, the theater has been holding the Ysyakh Olonkho, the Yakut national holiday, every summer. The Yakut State Theater of the Indigenous Minorities of the North, established in 2014 on the basis of the “Gulun” folk ensemble, stages the folklore-based performances in five languages of the peoples of the North: Even, Evenki, Yukaghir, Dolgan, and Yakut. These examples are a vivid evidence of realization of the positions declared in the Law “On the Strategy for Socio-Economic Development of the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia)...” (Zakon..., 2018) in the area of social construction of ethno-cultural identity.

The Khots Namsaraev Buryat State Academic Drama Theater combines the national, ritualistic, theatrical traditions, and the European drama in performances in the Buryat and Russian languages. For instance, in the play “Maksar. Steppe in Blood”, the archetypal plot of Shakespeare’s Macbeth is transferred to the Buryat-Mongol steppe. The sumptuous national outfits, sword fights, and throat singing accompanied by the authentic folk instruments are framed by the ascetic modern scenography and restrained European direction, which makes the epicism and the unique poetic style of the Shakespeare’s drama especially close and understandable to the Buryat theater and the audience. As part of the State Program “Preservation and Development of the Buryat Language in the Republic of Buryatia” for the year of 2015, the republican festival-competitions of the folk theaters were held annually, with the participation of the oldest Buryat amateur theater group—the Galsanov Iroi Folk Theater from the Selenginsky District.

In 2008, the Kok-ool Tyva State Musical Drama Theater, together with the association of national wrestling sports competitions, initiated a mass theatrical performance at the “Khuresh” stadium, under the motto: “Kuchum – theater, kuzhum – khuresh, chureem – Tyva” (‘My soul is theater, my strength is wrestling, my love is Tyva’). The annual holding of this event, which attracts audiences of many thousands of people, has become a tradition. In 2016, the theater was awarded the Order of the Republic of Tyva for the outstanding services in the development of national culture and art.

Thus, theaters occupy the priority position in the national-cultural and linguistic component of ethno-cultural identity of the Siberian region, as well as in the promotion of theatrical traditions at Russian and world levels.

Festival format of regional identity construction

During the last two decades, a broad entry of the culturally rich performative forms of leisure into the sociocultural space of settlements has been recorded. The ethnic culture in Russia has started to acquire a convivial and festival character due to the grant funding of the relevant projects. This has manifested itself in the festivals of different genres (musical, literary, historical, book, folk- and ethno- festivals, as well as festivals of culture, arts, and crafts), which can be interpreted as the “invention of tradition”. The emphasis on the ethnic specificity has been noted by researchers as an essential feature of transformation of the festival culture in the 1990–2000s. For example, the traditional celebrations of the indigenous peoples of the Altai Republic Dyilgayak and Tyuryuk Bayram were revived in the festival format, their boundaries having expanded from the family level to the republican level (Chemchieva, 2016: 198). Along with professionals, ordinary residents of the republic are also widely involved as experts and connoisseurs of the folk culture. Ethno-political function of the events becomes the demonstration of social ties of the indigenous Turkic-speaking population with the representatives of other ethnic groups, primarily the Russians and Kazakhs (Samushkina, 2017: 209). The festival format allows the national culture to remain alive and still fruitful (Chemchieva, 2016: 197). The younger generation, and especially the academic youth, successfully incorporates popular culture into the subculture of social media (Krasavina, 2017) and conducts relevant research.

The ethno-confessional atlas of the Novosibirsk Region, containing the analysis of holidays and festivals, was prepared by the scientists from the Institute of Archaeology and Ethnography SB RAS (Novosibirskaya oblast..., 2017). It has become a real communicative sociocultural practice for strengthening the unity of the Russian nation in its regional dimension and forming the multiculturalism as one of the most important skills of adaptation.

Folk festivals in the Krasnoyarsk Territory actualized the broad layers of folk culture and crafts. The multi-ethnic festival “Seveki—Legends of the North” (the Velmo settlement) reproduces an authentic Evenki holiday with a shaman’s appointment, traditional dances, tasting of dried muksun, and the atmosphere of nomadic life. The festival of folk

culture and ethnic music “Solstice” held at the Buzim recreation camp is based on the historical reconstruction of the Old Slavonic holiday called “Kupala Night”, with traditional rituals, round dances, and firewalking. The international festival “WORLD of Siberia” in the village of Shushenskoye, held with the active role of the museum-reserve, attracts lovers of ethnic music and crafts.

In 2019, the staff of the Cultural Center “Akademiya” in the Sovetsky District, Novosibirsk (Novosibirsk Akademgorodok) initiated the city ethno-cultural forum “Manifold Siberia: Dialogues of Cultures and Generations” with the interregional participation. At present, it has received some considerable public attention, support from the state and from scientific and national civic organizations, representatives of business structures, and from the media. In 2023, at the Fifth Interregional Forum, a number of events were held, including the Interregional Festival of Pedagogical Proficiency of Ethnic Cultures of the Peoples of Russia, with the support of the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Khakassia, with the inclusion of platforms dedicated to ethno-cultural educational components of the regions. The next stage of the forum “Manifold Siberia: Dialogues of Cultures and Generations” is scheduled to be held in the Altai Republic, to present the successful multi-ethnic practices. The event is focused on expanding the information space in the field of ethno-cultural education, creativity, and constructive inter-ethnic communication in the Siberian region.

In general, the festival format reflects the efficiency of integration of regional authorities, as well as cultural, scientific, educational, and business institutions. It also symbolically visualizes the images of the whole Siberia and its regions, cities, and towns. The performative sociocultural practices are increasingly perceived as the platforms for confirmation/redefinition of the identity. They act as a place of publicly available escapism, with the possibility to be a person who feels and experiences directly. They communicate the identity of feelings, unity, and kinship to the participants of convivial-festival and time-space continuum. Obviously, the festival life of Siberia in the modern dynamic everyday life, on the one hand, strengthens the sensual-emotional component of the Siberian ethno-cultural identity, and on the other hand, enhances the civilizational component in the all-Russian identity of the Siberians, thus introducing them to the global sociocultural space.

Conclusions

The interdisciplinary study of ethno-cultural identity that began on the cusp of the 20th and 21st centuries is currently at the stage of active scientific reflection and requires the formation and systematization of the empirical base, as well as the search for new approaches to the creation of universal models of regional identity, with the selection of ethno-cultural aspects. In this paper, we have presented for the first time a set of empirical knowledge and conclusions in relation to the activities of basic cultural institutions and sociocultural practices in Siberia. These correlate with the four criteria of ethno-cultural identity: territorial, cultural, national, and linguistic. The ethno-cultural component was established to be one of the dominants in the museumization of the region in the range from large environmental museums to museum-tourist development of especially significant sites of the indigenous population of the region, the creation of a wide range of exhibitions of ethno-cultural heritage with presentation of traditional and modern spiritual ethnic culture.

Activities of theaters working in natural languages and of festivals and forums as the emotionally framed processes of identification provide conditions “for self-identification of an individual or a social group with another person, group, or model, for interiorization of the occupied social statuses, and for acquisition of significant social roles” (Monakov, 2008: 85).

Noteworthy is the integration of actors in the construction of regional identity: public authorities, national-cultural associations, local communities, basic cultural institutions, and representatives of creative industries. This creates the potential for improving the sociocultural infrastructure to acquaint the local population and the residents of other regions with the Siberian multi-ethnicity as a priority factor in the development of all aspects of ethno-cultural identity.

Taking into account the results of the study of sociocultural practices in the Siberian region in the social constructivist paradigm, we suggest to single out the ethno-cultural aspect in the collective regional identity model, along with cognitive, value, sensual-emotional, and regulatory aspects, the ethno-cultural aspect being a significant one in the modern development of Russia and its regions. It is synthesizing in its character, being complementary and diffusive in regard to the above aspects. Its content is formed on the basis of sociocultural practices correlated with territorial, national, cultural, and linguistic

criteria of ethno-cultural identity and implemented by basic cultural institutions (museums, theaters, and libraries), as well as in the course of museum-tourist and educational projects, and the festival movement. The identified positions ensure organic integration of the multi-ethnic Siberian region into the Russian and world culture; it has a pronounced identity that is concentrated in the construct of “manifold Siberia”. The essence and content of the ethno-cultural aspect of the regional identity model are focused on ethno-cultural education and upbringing of young people; the use of sociocultural practices that are adequate to modern realities allow to strengthen and broadcast the positive Siberian identity and promote the harmonious civilizational development of our state in the context of the Russia’s northernness as its key identity.

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