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The Effectiveness of Social Networks in a Regional Community

Data on the functioning of social networks in a Russian region show that they are formed primarily at the level of kinship and friendship ties and focus on everyday mutual assistance; they do not, however, become transformed into civic initiatives for the protection and advancement of social interests.

At present, the conception of social networks, which originally emerged to describe immigration processes and to account for the economic behavior

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of migrants [1], is being actively used not only in studies of closed communities but also in the broader context for the study of societies in transformation. A society of the present type has relatively formalized social institutions and practices that serve as the basic mechanisms of social adaptation and the accomplishment of individual and collective goals. These institutions and practices include a set of impersonal norms and procedures that are often stipulated by law. On the one hand, they function based on confidence (N. Luhmann) in their effectiveness of a major portion of the participants in the community, in other words, their ability to solve individual and group problems. On the other hand, they function as the result of purposeful, institutional construction carried out by the state and by the dominant actors in the social space. The institutionalization of collective strivings and actions on the macrosocial level is generally the stage that follows the formation of social networks on the microsocal level. And when macro-group integration comes up short it is the consequence of insufficient solidarity on the microsocal level.

However, the main problem in the functioning of formal social institutions is that a substantial portion of everyday practices, connections, and relations is not susceptible to regulation by those institutions. Furthermore, despite the outwardly impersonal forms and the normatively universal character of the formal social institutions, their effectiveness regarding individual and group interests is often determined by the amount of the human and social capital of the actors.

We look at social networks as a complex of relatively stable and long-term interactions of an informal character that do not have an explicit organizational structure and that perform the function of boosting the amount of individual and social capital of their participants. The inclusion of individuals in social networks is able to compensate for an insufficiency of individual social resources thanks to the support of the participants in the social networks, the family, relatives, friends, and acquaintances, people from the same area, and religious and ethnic communities. However, here it must be noted that insufficient human capital, in any of its forms, acts as a constraining factor not only on functioning within the framework of formal institutions but also when it comes to being included in social networks. In order to obtain resources and benefits it is necessary to somehow pay for them in an equivalent form.

To study the functioning of social networks within a regional community, their effectiveness and the social resources that constitute the object of social exchanges, a sociological survey on a representative

regional sample ($n = 1,000$), was carried out in April and May 2010. The quota method was used to select the respondents. The structure of the aggregate sample corresponds to the social structure of the population of Belgorod oblast in terms of features such as gender, age, and type of community.

On the one hand, social networks are a compensatory mechanism formed as a matter of necessity under the conditions of the ineffectiveness of the state and other social institutions. On the other hand, they represent a universal social mechanism that performs its functions under the conditions of a state of relative social and group solidarity and, in this capacity, supplements other social institutions. In this way, the effectiveness of social networks is represented by their ability to regulate the behavior of an individual and to boost the amount of his human and social capital. A particular manifestation of the effectiveness of social networks is their ability to compensate for the ineffectiveness of formal institutions, in particular those of the state.

Consequently, the problem of discerning the prerequisites for the formation and development of social network interactions in Russian society consists of answers to two questions: first, the extent to which the necessary conditions have been created in society for the formation and functioning of social networks as a universal mechanism. And in this regard, the key indicator will be the level of interpersonal trust. And, second, the extent to which society and its individual segments need social mechanisms that compensate for the ineffectiveness of formal institutions as well as the extent to which these institutions are ineffective. And while in the first case there is a direct connection between the level of interpersonal trust and the development of social network interactions, in the second case the level of institutional trust is linked to social network interactions in reverse order.

Interpersonal trust, which is a complex social phenomenon, was measured on the normative and descriptive levels. According to our survey data, its level is relatively low. On the whole, the situation is characterized by a predominance of a cautious, mistrustful attitude toward other people. For example, in response to the question "In your opinion, can you trust most people or not?" 33.1 percent answered yes while 51.5 percent said no, and 15.4 percent were undecided.

The survey results are quite similar to composite data obtained during the same period (April 2010) by the Levada Center on the national level. In the course of that survey, 30 percent of the respondents expressed the

opinion that it is possible to trust most people. A total of 66 percent of the respondents agreed with the statement "It is necessary to be very cautious in dealing with people." The difference in the proportion of respondents who do not trust other people may be linked, among other things, to the "milder" and more normatively acceptable wording used by the sociologists of the Levada Center. Moreover, the Levada Center found a positive tendency for the level of trust in Russian society to rise starting in 2005. For example, the proportion of respondents who say that it is possible to trust most people rose by 4 percent, while those who favored caution in dealing with other people went down by 6 percent [1].

The level of normative trust rises slightly as the size of the community declines. Among residents of cities with populations of more than 100,000, 30.5 percent think it is possible to trust most people, and those in cities with populations of less than 100,000, or an urban-type settlement, the figure is 32.8 percent; in a rural area, however, the figure is 37.8 percent. An almost identical number of respondents living in different types of communities say it is not possible to trust most people (50.3–53.7 percent).

Grouping of the data broken down by sociodemographic characteristics of the respondents yields the following picture: females are more inclined and males are less inclined to trust people. For example, 37.5 percent of females think it is possible to trust most people, while 48.1 percent do not. For males the respective figures are 28.4 percent and 56.5 percent. Among respondents between eighteen and twenty-nine, 29.7 percent trust other people, while 59.8 percent do not; between thirty and thirty-nine, the respective figures are 34.9 percent and 51.3 percent; between forty and fifty-nine, 34.0 percent and 50.3 percent; for those age sixty and older, the respective figures are 34.7 percent and 47.3 percent. Thus, an attitude of distrust and caution toward other people is more widely prevalent among the young and least prevalent among older citizens.

A measurement of the descriptive level of trust, determined by means of the indicator question "You do or do not trust . . ." showed that it goes down as the scale of social connections goes up. For example, 47.3 percent of the respondents, on the whole, trust most of the inhabitants of their building and their own courtyard and the neighboring courtyard (the inhabitants of a street in a village or settlement); of that number, 13.2 percent answered the question unequivocally, while 34.1 percent said "for the most part, yes." On the whole, 41.7 percent of the respondents do not trust other people (14.1 percent are unequivocally distrustful, and

27.6 percent say “for the most part, no”). The total trust index, calculated according to this formula: the difference between the trusting respondents and the distrustful respondents (in which those who are unequivocally trustful and distrustful are assigned the coefficient 1, while those that mostly do and do not are assigned the coefficient 0.5), came to +2.35 percentage points.

A majority of the inhabitants of a city (or a village or settlement) are much less trusted. On the whole, for example, 27.5 percent trust them (of which 4.2 percent answered the question unequivocally, while 23.3 percent said “for the most part, yes”). On the whole, 58.6 percent do not trust them (21.1 percent are unequivocal in their distrust, while 37.5 percent say “for the most part, no”). The total trust index came to twenty-four percentage points. The difference between the level in a building, courtyard, or street was quite substantial, 26.35 percentage points.

One way or the other, on the whole, a rather low level of interpersonal trust leads to social atomization and the individualization of everyday practices in life. In dealing with their own problems in life, people prefer to rely on those who are closest to them, with whom they are connected either by kinship or friendship. But in a very large number of cases, even these social ties are not taken into the account as a significant social resource. For example, in their replies to the question “If you were to find yourself in a difficult situation, whose help could you count on above all?” (respondents could choose no more than three answers), 58.8 percent of the respondents answered “I would only rely on myself.” Second in significance is the help of relatives and members of the family, which was noted by 74.7 percent. In third place were friends and acquaintances (51.2 percent). Much further down the rankings were: colleagues at work (12.3 percent); neighbors (11.8 percent); managers of the organization in which the respondents work (4.7 percent); state or municipal bodies and institutions (4.5 percent); social organizations (1.5 percent); a religious community or group of people from the same home area (1.2 percent). To a certain degree, the respondents are flaunting their autonomy, which follows from the clear mismatch between the percentages of those who rely only on themselves and all of the rest, who in two cases exceed the percentage of the “nonautonomists.”

A rise in the number of answers “I only rely on myself” depends directly on the educational level. This answer was given by 48.7 percent of the respondents with secondary or incomplete secondary education, compared to 63.3 percent of those with higher education. The reverse

relation occurs regarding the possibility of going to family members or relatives for help: the respondents with the lowest educational level are the most likely to rely on getting help from family (81.6 percent); respondents with the highest educational level are the least likely to do so (70.3 percent). A similar tendency is seen regarding the possibility of turning to neighbors for help.

Opinions on the majority of parameters and in all of the age groups are generally united regarding choosing agents of help in a difficult situation. But we note certain specific ones that are manifested in comparison between the respondents of age sixty and the other age groups. Namely, 62.4 percent of the respondents between eighteen and twenty-nine would rely only on themselves in a difficult situation (the highest indicator among all of the age groups), compared to 50.9 percent of the respondents older than sixty (the lowest figure).

It is possible to account for this situation not so much by reference to the more salient external locus of control as the psychological disposition of respondents age sixty and older as by their sober assessment of the situation that has taken shape, their own resources and ability to convert them. Furthermore, young people are more likely than those in the other age groups to say that they are able to rely on getting help from friends and acquaintances (64.8 percent). Older people, on the other hand, select that answer choice the least often (39.6 percent), which is largely due, once more, to the low potential of the social networks that they belong to, both because of the similar status of the other participants and because of the objectively smaller number of participants in the social networks.

The older respondents are also more likely than the others to rely on getting help from social organizations. This was reported by 4.1 percent, while the answers given by those in other age groups ranged from 0 percent to 1.4 percent. It is reasonable to assume that this may be linked to the "Soviet" past of this category of people, with their collectivist attitudes, as well as to the fact that they have free time that enables them to have greater interactions with social organizations. On the whole, however, it must be kept in mind that the difference between the answers in all of the age groups is within the limits of statistical error, and it is not indicative.

The fact that 80.4 percent of the young people answered that they are most likely to rely on getting help from family members and relatives if problems arise is predictable owing to the specific character of their social status. On the one hand, for objective reasons they have not yet

been able to accumulate sufficient status capital to ensure their own autonomy, and on the other hand, a role is also played by young people's rather high psychological dependence on their parents and family, owing to, among other things, the established Russian tradition of rather lengthy parental guardianship. The respondents who are least willing to rely on getting help from family members or relatives are those between the ages of forty and fifty-nine, the age group characterized by the highest status positions and the capital that goes along with that.

On the whole, however, on the level of people's attitudes in the structure of significant social connections, the survey found quite an amazing combination of archaic and modernized characteristics, a combination expressed, on the one hand, in individualism and the attitude of relying exclusively on one's own resources and abilities, and, on the other hand, in the practice of turning to informal connections and relations when difficulties in life arise, primarily blood relatives. We note the extremely low level of hopes for getting help from formal institutions, whether state and municipal bodies and institutions or the management of the organizations in which the respondents work.

The situation of the financial-economic crisis, which negatively affected the objective and subjective characteristics of Russian society, especially at its regional level, brings into relief the importance of social networks and microsocioal practices. On the one hand, in connection with the rising uncertainty of the socioeconomic situation there is an objectively increased need on the part of substantial population groups to have social support from the state, and, consequently, there are reasons for an increase in people's paternalistic moods. But on the other hand, on the descriptive rather than the normative level, Russians show an extremely low level of hope for getting help and support from the state.

The results obtained correlate fully with the data for all of Russia, although there are a number of particular characteristics. In a difficult life situation, under the conditions of economic difficulties, according to Russian Center for the Study of Public Opinion data (from May 2009), 35 percent of Russians rely on their own resources, 56 percent and 18 percent rely on getting support from relatives and friends, respectively, only 5 percent rely on getting support from the state, 2 percent each—from neighbors and colleagues at work, and no one relies on getting help from charitable social organizations [2].

Therefore, even though on the whole the situation in the region reflects the tendencies for all of Russia, here individualistic attitudes are

Table 1

The Use of Informal Connections to Solve Problems (% of respondents)

Answers	Yes	No	Undecided
To defend your rights	26.0	65.8	8.2
To obtain medical assistance, social support, and benefits	46.5	48.2	5.3
To look for work, to get a job	26.1	67.8	6.1
To organize your own business	11.5	81.4	7.1
To enroll in an educational institution	11.0	82.6	6.4
To improve housing conditions	15.0	78.6	6.4
To register property rights and other rights	15.5	77.5	7.0
For other purposes (fill in the blank)	3.9	50.3	45.8

much more strongly manifested, and informal microsocial connections are stronger—relatives, neighbors, and work colleagues. We note that in both cases, any expectations from the state are weakly expressed. We find a tendency toward the further autonomization of the population from the state. Under the conditions specific to Russia, however, this tendency does not develop in the direction of the development of a civil society and a reinforcement of connections on the macrosocial level but instead, in the reinforcement of microsocial networks, going primarily to relatives and friends for support.

The results of the survey show that social capital, as expressed in informal connections, is used quite intensively by the region's population to solve a great variety of problems in life (personal problems and problems of family members). In the past two years, 46.5 percent of the respondents put their personal connections into action to obtain medical assistance, social support, and benefits; 26.1 percent did so in looking for work and finding jobs; 26.0 percent—to protect their rights; 15.5 percent—register property and other rights; 15.0 percent—to improve their housing conditions; 11.5 percent—to organize their own business; 11.0 percent—to gain enrollment in an educational institution; and 3.9 percent—for other purposes (see Table 1).

As we can see, the most problematic sphere for the population concerns obtaining medical assistance, social support, and benefits. It is also reasonable to suggest that this sphere, which is the most likely to put the resource of personal connections into action, is also the most likely

to foster corruption. This is indirectly confirmed by data obtained by the Levada Center in May 2010, according to which 10 percent of the respondents, or their relatives and friends, had to pay a bribe when they were in a hospital in the past three years [3]. In turn, the intensiveness of the use of informal connections is the direct consequence of the ineffectiveness of the corresponding formal institutions. According to Levada Center data from August 2009, only 15 percent of Russians expressed full or partial satisfaction with the state of health-care services, while 70 percent of the respondents negatively assessed their own chances of getting good medical service if necessary [4].

The data obtained in the course of our survey indicate the powerful social resource of informal connections and relations, their significance in solving problems in life and achieving particular goals. Considering the discreditation of state institutions, which was discussed above, the importance of informal connections fully confirms our original hypothesis about their compensatory character, given the conditions of the degradation and dysfunctionality of formal social institutions, in particular those of the state. In such cases, the main prerequisite for an individual to have access to social resources is inclusion in social networks and participation in mutual assistance in network communities.

The resources exchanged by the actors may be reciprocal—for example, material support in difficult life situations, or collective labor in the interests of one of the participants in a social network. As a rule, however, in the course of social contacts the actors in a social network exchange resources that are varied in character. To maintain social contacts and make it possible for them to acquire a long-term and regular character, it is necessary to achieve a level of subjective satisfaction with the number and quality of the resources that are received. The reciprocal conversion of socially important resources is one of the main patterns necessary for the functioning of mutual assistance patterns. The process of converting social resources represents a sociopsychological mechanism for measuring and comparing the amount of resources constituting the object of social interaction in social networks.

The survey found a hierarchy of resources, the offering of which supports network interactions. The question that was posed related primarily to the resources that were received by the respondents, since most likely they themselves would find it harder to rate their own contribution to network exchanges. However, it is most likely that the hierarchy of the resources that are received in the course of social exchange can also

be extrapolated onto social exchange as a whole. Since the survey was preceded by a hypothesis concerning the highest level of intensiveness of networks of relatives, friends, and neighbors, the indicator question was formulated this way: "What kinds of help do you or your family regularly or quite frequently receive from your relatives, friends, and neighbors?"

In first place in the hierarchy of resources is psychological support and helpful advice, which was mentioned by 63.5 percent of the respondents. In second place was help with transportation (25.3 percent). These were followed by: help in repairing or building a home, a dacha, an apartment, or a car (24.4 percent); help with a garden or orchard (23.7 percent); free material assistance (23.1 percent); loans or credit (20.8 percent); help with groceries (18.5 percent); help in organizing celebrations or rituals (14.5 percent); help around the household, such as cleaning, buying groceries, and so on (13.5 percent); child care (13.5 percent); help in obtaining various social services (9.0 percent); help in looking for and finding a job (8.2 percent); providing professional counseling and services (7.4 percent); making clothes, repairing household appliances (6.6 percent); and help in gaining access to officials or bodies of authority in order to solve your problems (5.7 percent). Only 13.2 percent of the respondents said that they got no help from relatives, friends, and neighbors.

To put together a more consolidated hierarchy of socially important resources that circulate in the social networks, it is useful to typologize them after having grouped together specific forms of social support. It is perfectly reasonable to single out the following types: material support, which includes various kinds of financial and in-kind assistance (free material assistance, loans and credits, help with groceries); labor (help with transportation, help in repairing or building a house, a dacha, an apartment, or a car, help in working a garden or orchard, help in organizing celebrations or rituals, help around the household, child care, providing professional counseling and services, making clothes and repairing household appliances); information and psychological support (psychological support, help with advice) and social and communicative assistance (help in obtaining various kinds of social services, help in finding a job or looking for work, help in gaining access to officials and bodies of authority). It is true that no precise boundaries exist between these types. For example, providing professional counseling and services certainly may have an underlying social and communicative function. The same can be said about help with advice. Nonetheless, this grouping makes

it possible to judge the hierarchy of the social resources that constitute the object of network exchanges, and, consequently, to judge the functions of the social networks that are the most highly developed in the regional community, based on relations with relatives, friends, and neighbors. For example, labor support is predominant in these resources and functions of social networks: a total of 121.5 percent [*sic*] of the respondents mentioned various forms of it. In second place was the information and psychological function (62.4 percent); in third place was material support (62.4 percent). A total of 22.9 percent of the respondents mentioned the social and communicative function of social networks.

There is a marked, age-specific element with respect to almost all types of help that a respondent or his family receives. Psychological help is received mostly by respondents between thirty and thirty-nine (71.2 percent), while the oldest age group receives the least (18.2 percent). Mostly young people report receiving free material assistance (30.4 percent) while the lowest figure occurs for those between forty and fifty-nine (18.2 percent). For loans and credit, again, young people are most likely to receive that assistance (29.4 percent), while respondents age sixty and older receive less than others (12.2 percent). The oldest respondents report getting more help to repair or build houses, dachas, apartments, and cars (31.1 percent), while for those in the middle age groups and the others the figure is 22.5 percent. It is interesting to note that the respondents who are more likely to report getting help with groceries are those between thirty and thirty-nine (24.5 percent) and those who are sixty and older (27.6 percent). While respondents between thirty and fifty-nine report getting help with transportation in almost equal measure (25–26 percent), people age sixty and older report it more often (32 percent), while young people report it the least (19.3 percent). Assistance in doing orchard work is requested most often by respondents age sixty and older (44.1 percent), while in the other groups it varies in the range of 20 percent. Among the types of assistance received by the oldest age group, for 30.6 percent help in running the household stands out especially (house cleaning, purchasing groceries, etc.), while for other groups, the range is 7–11 percent. The change over time in decline of the importance of child-care assistance, down from 23.0 percent to 4.5 percent in the group of respondents between thirty and thirty-nine, followed by young people, those between forty and fifty-nine, and after that those age sixty and older, would seem to be predictable, owing to

the life cycle of the family. It is also obvious why the highest indicators of requests for assistance in looking for work and getting a job pertain to the cohort of young people (15.6 percent). Regarding the other types of assistance, no statistically significant differences have been found.

Even though, as was pointed out above, the respondents tend to exaggerate their degree of autonomy from the social groups around them, 64.6 percent of the respondents receive assistance from relatives, friends, and neighbors in subjectively significant amounts. Moreover, about one-third (32.8 percent) mentioned the very high importance of such assistance and their inability to repay what they received out of their own resources. About the same proportion (31.8 percent) mentioned the importance of that assistance, but, at the same time, they also mentioned that they would be able to manage without it. Only 17.7 percent of the respondents said that the assistance was very essential, and the same percentage found it difficult to estimate (this included the 13.2 percent who, in response to the preceding question, said that they do not use this assistance). This makes it possible to characterize the role of the practices of mutual assistance that have formed based on kinship, friendship, and neighborly ties, as one of the most important sources of socially significant resources, which is no less important, but instead much more important than the resources of various social institutions. The distribution broken down by age categories shows that the subjective importance of outside help is substantially higher for respondents age sixty and older, and lowest for those between forty and fifty-nine.

The data obtained in the course of the survey indicate the quite powerful social resource represented by informal connections and relations, their importance in solving various problems in life and achieving the goals of the social actors. However, this characterizes primarily the practices of mutual assistance that function among relatives and friends, and to a lesser degree work colleagues and neighbors. The social resources of social and religious organizations and communities of people from the same home area are not in much demand at present. Sociological measurements have shown that in the subjective perception of the population, at any rate, practices of mutual assistance are, overall, of a symmetrical character, which is reflected in the almost identical intensiveness of respondents' receiving and rendering of assistance (with a slight tilt in favor of rendering). In the case of resources that are exchanged by the actors in social networks that have formed based on relations with relatives,

friends, and neighbors, various forms of labor help predominate. Also of essential importance are information and psychological mutual assistance and material support.

The rather difficult socioeconomic situation in Russian society as a whole and in the region, linked both to the effects of the financial-economic crisis and to number of unresolved social problems as well as the ineffectiveness of state institutions, makes the social networks an objectively significant agent of social support. In the subjective assessments of the region's population, the socioeconomic situation reflected by the indicator of the population's material situation, has had some tendency to worsen in the past year. For example, only 24.4 percent of the respondents reported that their material condition had improved in the past year. A total of 38.7 percent said that it had worsened, while 35.3 percent said that it had not changed.

Thus, objectively, the need for social support and mutual assistance on the part of participants in the social networks has risen. And the respondents perceive an increase in the subjective importance of social contacts in the past year. As was shown above, the importance of contacts in social networks is determined by their ability to provide the actors involved in interaction with socially important resources. The subjective dimension of that importance, therefore, stems both from the actors' interest in obtaining resources and from their assessment of their own ability to be of benefit to their counterparts. Accordingly, the respondents were asked two questions—about the extent to which their need to obtain assistance from the participants in network structures had risen, and also from other actors. The survey results made it possible to record a definite positive dynamic in that regard. This related, in particular, to the most intensive social network relations mentioned earlier, relations with relatives and friends. For example, 28.8 percent of the respondents reported that in the past year their need to obtain assistance from relatives had risen. The opposite tendency was mentioned by 11.7 percent; 50.1 percent said that their level of need had remained unchanged, and 9.4 percent were undecided. The index of the dynamic of that need was 17.1 percentage points (see Table 2).

A somewhat lesser degree of increase was seen in the respondents' need for assistance from friends, as reported by 20.4 percent. A total of 11.5 percent said that it had gone down; it remained unchanged for 57.4 percent; and 10.7 percent were undecided. The index of the dynamic of the need for help was 8.9 percentage points. Also ending up on the

Table 2

The Character of Respondents' Need for Assistance (% of respondents)

Answer	Increased	Decreased	Remained unchanged	Undecided
From relatives	28.8	11.7	50.1	9.4
From friends	20.4	11.5	57.4	10.7
From social organizations	5.5	8.9	48.8	36.8
From neighbors	8.7	11.0	57.8	22.5
From acquaintances	9.0	10.0	58.0	23.0
From associations of people from the same area	3.4	6.7	47.3	42.6
From managers	8.5	7.9	50.7	32.9
From work colleagues (class-mates)	11.4	6.6	54.3	27.7
From religious communities	4.1	5.7	46.5	43.7
From official institutions	5.7	5.7	47.7	40.9

plus side was the dynamic of the need for help from work colleagues (schoolmates). It rose for 11.4 percent of the respondents and fell for 6.6 percent, while it remained unchanged for 54.3 percent. A total of 27.7 percent were undecided. The index of the dynamic of the need for help was 4.8 percentage points.

There was a slight increase in the need for help from the management of organizations and enterprises. For example, it rose for 8.5 percent of the respondents and fell for 7.9 percent and remained unchanged for 50.7 percent. A total of 32.9 percent of the respondents were undecided. The index of the dynamic was 0.6 percentage points. In all other cases, with respect to various real and potential agents of social support, we find a zero or negative dynamic along with a very high percentage of respondents who were undecided. It should be noted that in and of itself, the proportion of the latter is an important indicator of the importance of counterparts in social networks. The higher their percentage the lower the actual importance of the corresponding structures.

We note the very high proportion (40.9 percent) of those who found it difficult to determine the change over time in their need for assistance from official institutions. This most likely means that a considerable share of the population does not rely on getting any kind of support at all from the state or local authorities. For 5.7 percent of the respondents,

however, the need for assistance from official structures has increased, while it has declined for the same percentage of respondents. It has remained unchanged for 47.7 percent. The index of the dynamic of need for assistance is 0 percentage points. Following in terms of declining need for assistance are: acquaintances; religious communities; neighbors; associates from the same area; and social organizations (see Table 2).

It must be asserted, then, that the rise in the objective need for social support has been transformed into an actual increase in the importance of outside assistance for participants in network interaction. At the same time, however, the increase is taking place basically, if we may put it this way, based on archaic network structures associated with relations of kinship and friendship. This is true to a much smaller degree for formal institutions such as the management of enterprises and organizations, social organizations, and official institutions. Most likely, this fact is linked to the inadequate effectiveness of official institutions (with regard to the state and the managers of organizations) and the underdevelopment of their infrastructure (social organizations). This is confirmed by 63.4 percent of the respondents.

To a large extent the fact that the state and municipal authorities are not performing their social functions satisfactorily may predetermine a rise in the activeness of network interactions. The formation of effectively functioning social networks is by no means an automatic consequence of the ineffectiveness of formal institutions. For social networks to perform socially compensatory functions, the participants in a community have to become willing to form them and get involved in their activity. And in this regard, as has been indicated earlier, despite the relatively high level of interpersonal trust on the microsocial level, their willingness to engage in joint activity and serve their common interests is relatively low.

According to the data of a study by the "Public Opinion" Foundation (2007), 55 percent of Russians express a willingness to join together with others for any kind of joint actions—but only with an essential proviso, "if their ideas and interests coincide." At the same time, a large proportion (31 percent of the population) does not want to join together with others, even where they have common interests and ideas [5]. Most likely, the actual willingness to engage in self-organization is much lower. As a rule, Russians' social network activity is confined to their circle of relatives and friends, and it rather infrequently extends beyond that.

The same conclusions can be made based on the distribution of the respondents who answered the question "What is there more of in our

country and among your immediate associates today—harmony and solidarity or disharmony and discord?” Characterizing the situation in the country, 15 percent of the respondents say that harmony and solidarity predominate, while 76 percent say that disharmony and discord predominate. When it comes to the respondents’ most immediate associates, a fundamentally different opinion prevails. In this case, 52 percent of the respondents say that there is more harmony and solidarity. The opposite opinion is expressed by 38 percent [5].

A similar question that was posed in our own survey, concerning people’s immediate associates (since it is among them that social contacts are established to form social networks) revealed approximately the same distribution of opinions. For example, 44.9 percent of the respondents say that there is more harmony among their immediate associates. It is reasonable to suggest that in this category of respondents a variety of social contacts is developed to a larger degree, associations that go outside the boundaries of their own family and the performance of professional functions. The opposite opinion, that there is “more disharmony,” is held by 28.8 percent. At the same time, a large proportion, 26.3 percent, were undecided. Strictly speaking, overall, this category of respondents is typologically closer to the second group, since the lack of an opinion regarding an important social factor such as harmony versus disharmony among social associates, supposes that social network interactions are minimized.

Thus, despite the objective need for the social compensatory functions of social networks, the development of effectively functioning informal network structures on the macrosocial level is held back by the low level of interpersonal trust in Russian society and the weakness of the social infrastructure in the form of social organizations. Russian society is a paradoxical combination of paternalistic expectations and a high level of individualism and atomization. Social networks form primarily on the level of relations of kinship and friendship and are not transformed into civic initiatives for the defense and furtherance of social interests. As a rule, high resource groups of Russian society are an exception in this case. The other citizens, as a rule, act as the carriers of specific statuses, each of which is separated from others by symbolic but quite rigid barriers. In contrast, the effective functioning of social network connections is linked to the individual’s understanding that he is an active agent who integrates a set of statuses, relations, motivations, interests, and so on. The development of network structures is thus largely the result of

the development of social agency in Russian society. And, moreover, agency not so much as autonomy from external circumstances but as consciousness of responsibility for the accomplishment of one's own strategies in life.

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