

**Provincial Russia in transition. The rise of urban culture at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries**

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**Abstract.** The current research results are based on the using different historical sources which contain information about cultural life of the certain towns in the European part of the Russian Empire during the period from the end of the XIX until the beginning of the XX. The analysis involved historical sources led to a number of assumptions regarding the formation and development of urban culture in the Russian province in the turn of the XIXth – XXth centuries.

[Semenov M.Y., Dvoretzkiy E.V. **Provincial Russia in transition. The rise of urban culture at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries.** *Life Sci J* 2014;11(12):245-251-] (ISSN:1097-8135). <http://www.lifesciencesite.com>. 45

**Keywords:** russian province, historical urbanistic, cultural periphery, urban culture

**Introduction**

Before speaking about the principle item mentioned in the title of the article, we should specify, first of all, the term *the Russian province*.

The notion *province* is often used in Russian human science not only to nominate cities and regions, which are geographically distant from metropolitan centers, but also to refer to a particular lifestyle or way of life. It results in a conceptualization of province not only (and not so much) as a geographical periphery, but also as a cultural periphery (particularly at the end of the XIX and the beginning of the XX centuries).

Such conclusion is based on the fact that contemporary Russian human science doesn't present the holistic (systemic) picture of the Russian province cultural life history of the turn of the XIX and XX centuries. That is why the first task is to reconstruct the history of the cultural life of certain Russian provincial cities of the named period. So, the object of our study is the cultural life of Russian provincial cities of Voronezh and Kursk at the end of the XIX and the beginning of the XX centuries.

The choice of these cities is based on their geographical remoteness from metropolitan centers and also on that fact that they are agricultural centers with predominantly peasant population. So these factors allow to characterize Kursk and Voronezh as a typical province (in the geographical, historical and cultural dimensions).

To prove this conclusion, it is necessary to reconstruct the history of the cultural life of Kursk and Voronezh at the given period. In order to do this, we study and analyze various historical sources, which contain information about the cultural life of the cities. The main problem we face while reconstructing the cultural life history of provincial cities is that there was no tradition of cultural events recording (in comparison with economical events, for

example), and as a consequence of it we have only some fragmentary information.

We study historical sources which appeared during the period of the so called *forced industrialization* in the Russian Empire. This confines the chronological framework of the research to the end of 1890s of the XIX century, on the one hand, and to the beginning of the First World War (1914), on the other. Both of these phenomena have fundamentally changed the social and cultural life of the Russian society (including provincial society).

**Discussion**

The analyzed historical sources contain a great deal of historical details and facts concerning the cultural life of Kursk and Voronezh in the period under review. So this part of the article will focus on the general characteristics of only secular cultural life of these cities. These characteristics will be general, of course, but at the same time they will represent the typical situation.

Here we see some brief statistical information: The results of All-Russian population census in 1897 showed that the population of Kursk was 75508 people and the population of Voronezh was 80599 people. Peasant population prevailed in both cities (in Kursk it was 40169 people, or 53.2%, in Voronezh it was 40545 or 50.3%). Illiterate population prevailed over literate in Kursk (42686); in Voronezh illiterate population was only slightly lower in number in comparison with the number of literate people (37801).

The cultural life of both cities contained two principle segments:

- cultural and educational life. It includes features of secular cultural life associated with the dissemination of scientific and popular scientific knowledge among the various strata of the urban population (excluding educational institutions);

- cultural and entertainment life. It includes features of secular cultural life associated with the offer to different layers of urban population of opportunities of pastime that are not associated with any kind of work or training activities.

The study of the cultural and educational life of Kursk and Voronezh at the turn of the XIX – XX centuries showed that public organizations which dealt with promoting scientific and popular scientific knowledge among the general urban population expanded during this period. The founders of these organizations were representatives of the provincial intelligentsia. The target audience of these organizations was primarily illiterate or semi-literate population.

So, in 1894 the Voronezh Commission of People's Reading (VCPR) began to operate in Voronezh and in 1898 the Society Assistance to Primary Education of Kursk Government (SAPEKG) started functioning in Kursk. Both organizations had similar goals, so they wanted to promote primary education within the provinces, which was claimed, according to the census [1, 2].

The main method both organizations' diffusion of knowledge was the so-called people readings which were public (free or for a small fee) lectures on popular science topics with the use of visual aids (magic lantern - a prototype of the modern projector and shadow pictures - glass slides with a pictures on them).

Topics of popular lectures were initially limited by the Ministry of National Education. It produced a special catalogue, which, according to

contemporaries, “was characterized by efficient poverty of quantity and quality”[3]. The lecturer had no right to comment on the reading. His main task was to read the given text. The topics of the first lectures in Voronezh in 1894 г. were: *About Peter the First, his childhood, how and what he studied; About the Volga River; Life of the Mother of God; Trinity Lavra of St. Sergius; What is coal and how it is produced; Merchant Igolkin's act of bravery*. In Kursk in 1904, for example, the following lectures were suggested: *About the water; About the air; How plants fight; India; Abyssinia; About Siberia* and others [4]. Among the characteristic features of popular lectures organization in Kursk and Voronezh are:

- lack of own premises to hold lectures in;
- restrictive government policy;
- dependence on local administration.

In terms of content the characteristic features of lectures were:

- invariable number of topics (due to the limited list of permitted books);
- absence of systematic presentation of the material (this was due to poverty of permitted books catalog, and to restrictive policy of local officials).

Despite the restrictive organizational conditions VCPR and SAPEKG tried to give regular public lectures and contributed to their proliferation within the provinces.

To see if these lectures were popular with the target audience we could turn to the statistical data, contained in VCPR and SAPEKG annual reports.

**Table 1. The distribution of VCPR lecture attendees in 1893-1898 [5, 6, 7, 8]**

Year	Number of Lectures	Number of Fee-paying Attendees	Number of Free Attendees	Total	
1893-1894	11	7251	2912	10163	
1894-1895	36	22400	9680	32080	
1895-1896	38	No data	No data	40384	
1896-1897	70	22509	5234	27743	30573
		4470	1640	2830	
1897-1898	29	2107	1000	3107	5370
		1112	1151	2263	

**Table 2. The distribution of SAPEKG lecture attendees in 1898 – 1903 [9]**

Year	Number of Lectures	Number of Attendees
1898 (the second half)	No data	11454 (half year)
1899	94	13441
1900	77	11924
1901	71	11008
1902	71	7227
1903	56	7178
1904	51	2113

From the given tables 1 and 2 it is clearly seen that public lectures were a regular event in the cultural life of Kursk and Voronezh for several years. We can also say that they were popular with the citizens. But this popularity was unstable. A few years after the regular functioning the public lectures fell into disrepair in Kursk and Voronezh. There are the following reasons for this decline:

- invariable topics;
- no systemic character;
- perception of the lectures by the most part of attendees as entertainment (mainly because of the slide show).

However, the analyses of statistic data allows to conclude that VCPR and SAPEKG achieved their goal, being able to attract a significant audience of attendees.

Another important activity of Russian intelligentsia concerning cultural minimum projection among the townspeople was establishment of libraries. Semyonov's Public Library appeared in Kursk in 1897, Pushkin Public Library appeared in 1899, and public library appeared in Voronezh in 1864 and then its branches developed. The main goal of public libraries was characterized as "giving to all social groups the opportunity to use a book for free and for extensive use"[10]. Public libraries also provided books for a fee.

Voronezh public library was established as a result of Voronezh intelligentsia's enterprise but didn't have any financial aid from the state or local authorities. Kursk libraries also were established as a result of intelligentsia's enterprise, had financial aid from the City Duma which amounted 500 rubles annually. The named libraries had no specially equipped rooms for their work, they rented premises. The popularity of the public libraries could be seen in the information published in the annual reports.

**Table 3. Voronezh Public Library**

Years	Total Amount of Demands (in reading rooms and loan department)	Number of Reading Rooms Attendees	Number of Library Passes	Library Stock (in volumes)
1885	102796	20106	758	22084
1890	69639	6274	871	28853
1895	84807	11130	1161	41989
1900	55875 (due to moving to the new building)	14283	1551	50424
1905	50110	18745	1850	57158
1910	59497	12992	2151	60767

**Table 4. Kursk Semenov's Public Library**

Years	Total Amount of Demands (in reading rooms and loan department)	Number of Reading Rooms Attendees	Number of Library Passes	Library Stock (in volumes)
1899	No data	No data	244	8492
1900	42618	147	468	10273
1901	45870	No data	570	21937
1902	46723	80	564	22890
1903	44603	89	624	24192
1904	No data	No data	694	No data
1905	No data	214	No data	No data

In fact, the number of citizens who used the books in Kursk and Voronezh, was even wider. In Voronezh, besides the main library there were also two branches of it, and another library functioned in Kursk (Pushkin Public Library). The greatest demand in the libraries of both cities was fiction. Thanks to the continued existence of VPB we can trace the dynamics of interest change of the readers who liked fiction and some magazines [11, 12, 13, 14, 15]:

**Table 5. The Most Popular Magazine/Newspaper**

Year	Total Amount of Demands	The Most Popular Magazine/Newspaper	Russian Fiction	Foreign Fiction
1885	102796	1315 ( <i>Russkaja Mysl'</i> )	11816	6674
1890	69639	1661 ( <i>Vestnik Evropy</i> )	13356	5284
1895	84807	5242 ( <i>Russkie Vedomosti</i> )	16052	7690
1900	55875	No data	No data	No data
1905	50110	638 ( <i>Russkoe Bogatstvo</i> )	17390	8528
1910	59497	No data	19622	13316

Books and periodicals were widely available to the residents of Kursk and Voronezh, and the libraries were popular with the citizens. Books in foreign languages were available to the residents of Kursk and, especially, Voronezh (primarily in French). All these facts allow to say that libraries successfully coped with the task to make books and magazines available to the public, forming the habit of daily reading, making reading a normal feature of the urban way of life.

The cultural and entertainment life intensively developed alongside the cultural and educational life in Kursk and Voronezh at the turn of the XIX – XX centuries. The main sources of information for its reconstruction were the newspapers: *Kurskaja Gazeta* and *Voronezhskij Telegraf* of various years (more than 300 issues in total). Both positioned themselves as periodicals of liberal views, regularly covered the cultural events in details, posted information about them in special columns called “Theatre and Music”.

Two main tendencies can be pointed out in the theatrical and musical life of both cities: the touring professional artists and amateur activities. The basis of the theatrical and musical life of Kursk and Voronezh were touring actors under the direction of entrepreneurs. Neither Kursk nor Voronezh had repertory theater (and therefore there was no permanent repertory companies). Both cities had good material and technical base. Voronezh had at least five theater venues at the beginning of the XX century. Regular performances were acted in the building of the Winter Theatre and the People's House. Kursk also had five theater venues at the beginning of the XX century (main performances were given on the stages of the two city's theaters – the winter (named M.S. Shchepkin's) and summer).

The brightest events in theatrical and musical life of Kursk at the end of the XIX – beginning of the XX century are the following: tours of the famous popularizers of the best works of world classical drama, actors known all over Europe – brothers Adelgeim (1903) [16]; the performance with Petersburg Saburov Theatre prima Elena Mavrikiyevna Granovskaja [17] (1913); “the luminaries of Russian scene, artists of the Imperial Moscow Maly Theatre Mrs. A.A. Levshina, Mrs. E.M. Sadovskaja, Mr. V.A. Bljumental'-Tamarin, actors of Theatre of Korsh Mr. B.S. Borisov, N.N. Gorich, the actor of St. Petersburg Maly Theatre Mr. K.O. Shorshtejn, the actor of St. Petersburg Nezlobin Theatre Mr. M.M. Tarhanov who toured in Kursk as a part of repertory company in 1913” [18].

Along with the national drama and opera ensembles Kursk was visited by foreign repertory companies in the early XX century: the Italian opera

company and French operetta company “la Roulotte” [19, 20, 21, 22, 23] gave their tour in 1901. The most striking events of Kursk musical life can be named as: the world tour of the famous Russian opera singer Fyodor Chaliapin in 1901 [24]; the performance of the Polish pianist Josef Hofmann (January 1903) [25]; the concerts of incredibly popular performers of Gypsy romance A.D. Vyaltseva (1903 r.) [26] and M.A. Jemskaja - one of the first Russian singers whose voice was recorded on gramophone records (1913 r.) [27]. In 1912 Kursk visited by the contemporary eminent violinist Bronislaw Huberman [28]; The world-famous Russian composer and pianist S.V. Rachmaninoff toured in 1913 [29], etc.

The repertoire was extremely diverse: it included the operas “La Traviata”, “Les Huguenots”, “Faust”, “Hamlet” and performances based on creations of Russian and European playwrights to Ukrainian operas and French operettas.

The similar situation was in Voronezh, at the turn of the XIX - XX centuries. Among the highlights of the theatrical and musical life of the city can be named the tour of already mentioned performer of Gypsy romance A.D. Vyaltseva; the performances with starring V.F. Komissarjevskaya and D.H. Ugine, tours of Italian opera and Ukrainian teams, etc. Over the years, residents of Voronezh were shown such operas as “Il Travatore” and “Aida” by Verdi, “Carmen” by Bizet, “Eugene Onegin” by Tchaikovsky, “Les Huguenots” by Meyerbeer, etc., operettas “Geisha” by C. Jones, “Birds Singing” by J. Offenbach, etc.

Amateur clubs existed in addition to performances of professional artists in Kursk and Voronezh. The circles of Dramatic Art admirers and the circles of music admirers developed in both cities. Both of them wanted to popularize opera and drama, classical music. Musical circles were the most successful in both cities. Theatrical circles experienced similar problems: their officials could not determine the choice of repertoire to an audience unfamiliar with the theater.

In addition to theatrical and musical life the systematic phenomena of cultural and entertainment life of both cities was circus and cinema.

The presented general characteristics of the cultural life of Kursk and Voronezh at the turn of the XIX – XX centuries witnesses that the cultural life of these cities was intense and rich. The citizens had the opportunity to attend cultural events regularly, besides, they had a wide range of pastime opportunities, the best classical works of various genres, often performed by well-known artists were available to them.

Brief description of the history of the cultural life of Kursk and Voronezh is necessary in order to get an idea about the innovations that appeared in it under the influence of the process of modernization. Also, the analysis of historical sources will help to come closer to answering the fundamental question of the article – whether the urban culture developed in the Russian province in the period under review.

First of all, it is necessary to find out what is meant by the term *urban culture*. The scientific literature analysis reveals that the urban culture is the object of study of various scientific disciplines. Therefore, it should be noted that in this article urban culture will be primarily presented as a historical event. In Russian historiography, the term *urban culture* is widely used in the scientific literature, but researchers avoid defining it. Western humanities also attempt to conceptualize and explain this phenomenon. The traditional problem is the lack of comparability (or partial comparability) of the terminology used.

The English literature is dominated by the term *urban culture*, which in the German language as a whole can meet the concept of *Stadtkultur*, in the Russian language it correlates with the term *gorodskaja kul'tura*. However, in the German scientific language the notion *Urbanität* is also widespread. It is broader in meaning and often includes the notion of *Stadtkultur*[30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 40, 41, 42]. In Russian humanities besides the term *gorodskaja kul'tura* (which usually means centuries-old, traditional culture), such notions as *city urbanizing culture* (the term usually used in relation to the period of the late XIX - early XX century) and *urban culture* (the notion that reflects the kind of completeness of the process of urbanization, which characterizes, as a rule, the modern state of the urban society) are used.

During the continuous scientific discussion it is possible to enlarge the existing knowledge about the phenomenon of city urbanizing culture with the help of historical material.

Theoretically, one can imagine the urban culture as an information space with its nucleus (the city itself) which is the place of localization and generation of urban culture (source of certain information) and the periphery (it includes everything that is outside the nucleus, but is influenced by the information flow obtained from the nucleus). In other words the principle difference between urban and non-urban culture is based on the specific character of generated and *projected* information.

If to name urban culture a historical phenomenon as it is mentioned in the article, it is clearly seen that the simple supposition concerning

the presence (or absence) of urban culture in any particular locality is controversial. But it is obvious that terms, reflecting the dynamic character of the phenomenon, for example, like *higher (lower) degree of urban culture formation (registration)* are more appropriate in a historical context.

## Results

The analysis of historical sources makes it possible to point out a number of hypothetical signs that may indicate a higher degree of city urbanizing culture development. The indicated signs are called hypothetical because, first of all, they were worked out on the basis of historical material which concerned only the cultural life; besides this information concerned the cultural history of only two Russian cities - Kursk and Voronezh.

These signs are the following:

1 - heterogeneity of cultural and information space, which results in the heterogeneity of projected (by the city) information.

2 - the existence of a variety of subjects, which build up the urban culture space. Such subjects of urban culture are secular and / or religious organizations which generate, project and distribute cultural information of society, and also associations, whose main task is to popularize the samples of national and world culture among urban population, and consequently to acquaint people with the cultural heritage, to make literacy level higher, to distribute scientific and basic knowledge among common people, to form people's reading habits and to organize leisure.

Subjects of urban culture generate cultural information, create cultural values, influence citizen's world view, their tastes, so they may include theater, library, church, saloons, universities, clubs, schools, museums, community organizations and associations engaged in cultural and educational activities.

3 - socio-cultural heterogeneity: the difference in the perception of cultural heritage and cultural events by different layers of the urban population, as well as the uneven level of their involvement in the cultural life in general.

4 - the presence of sub-cultures, understood as the transformed value system of traditional culture, which received a kind of ideological coloring, which is connected with the process of formation of different culture levels, for example, elite, mass, ethnic (traditional).

5 - distribution of the urban way of life norms among the non-urban population living within the city or permanently connected with it, or acculturation (spontaneous or deliberate, active or passive), understood here as the process of acquisition (active and conscious acculturation) or



adoption (passive and spontaneous acculturation) of city life norms.

6 - the priority of scientific knowledge and literacy over the traditional world view. These features are the most common, they oppose the phenomenon of urban culture to the universal cultural space.

However, taking into consideration the specific features of Russian cities historical development at the turn of XIX - XX centuries, we can enlarge the given list by the following features of urban culture:

1) active absorption of information due to systematic reading of fiction and science-fiction, newspapers and magazines, shows and educational events;

2) easy access to the cultural information for common people, that is the opportunity to popularize the best national and foreign cultural achievements;

3) cultural cosmopolitanism in late XIX - early XX century, understood as a certain degree of Russian population initiation to the phenomena of the world culture and related to this certain synchrony of city cultural life events to the context of world culture;

4) opportunity to choose the way of pastime and various leisure activities (compared to non-urban area), which is due to the significant number of different cultural events and relationships offered at a certain time (i.e. a dynamic cultural life);

5) presence / absence of the necessity of impressions of constant cultural entertainments, opportunity to participate in the cultural life for all social groups, regardless of social status.

In conclusion, it should be noted that apart from the question of the legality of the proposed understanding of the phenomenon of urban culture there exists a number of no less significant scientific problems. If the hypothesis is correct, it can be applied to all major cities of the Russian Empire in the late XIX - early XX century (the cities of Siberia, for example)? Can we speak about the origin of some regional (if to take European scale) model of city urbanizing culture of the turn of the century, which appeared under the influence of the process of modernization?

#### Acknowledgments

The research was carried out with support of the Ministry of education and science of the Russian Federation. The project theme "Cultural and educational activity as a phenomenon in the cultural life of the Russian city in the late XIX - early XX century". Code – 327.

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7/26/2014