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The 'Local Society' of Ust-Sysolsk, Vologda Gubernia in the Second Half of the 19th Century

Abstract

The article analyses activities of the 'local society' of Ust-Sysolsk, Vologda gubernia in the second half of the 19th century. It draws on both published and unpublished historical sources to reconstruct its history. These are known to researchers of problems of culture and education of the Komi population. However, the term 'local society' is rarely used. The author defines 'local society' of the uezd town of Ust-Sysolsk of the second half of the 19th century as a voluntary self-identifying association of citizens, codified or not, conceived on a on-going basis in order to solve urgent problems of non-productive and non-commercial nature. In the studied period in Ust-Sysolsk there were a boys gymnasium and a girls one, a town school, a vocational

school, and a religious college, and also several a parochial and uezd schools. Teachers, town and uezd officials, merchants and townspeople formed the 'local society.' The intelligentsia made up for absence of cultural and educational institutions in the town by creating public organizations, whether spontaneously and in an organized way. The spectrum of the Ust-Sysolsk 'local society' activities covered spheres of education, charity, organization of public libraries and reading rooms, leisure and scientific expeditions, collecting of ethnographical materials. Cultural and educational activities were purely amateur, of non-professional nature. And yet it bolstered the development of theatre, music, and visual arts in the town. There also were societies 'just for fun.' These organized soir?es, feasts, masquerades; in winter constructed an ice rink. The Ust-Sysolsk 'local society' had its peculiar features, such as clear differentiation of the citizens' cultural values and new forms of public associations. Its many events and activities prompted community connections. The 'local society' was a 'school of citizenship' of sorts, meaning that it produced a sense of public service, duty, and national pride. Performing its different functions, it complemented top-down governance. As it had a dual nature (the nature of its activities was both public and state), in course of reforms the 'local society' continued to develop its public spirit.

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Keywords

Public life, Ust-Sysolsk, «local society», modernization, self-organization, daily, values.

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