

Small and medium-sized cities: problems of and prospects for development

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Abstract

Problems of development of small and medium-sized cities have been traditionally relevant for regional development. Small and medium-sized cities are special objects of social and economic space: they can either enhance its diversity and strengthen the socio-economic system of the region, or lead to the degradation of the urban economy and also weaken the economy of the adjacent rural areas. This paper deals with the small and medium-sized cities of the Republic of Tatarstan – one of the most economically developed regions of Russia. We conducted the analysis of the demographic status of this category of urban settlements and defined common problems of and prospects for their development. Small and medium-sized cities in Tatarstan have quite different factors of origin and development, their formation falls within different historical periods. Modern specialization of the economy also varies greatly. Many small towns are depressed due to a decrease in population number, its aging, and loss of competitive advantages. The main problem of most of the studied cities – is insufficient development of industries of the urban economy specialization, the need to develop a fundamentally new area of urban development, associated with the food industry, trade, tourism, transport services in transit transport routes, and intangible activities.

Keywords: small towns, medium-sized cities, urban economy, the development of small and medium-sized cities.

Introduction

Cities are essential elements of social and economic space of the region. Favorable conditions make them the points of growth that form their own radius of influence on the surrounding rural areas. In such cases, it usually goes about major cities and urban agglomerations. Small and medium-sized cities are often associated with the delayed development and even regression [1-3]. However, as noted by [4], both small and medium-sized cities can have a large number of socio-economic development scenarios. And the successful development of the urban system is not always caused only by economic factors.

Development of small and medium-sized cities in the Soviet Union was an important element of the demographic and economic policy. Its objectives were to create a variety of urban settlement systems through making them multistaging. Small and medium-sized cities were important settlements, which accepted the migrants from rural areas. The specialization of municipal economy was variable but always narrow. Basically, it was associated with either a resource recycling or agro-industrial production. Development of small and medium-sized cities was supported by planned economy. Modern market path of Russia's development has led to significant changes in settlement systems, including urban areas.

The Russian Federation also has a range of issues related to small and medium-sized cities. Having low competitive advantages as compared with agglomerations, small and medium-sized cities continue losing their population, plus, there is a crisis in the leading sectors of municipal economy [5]. However, the successful development of these cities is very important for Russia. 936 of the 1100 Russian cities account for cities with a population of less than 100 thousand people (or 85% of the cities in the country), which are home to 27.3 million people (every fifth Russian). Every third small city in Russia and every second middle-sized city have objects of cultural and historical heritage, which makes them potential targets of excursion and tourist visits [6]. In this paper we have considered the small and medium-sized cities of the Republic of Tatarstan, one of the most economically developed regions of the European part of Russia.

Methods

This paper was written with the use of statistical data on the population of small and medium-sized cities, provided by the authorities of the state and municipal statistics – Rosstat and the Statistics Committee of the Republic of Tatarstan. On the basis of statistical data, the cities of Tatarstan have been grouped by population size. The analysis of the current indicators was conducted with the use of methods of mathematical statistics, as well as SWOT-analysis of conditions and threats to the development of small and medium-sized cities in the Republic of Tatarstan were conducted.

Results

Tatarstan is a highly urbanized region of Russia, with 75.4% of the population residing in urban areas, and 24.6% – in rural areas. The number of urban population has a tendency to slow sustainable growth.

The cities of the republic differ in the number of inhabitants and play different roles in the internal and external social and economic processes of the territory. The largest cities with population over 100 thousand people have a diversified industry, participate in the intra-regional division of labor by producing products targeting both the domestic and the foreign market.

The region has 22 cities, 11 of them are medium-sized cities and 7 – small towns. In total, medium-sized and small cities count for 23.2% of the citizens of the republic (Table 1).

Table 1

Classification of the cities of Tatarstan by population size

City status	Name	Number of population, thous. peop.	Share in the total urban population of the RT, %	
I. Million cities (1 mil. people and more)	Kazan	1136.5	40	
II. The largest (500 – 999.9 thous. people)	Naberezhnye Chelny	510.3	18	
III. Large (100 – 499.9 thous. people)	Nizhnekamsk	227.1	8	13
	Almetyevsk	142.1	5	
IV. Medium-sized (20 – 99.9 thous. people)	Zelenodolsk	99.1	3.5	19.8
	Bugulma	89.9	3.1	
	Yelabuga	70.5	2.5	
	Leninogorsk	65.5	2.3	
	Chistopol	61.1	2.1	
	Zainsk	42.1	1.5	
	Aznakaevo	34.4	1.2	
	Nurlat	32.1	1.1	
	Bavly	23.2	0.8	
	Mendeleevsk	22.4	0.8	
V. Small (up to 19,9 thous. people)	Buinsk	20.4	0.7	3.4
	Agryz	19.2	0.67	
	Arsk	17.9	0.63	
	Menzelinsk	16.5	0.6	
	Mamadysh	14.6	0.5	
	Tetyushi	11.4	0.4	
	Bolgar	8.3	0.3	
Laishevo	7.9	0.2		

Our analysis of the indicators characterizing the demographic situation and the employment structure by sectors of the urban economy allowed us to divide the small cities of the country into three groups:

Group I. Cities closely related to rural area: Arsk, Laishevo, Mamadysh. The leading sectors of the city economy are the agricultural raw materials processing industries. These, as a rule, are the cities that recently received the status of an urban settlement.

Group II. Cities having retained the major objects of cultural heritage associated with the medieval state of Volga Bulgaria: Bolgar, Tetyushi. The main problems of these cities are the relative lack of development of tourism infrastructure.

Group III. Cities with two or more specializations, representing the important transportation centers – Menzelinsk, Agryz.

Medium-sized cities of the country have more complex structure of the population employment and a diversified model of urban development. They can be conditionally combined into 2 groups:

Group I. Cities specialized in the production of oil or technologically related thereto. These are Bugulma, Nurlat, Bavly, Leninogorsk, and Aznakaevo.

Group II. Cities with diversified economy specialized mainly in engineering or chemical

industry, food production: Zelenodolsk, Yelabuga, Zainsk, Chistopol, Mendeleevsk, Buinsk.

Let us consider the current problems of and possible perspectives for the development of small cities of the Republic of Tatarstan (Table 2).

Table 2

Assessment of opportunities and prospects for development of small towns in Tatarstan

Strong points	Weak points
1) stable relationships with the surrounding countryside 2) high transport accessibility 3) favorable ecological situation 4) social and ethnic peace 5) preservation of national cultural and social traditions of the local population	1) remoteness from the capital and the major agglomerations 2) aging of the population 3) population decline 4) spreading of alcoholism 5) low living standard of the population 6) low rates of urban economy growth 7) unemployment among young people 8) lack of the enterprises of modern industry.
Environmental possibilities	Environmental threats
1) Support to small towns through the republic social and economic programs 2) a stable position in the domestic regional food market 3) interest in small towns by the tour operators developing the domestic tourism	1) a threat of further outflow of young people in other cities and regions 2) a threat of increasing dependence on external subsidies. 3) further deterioration of the basic production assets 4) the need for modernization of the old or the development of new industries. 5) poorly developed modern infrastructure of tourism, recreation and entertainment

Thus, taking into account the world experience of development of small towns in Denmark, Germany, USA, China, Italy, Romania [7-11], there is a considerable variety of programs and ways of development. The problems of small towns inevitably arise in connection with the process of globalization and consolidation of municipalities to the agglomerations and mega-cities, which are able to provide a higher standard of living and a variety of spheres for labor application.

On the other hand, small towns are able to find its own niche in the hierarchy of urban settlements, due to both the industrial and infrastructure sectors of the urban economy. For example, in highly populated countries such as Indonesia, small cities grow and often act as a core of the developing centers of the regions [12]. North America has the examples of small towns, which have been integrated in the transnational economy of large industrial, power or tourism companies [13]. The communities of small towns in New Zealand welcome the dynamism of tourism development and appearance in connection therewith the new economic opportunities [14]. Factors of harmonious development of small towns as centers of agriculture, industrial service and tourism centers have been actively studied in Eastern Europe [15].

Medium-sized cities of Tatarstan, in our opinion, are more likely to remain stable settlements with the positive dynamics of socio-economic development. This is facilitated by a diversified urban economy, well-developed urban environment, and positive population growth (both natural and mechanical). Most medium-sized cities are located in the zone of influence of the major cities of Tatarstan and form a part of the emerging agglomerations. Among the threats to the

development is the need for high investments in competitive industries, and the continuing difference in the standard of living of the population compared to large cities.

Summary: We can define several possible directions of development of small towns in Tatarstan.

Firstly, a more serious cooperation with rural producers and the development of food production, based on the processing of ecologically clean agricultural products. The simultaneous development of several food companies is advisable. A stable position in the domestic regional food market will ensure a stable situation in the urban economy.

Secondly, the development of domestic tourism, participation in regional excursion and tourist routes, weekend programs, etc. This can be contributed by the presence of man-made recreational resources in the smallest towns of the region.

Third, small towns in case of modern infrastructure available may become territories of suburbanization due to the increase in the number of specialists working remotely (freelance), as well as the growth of tariffs for communal services in large cities.

Conclusion

Small and medium-sized cities are an important part of urban settlement system of the Republic of Tatarstan. In total, they count for 23.2% of the citizens of the region. Prospects for the development of small cities may be associated with the further improvement of food production, especially based on the processing of organic products, as well as with tourism. Some of small cities for many reasons in the future may become areas with a significant influx of the population from the large cities within the framework of the suburbanization phenomenon.

The medium-sized cities of the region now have a developed specialization, and successfully participate in intraregional and external economic relations. For most of them it is advisable to preserve the existing municipal economy and gradually build-up the knowledge-intensive industries.

Acknowledgements

The work is performed according to the Russian Government Program of Competitive Growth of Kazan Federal University.

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