

## Social Identities in Russia and Poland

*Elena Danilova, Moscow*

One of the fundamental questions that has emerged in the recent transformation of post-communist societies concerns the constitution of individuals' identifications with social groups and communities. The question refers to socio-cultural constructions such as ethnic groups or nation-states, social status position or marginal group, political and cultural affiliations etc. It is obvious that these multiple, overlapping, shared and contingent identities are changing under the new social and economic conditions. The relevance of the topic will be exemplified further on by the findings of a comparative study conducted in Russia and Poland<sup>1</sup>. The study was aimed at assessing similar and specific features of social identities in both countries on the basis of data collected in the surveys of nationwide samples of adult population in Spring 1998<sup>2</sup>.

The study is based on the concept of multidimensional social identity. Its guiding idea is that every society generates the sets of identities (social categories) which are functional for its development and survival as a social system. Identities are determined by social settings of attitudes and utilised by people for inter-group comparisons and as a basis for group loyalties. Thus, social identities determine the development of group bonds and solidarity. The study of social identity promotes the better understanding of society and its developmental potentials.

Taking these assumptions for granted, social categories that are at the focal point of current social transformation in both societies were examined. Careful specification allows to compare identities of Poles and Russians. The questionnaire included two main tools of recording social identities: the procedure of measuring individuals in-group solidarities or collective identities („We-identity“) and the procedure of choosing and sorting the relevant self-characteristics („I-sort-procedure“ related to „personal identity“).

The procedure of registering collective identities was based on measuring group proximity. The questionnaire contained the following question: „During our lives we meet various people. With some, we easily find a common language, an intellectual affinity, and we understand them. Others, in contrast, always remain strangers to us even though we may live alongside them. As for yourself, how often do you feel a closeness (a sense of community) to various groups of people about whom you could say, 'This is we'?" The respondents were asked to choose among three given answers. Possible responses were: „frequently“, „sometimes“, „hardly ever“, with the option „difficult to say“. The objects of identification were distributed beforehand among 24 categories of social groupings and communities.

„I-sort procedure“ means that each respondent was given cards with indication of various social categories, and was

asked to select particular social categories which she/he considered to be relevant and important to her-/himself. As a result, the interviewer has the number of selected categories for each respondent.

### Who are „We“ in Russia and Poland?

#### *Distribution and hierarchy of social identities*

For societies in transformation, the answer to the question which groups and communities a person identifies as „his own“, and which ones he sees as in some way friendly or hostile becomes fundamentally important for an understanding of social bonds and resources. Here we examine collective identities. Dynamism and the multilayered nature of social relations in one way or another give rise to the need to order both dominant and peripheral „solidarities“. Given the fact that in general, Russians prefer to identify themselves within a wider range of groups and communities than Poles do, the hierarchies of collective identifications are basically quite similar (see picture 1).

The basic level of identities both in Russia and Poland is constituted by primary groups, groups of everyday contacts, i.e. family and friends. While Russians equally frequently choose both friends and family, Poles more often value family over friends. Russians in general more strongly identify themselves with „people of the common lifeview“, „people of the same age and generation“, as well as „people with the same income“, „work-mates“, „people of the same occupation“, „people living in the same city“, whereas among Poles these identifications do not have as wide a range. Such constructions as Soviet people, or advocates of PPR lay at the periphery of social identities.

However, there are some meaningful differences. Poles appraise solidarities within their national state and cultural tradition as well as with the rest of world, while Russians are more aware of ethnic identity and social surroundings.

#### *Latent structures of We-identities*

The factor analysis reveals quite similar structures for both Russian and Polish samples<sup>3</sup>. Four identities are very similar in the Polish and Russian samples, whereas two are slightly different (see Table 1). Similarities concern identifications within the close social milieu: family and friends, and work and occupation related groups. Two other factors obtained from both sets of data demonstrate similar associations with particular behavioural patterns and illustrate a dividing line between people with different experience of adaptation in both societies. One of them is an active strategy of the individuals with higher adaptive abilities and resources, who are relative „winners“ in the reforms. An alternative pattern is implicated by individuals who show a passive and politically alienated strategy, relative „losers“.

**HIERARCHY OF SOCIAL IDENTIFICATIONS OF RUSSIANS AND POLES**

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>RUSSIA</b></p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>POLAND</b></p>
<p><b>I (basic level)</b></p> <p style="text-align: right;">Friends</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Family</p> <p style="text-align: right;">People of the same life views</p> <p style="text-align: right;">People of the same age, generation</p> <p style="text-align: right;">People of the same level of well-being</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">%</p> <p style="text-align: center;">90</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Family</p> <p style="text-align: center;">80</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Friends</p> <p style="text-align: center;">70</p>
<p><b>II</b></p> <p style="text-align: right;">Work mates</p> <p style="text-align: right;">PEOPLE OF THE SAME ETHNIC GROUP</p> <p style="text-align: right;">People of the same occupation</p> <p style="text-align: right;">People from the same locality</p> <p>¥</p> <p style="text-align: right;">RUSSIANS (ROSSIYANE)</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">People of the same life views</p> <p style="text-align: center;">60</p> <p style="text-align: center;">People of the same level of well-being</p> <p style="text-align: center;">POLES</p> <p style="text-align: center;">People of the same age, generation</p> <p style="text-align: center;">FOLLOWERS OF THE NATIONAL TRADITIONS</p>
<p><b>III</b></p> <p style="text-align: right;">Advocates of local traditions</p> <p style="text-align: right;">FOLLOWERS OF THE NATIONAL TRADITIONS</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Losers during reforms</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">50</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Work mates</p> <p style="text-align: center;">People of the same occupation</p> <p style="text-align: center;">People from the same locality</p> <p style="text-align: center;">PEOPLE OF THE SAME ETHNIC GROUP</p> <p style="text-align: center;">40</p> <p style="text-align: center;">All of humankind</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Advocates of local traditions</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Losers during reforms</p> <p style="text-align: center;">People of the same political views</p>
<p><b>IV (periphery)</b></p> <p style="text-align: right;">People of the same political views</p> <p style="text-align: right;">SOVIET PEOPLE</p> <p style="text-align: right;">All of humankind</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">30</p> <p style="text-align: center;">20</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Advocates of PPR</p> <p style="text-align: center;">10</p>

Differences between the two societies are indicated by the remaining factors. Polish data reveal that the most solid and consistent factor of national identity is „Poles“. It is supported by „followers of national Polish traditions“, „people of the same ethnicity“, „people living in the same city (village)“, „people with the same income“ and „all of humankind“.

Russian identity is less consistent. „Russians“ do things together with „people living in the same locality“, „people of the same generation“, „people with the same income“. Ethnic and cultural components of national identity do not correlate with „Russians“. In comparison with Poland, where national identity is deeply rooted in tradition and religion, Russia presents a rather abstract up-rooted identity.

Still another bond of collective identities in Russia and Poland relates to the past. We label this factor as syndrome of deprivation and nostalgia for the socialist past. Fee-

lings of present-day deprivation and nostalgia for the socialist past as well as local patriotism unite people, who did not adjust to the changes in both societies. In the Russian data this particular factor correlates positively with the variable „followers of the national Russian traditions“.

Summing up, the populations of Russia and Poland generate quite similar bonds of collective identities. Identifications with the closest social milieu are the most prominent. The contact groups within both private and work-related domains play the dominant role in individuals' social environment in both societies. It must be pointed out, particularly for Russia, that the increasing differentiation of possessions and the demarcation in respect to ways of thinking and vital convictions have led to a sense of closeness to one's own generation.

Beyond this narrow circle of everyday practices, social space is formed on the basis of stereotypes and models as well as on the basis of contrasts and unstable categori-

Table 1: Factor structures of collective identities

Russia		Poland	
<b>Primary groups</b>		<b>Primary groups</b>	
Family	0,53	People of the same outlook on life	0,64
People of the same outlook on life	0,71	Family	0,66
Friends	0,65	Friends	0,69
<b>Occupation related groups</b>		<b>Occupation related groups</b>	
Work mates	0,80	Work mates	0,71
People of the same occupation	0,65	People of the same occupation	0,51
		People of the same age, generation	0,52
<b>Active strategy</b>		<b>Active strategy</b>	
Masters of own fate	0,60	Masters of own fate	0,59
Those who achieved success	0,70	Those who achieved success	0,67
Business people	0,75	Business people	0,65
		People of the same political views	0,53
<b>Passive and politically alienated position</b>		<b>Passive and politically alienated position</b>	
Those who prefer not to show up	0,57	People having no interest in politics	0,73
Those who believe that nothing depends on their own actions	0,72	Those who prefer not to show up	0,52
People having no interest in politics	0,72	Those who believe that nothing depends on their own actions	0,68
<b>„We-Russians“</b>		<b>„We-Poles“</b>	
Russians (citizens of Russia)	0,55	Poles	0,75
People living in the same city (village)	0,74	Followers of Polish national traditions	0,64
People of the same age, generation	0,68	People of the same ethnicity	0,59
People of the same income	0,63	People of the same income	0,55
		All of humankind	0,58
		People living in the same city (village)	0,64
<b>Deprivation and nostalgia for the Soviet past</b>		<b>Deprivation and nostalgia for the socialist past</b>	
Soviet people	0,62	Advocates of People's Republic	0,65
Those who find themselves in need	0,56	Those who find themselves in need	0,72
Followers of Russian national traditions	0,66	Supporters of local traditions	0,69
Supporters of local traditions	0,67		

sations, especially in respect to Russia. Solidarities with wide communities like citizenship and political preferences are most open to change. Solidarities of those who demonstrate the same active or passive life strategies, require adaptation to changing conditions, including a capacity for reshuffling of social identifications. The latter concerns mostly those individuals who have achieved better positions in the new economic structures. Those who still hold customary social identifications of Soviet people or advocate socialist Poland, regard themselves as being in a worse position – as „people in need“. In Russia the identity with Soviet people is deeper and in many respects differs from the socialist identity of Poles.

The main differences between Russian and Polish societies concern the identities, which establish the basis for national consolidation or refer to cultural and political traditions of the two countries. Another set of differences concern identities with the world. Poles demonstrate a consistent structure of national identity rooted in tradition and religion, which provide a wide basis for national consolidation. In Russia there is an absence of such cohesiveness. The split between civic, ethnic and cultural components that one can observe in factor structures, erodes the concept of national identity as it is understood in Polish society. A quite considerable part of Russians still hold to their identification as Soviet people, which in some sense substitutes the national identity. The development of the double reconstruction of national identities in Russia took place after a breakdown of national traditions and religion at the beginning of the twentieth century and after the collapse of the Soviet Union at its demise. During the communist era the national identity was substituted or superimposed by the supranational „Soviet“ identity, which still has some power of attraction for the elderly generation. The recent reconstruction reflects problems of nation-building in Russia. Historically, the national identity in Russia is strongly linked with the powerful state. However, contemporary Russia does not correspond to such an image. More than 40 percent of the Russian population selected identity of „a citizen of the country that has lost its great power“. There is also a split between various elites in Russian society, therefore a lack of a common national idea which could lead to consolidation of the multiethnic nation.

### „Winners“ and „Losers“ of Transformation

#### *How to measure the difference?*

The question of how an individual copes with the hardships of transition is of special importance in comparative study. Relative „winners“ and relative „losers“ in transformation were defined in two ways: by comparing the currently occupied position with the position held some years ago and on the basis of an aggregated index covering feelings of success or optimism<sup>4</sup>. The first indicator shows subjective estimations of gains or losses during a five-

year period. According to this difference each sample was divided into three groups: the losers (negative dynamics of estimates), the stable group (no dynamics) and the winners (positive dynamics) (see Table 2). The results appeared clear-cut: in Russia there are more victims, in Poland – more winners.

One can observe a common declining tendency of the subjective prosperity estimates during a five-year period in both societies. However, the decline is more striking in Russia than in Poland. There is also a difference in proportion of people with a stable position – in Poland it is higher than in Russia.

Another indicator of social adaptation is the index of relative deprivation, which reflects the gap between one's level of achievements and level of aspirations. The former is constituted as a difference between the present and five years ago; estimates of one's prosperity, e.g. dynamic estimates in terms of whether losses or gains have been the result. The latter is a difference between one's present position and a position that one considers appropriate for oneself. Thus, the level of relative deprivation is accounted as a proportion between a level of achievements and a level of aspirations. The larger the gap, the higher the extent of relative deprivation. The average level of aspirations of Russians is slightly higher than that of Poles (7,49 and 7,12 respectively with significance  $p < 0.0001$ ). The level of deprivation in Russia is two times higher than in Poland (-0,36 and -0,18 respectively).

Therefore, all indicators show that people in Russia were negatively affected by social changes to a greater extent than Poles. This is also evidence that the Russian society is still more unstable and dynamic. Instability and dynamism of Russian society coincide with bigger social mobility, which makes social adaptation more difficult. In particular, this applies to the criteria for individuals' estimation of their position within society and to the measurement of one's losses and gains.

#### *Who are the „winners“ and „losers“ in both societies?*

In both countries the groups of „winners“ and „losers“ have similar socio-demographic profiles. The experience of being a „winner“ depends on numerous social and demographic factors. Higher proportions of males, of younger people, of more educated people, of those with higher income, and of those who live in a medium and big

Table 2: Composition of the society by adaptation groups (in %)

Groups	Russia (N=1604)	Poland (N=1081)
Losers	57,2	42,1
Stable	23,8	33,0
Winners	19,0	24,9

cities belong to the „winners“. In Russia as compared to Poland, the dependence of being „winner“ upon socio-demographic factors is stronger. Age is one of the crucial factors influencing the assessment of one's capacities in both countries, but particularly in Russia. Experiences, habits and inclinations that depend to a large extent on old age appear to be a burden for individuals in both countries. The young age becomes one of the most important resources of an individual in the situation of rapid and extensive social change. On the contrary, in stable Western societies one may observe a modestly negative relation between age and symptoms of depression, as younger people usually have greater adaptation problems than older ones. Experience promotes further adaptation. In Russia and Poland, the experience gained in the era of socialism is rapidly becoming useless and hampers learning new adaptive behaviour. In this situation, young people have greater opportunity to develop effective strategies for coping with the reality.

In both countries the syndrome of „loser“ is related to low education, low social and vocational position and old age. However, in Russia it is additionally related to being female,

to the marital status, religious practices and area of residence.

In both societies there are more „winners“ among top-managers, skilled workers, students as well as among new social groups like entrepreneurs. The major difference is observed in the position of professionals. In Poland they are mostly „winners,“ while in Russia professionals are „losers“. In Poland individuals' professional achievements and abilities provide a substantial resource for adaptation and development. In Russia age, social status and material possessions are determinants of such resource. Hence, associations with „winners“ in the reforms in Poland are more relevant to the middle class, whereas to be „a winner“ in Russia is more appropriate to individuals of higher stratum.

*Identity matrices of „winners“ and „losers“  
in Russia and Poland*

The comparison of „winner“ and „loser“ identities helps to understand what are the developmental resources and obstacles in each society under scrutiny (Table 4). The difference between losers and winners is higher in Russia

Table 3: Related identities of „winners“ and „losers“

Russia	Poland
<b>Identities which mark social resources</b>	
<p><i>Similar for both countries:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(+) young person</li> <li>(+) a person with prospects</li> <li>(+) wealthy person</li> <li>(+) student/pupil</li> <li>(+) entrepreneur</li> <li>(+) employee of a particular enterprise</li> </ul>	
<p><i>Different:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(+) a master of his/her own</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(+) member of intelligentsia</li> <li>(+) person of a particular profession</li> </ul>
<b>Identities which mark barriers of adaptation</b>	
<p><i>Similar for both countries:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(-) poor person</li> <li>(-) elder person</li> <li>(-) person without prospects</li> <li>(-) pensioner</li> <li>(-) „Soviet“ person or</li> <li>(-) advocate of People's Republic of Poland</li> <li>(-) peasant</li> </ul>	
<p><i>Different:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(-) ordinary person</li> <li>(-) citizen of the country that is not a great power anymore</li> <li>(-) victim of reforms</li> <li>(-) advocate of the firm hand order</li> <li>(-) parenthood roles</li> </ul>	

than in Poland. The winners are the group characterising the developmental resources of society. Identities based on a higher self-esteem, such as being master of one's own fate, a person with prospects, a wealthy person as well as an entrepreneur or an employee of particular enterprise are important for „winners“. In Russia, the most important resources derive from personal properties<sup>5</sup>, such as young age and higher subjective evaluation (to be strong and rich). In Poland the resources are more socially based on professional achievements, although the personal characteristics are also important.

Identities of „losers“ mark barriers to adaptation, like old age and poor material conditions. In both societies these identities are politically affiliated to the advocates of the past. In Russia the connection is stronger. The more disturbing fact is that in Russia one can identify the parental roles among the barriers.

#### *Who is a „typical person“ in Poland and in Russia?*

A high percentage of respondents in both societies selected an important self-categorisation – „I am like all others“ means a „typical person“. This applies to 57 percent of the sample in Poland and 53 percent in Russia. However, correlation analysis reveals significant differences between Poland and Russia regarding the social and demographic profile of the „typical person“ and her/his characteristics. A typical person in Poland can be young and old, wealthy and not so wealthy, educated and less educated, a resident of cities and of rural areas. The „typical individual“ in contemporary Russia is different: she/he is more frequently a female than a male, an older person rather than young, less educated, an individual in inferior material conditions and residing in rural areas. The feeling of being a „typical person“ in Russia correlates strongly with parameters of social deprivation as well as identities deriving from the collapse of Communism.

Thus, in Poland there is a stable social and normative basis for one's feeling of being like all others and the „typical person“ is embedded in society. In Russia such a social basis is not yet established. The time that has passed since the collapse of the long-lasting Communist regime is

probably not long enough and the crisis has not been overcome yet. To be „typical“ still has Soviet sentiments. It is different in Poland, where the feeling of „being typical“ is harmonized with the majority of current social identities. They include belonging to the world. This self-consciousness of Poles may be one of the important factors which stabilize the construction of the new democratic social order in Poland. In Russia, the declared and accepted social identities do not seem to constitute social resource, which would promote alleviation of social tensions and help to mobilize activities focusing on the common welfare.

#### **What Nations are Closer to Russians and Poles?**

We assume that the character of national identity is conditioned also by attitudes toward other nations. How far or close do Russians and Poles feel towards other nations, how open are they to the world? Several parameters were used to measure geopolitical dimensions of identities, namely the matrix of nations regarded as close or distant, European vs. non European self-identity, openness vs. closeness to the world, evaluation of the role of the nation-state in the world. Our assumption was that every nation maintains its own hierarchy of „significant others“ which embodies national, ethnic and geopolitical formations.

Russians and Poles reveal similar dominant orientations towards the West. But the hierarchy of preferences is different. For Poles it goes like following: Americans, Germans, Russians; for Russians – Poles, Finns, Americans and Germans (Table 3).

The Poles express closeness to other nations as well to the whole world. Three quarters of them (75 percent) regard themselves close to all of humankind, while only 48 percent of Russians include themselves into the world community. As for European identity, 59 percent of Poles selected „being European“ as an important feature, which is more than two times higher than among Russians (26 percent). Russians, who define themselves as Europeans, feel more close to European nations, i.e. Poles, Finns, and then to Americans and Germans compared to other listed nations. Polish „Europeans“ do not reveal any deviance regarding the entire sample.

*Table 4: Perception of other nations in (%)*

Nations	Very close, rather close than distant		Very distant, rather distant than close	
	Russia	Polen	Russia	Poland
Americans	22	45	62	38
Germans	22	40	62	43
Poles/Russians	37	27	43	54
Finns	26	15	71	52
Chinese	13	4	69	71
Japanese	11	8	71	68

Territorial neighbourhood is a more significant factor for Russians (see Table 4). They recognise as „close“ even those nations that are ethnically and culturally distant, but operate in the domain of everyday contacts. Inhabitants of the Far East perceive the Japanese, the Chinese and Americans as closest neighbours. Those who live in Siberia and Kemerovo consider the Chinese as a close nation. They also choose the Poles; this can be explained by a large number of Poles that have lived in the region following the Russian civil war. People who live in the Urals, Bashkiria and the Central regions of Russia feel more distant from other nations. Those who live in the North and North-West of Russia identify more often with Finns than the rest of the respondents.

This provides ground for the assumption that basic criteria for estimation of closeness differ. Poles make their judgements from the standpoint of Western standards and values, while Russians living on the spatially huge territory take into consideration other criteria like neighbourhood or common historical fate and ethnic roots. Poles value the European identity, while Russians take the position of self-sufficiency and specificity of their country.

The socio-economic status of the respondents correlates with perceptions of other nations to a higher extent in Russia than in Poland. Age, education, and the subjective social and economic statuses in Russia have a strong association with the national identification. For example, elder Russians feel most distant from all the mentioned nations. Russians with a high estimation of their well-being identify more with Western nations, while those with lower estimates of well-being feel that they are totally distant from them. Successful people are cosmopolitans, losers demonstrate signs of xenophobia, particularly towards those nations they regard as threatening. Poles do not reveal such characteristics.

Summarising, one may say that the similarity of both Polish and Russian identities is in the dominance of the „West vector,“ which is expressed more evidently in Poland than in Russia. The differences between the two societies are numerous. They relate, first of all, to the higher differentiation in Russia in spatial, social, economic and even political terms. In Poland there is no such differentiation and the perception of other nations there corresponds to the primary values of the whole society as well as to national and European identities shared by the majority of the population. Moreover, the consistence of national identity and values coexists in Poland with openness to the whole world.

In Russia, identification with other nations is determined by the social and spatial differentiation of society. There is a gap regarding value systems between social groups that occupy different social positions and possess different resources. Those who are in upper positions, as for example elites and advanced groups, express their sympathy for

Western nations and Western values, while other groups of the population still feel distant towards the rest of world. This gap makes it difficult to develop a set of common values for all of Russian society based solely on Western ones.

*Elena Danilova is Professor for Sociology at the Russian Academy of Sciences in Moscow.*

- <sup>1</sup> The research project was carried out by members of the Institute of Sociology, Russian Academy of Science (E. Danilova (head of the project), O. Dudchenko, S. Klimova, A. Mytil, V. Yadov) and the Institute of Sociology, Warsaw University (K. Kosela, M. Grabowska, T. Szawiel, E. Kolbowska). The project was supported by RRS grant, Soros Foundation.
- <sup>2</sup> In Russia the survey was carried out by the VCIOM branch at Saint-Petersburg in April and May 1998 on N=1506. A quoted sample of adult population with a mean error of 3 % was used. In Poland the survey of the randomized sample of adult population was conducted in March 1998 on N=1107. The data were collected by Centrum Badania Opinii Społecznej.
- <sup>3</sup> The factor analysis was based on the procedure of OBLIMIN rotation. The six factors explaining in total more than 60 percent of variance were extracted (see table 8) for each sample.
- <sup>4</sup> Indicators for winners and losers were: self-evaluation by a ten-point scale and self-characteristics by chosen identities indicating social optimism. The question was the following: „You see this scale on which the point ‘10’ is the place attributed to people whom you personally regard as the most prosperous and point ‘1’ – the less prosperous. Please indicate the point which you consider as the most relevant for yourself at present time? 5 years ago? And which place you consider as the most appropriate for yourself?“

### **Social Sciences in Southeastern Europe**

NIKOLAI GENOV AND ULRIKE BECKER, EDS.

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