Small-Town Russia

After providing a detailed overview of economic and social trends in Russia since 1991, and the enormous diversity of experience both across and within Russia’s 89 regions, *Small-Town Russia* focuses on social change within three communities in different regions. All three towns have been hard hit by unemployment and falling real wages; private sectors are small and inhabitants have a sense of being marooned in the Soviet past, with the fruits of ‘transition’ reserved for neighbouring cities. The book examines the impact of these developments, asking, for example, what types of household are poor; how people survived when they were not paid for months on end; whether Russians have ‘survival strategies’ and, if so, how these are gendered. It discusses why many Russian men die in middle age, exploring the links between economic depression, stress, self-image and social networks. It also investigates whether those networks, and community spirit in general, are weakening; whether there is a new ‘middle class’ emerging in the small towns; whether regional identities are becoming stronger; and how far ethnic Russians have developed a sense of ‘Russianness’ since the creation of the Russian Federation in 1992.

The answers to such questions are usually sought from national data or from research among Russian city dwellers. This book is original in that it offers an entirely different perspective, based on 141 interviews in small towns. On a theoretical level, the book’s originality lies in its juxtaposition of the concepts of identities and livelihood strategies. It is intended as a contribution to the small but growing body of literature which emphasizes that even the apparent ‘victims of transition’ maintain identities as coping individuals.

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Although none of the chapters in Small-town Russia is identical to any of my previously published work, Chapter 8 does, with permission from the editor, overlap with ‘Mother Russia: gender and ethnicity in the Russian provinces’ in Jacqueline Andall (ed.), Gender and ethnicity in contemporary Europe, Oxford: Berg, 2003.

I presented papers about the small towns at seminars at the universities of Bath, Birmingham, Cambridge and Oxford, and at annual conferences of the British Association for Slavonic and East European Studies and the Study Group on Education in Russia, the Independent States and Eastern Europe. I should like to thank the participants for their stimulating questions and observations.

Tama and Lucy White helped with the maps, tolerated my absences with good grace, and themselves made long journeys to paddle in the Volga in Zubtsov, visit a kindergarten in Bednodemyanovsk and make their own friends among small-town Russian children. Howard White offered constant intellectual, practical and
emotional support. Without his unfailingly good judgement this book would have been much weaker.

I am sure, nonetheless, that mistakes and misrepresentations remain, and, in particular, I would like to apologize in advance to any interviewees who feel that I have misunderstood their situation, or painted an unduly positive or negative picture of the small towns in which they live.
Peace, Labour and Happiness
(Slogan written on a conspicuous building in Zubtsov, welcoming visitors from the direction of Moscow)

In Moscow people and values are different. We have our own way of life, which is – as it were – ‘separate’ from life in the cities.

(Zubtsov teacher)

Are these intelligentsia hands? A member of the intelligentsia should read, not chop logs.

(Achit teacher, showing her own hands)

This book is about how people live in three small towns in Russia, and about how their lives have changed since the collapse of communist rule in 1991. More exactly, it is about how small-town Russians make their livings (livelihoods), how they perceive themselves (identities) and the interconnections between the two. The book contributes to a number of debates about the nature of post-Soviet Russian society, exploring areas such as the nature of poverty and livelihood or ‘survival’ strategies; links between economic crisis, stress and mortality; (un)changing gender roles and relations; the cohesion or breakdown of communities; the transformation of the Soviet class system; the growth of civil and political society; and the evolution and significance of ethnic and territorial identities.

The main focus is on the turn of the century. How much ‘peace, labour and happiness’ could the visitor to Zubtsov, Achit or Bednodemyanovsk expect to find in the years 1999–2000? At first glance, the most striking aspects of the towns were their impoverishment and isolation from any benefits of postcommunism. The towns had suffered the full impact of economic collapse in the 1990s. However, interviews also revealed a certain resilience in the communities: neighbours trusted one another, kin networks were strong and recorded crime was surprisingly low, compared with Russian averages.

Most of the book is based on 141 semi-structured interviews with professional people, or former professional people, the so-called ‘intelligentsia’. Hence the book is mainly about what might seem to be a rather narrow category. It is, however,
an important group, because of its role in organizing local community life, including, perhaps, promoting democratization, and because it may be developing into a new ‘middle class’. The book also seeks to overcome the limitations presented by the sample, presenting, as far as possible, a multifaceted account of life in the small town. It does this partly by supplementing the 141 interviews with information supplied by managers of local institutions, such as schools and hospitals, and with newspaper reports and local statistics. The respondents themselves, in their interviews, also shed much light on the life of the whole community. The intelligentsia is not a group apart, but is well integrated into local society, through intermarriage with workers and because of its professional responsibilities.

Most of Achit is a cluster of black log cabins, picturesquely situated around a lake in the foothills of the Ural Mountains. It is in Sverdlovsk Region, which has a reputation for being one of Russia’s most thriving, although, as will be illustrated later, this reputation is not entirely deserved. Sverdlovsk Region has many cities and industrial complexes, but Achit District is rural, apart from one glass factory. Achit District has Tatar and Mari as well as Russian villages and the name is said to have been derived from a Tatar word meaning ‘hungry dog’, a reference to the eighteenth-century Russian fortress, which sucked resources from the local population. Achit is in Europe; Asia is Yekaterinburg, the regional capital across the hills, which are low and wooded in this part of the world.

Zubtsov is west of Moscow on the banks of the Volga, Vazuza and Sheshma Rivers. An elegant church nestles at the confluence of the Volga and the Vazuza, near a steep tooth-shaped promontory, which gave the medieval town its name (‘of the little teeth’). Some rusting factories spoil the view. Zubtsov is in Tver Region, a region with a middling per capita Gross Regional Product, compared to other central European Russian regions. Zubtsov District, however, borders Moscow Region. Hence, although Zubtsov lost 40 per cent of its jobs in the 1990s, the proximity of Moscow’s expanding economy has partly compensated for this disaster. At a distance of 200 kilometres from Moscow, Zubtsov is close
enough to the capital to place it in the dacha (summer cottage) zone for Muscovites. Interviewees had very different ideas, however, about whether 200 kilometres was actually ‘near’ or ‘far’.

The third town, Bednodemyanovsk, is 450 kilometres south-east of Moscow, in rolling open steppe cut by ravines. It lost its river as a result of misguided irrigation projects in the 1980s under Gorbachev’s predecessor, Chernenko. Bednodemyanovsk is a market town, dating from the seventeenth century. Its housing stock consists largely of solid wooden cottages surrounded by kitchen gardens. It has a few working factories and farms, but is located in Penza Region, one of the poorest in European Russia. The town was named Spassk (Church of the Saviour) until 1925, when, on the recommendation of a local communist party conference, it took the name of a Stalinist hack poet, Demyan Bednyi. It shed its Christian identity and acquired an ostentatiously Soviet one. Bednyi himself never deigned to visit the place, although, according to locals, his son did pass through and got very drunk. ‘Bednyi’ means ‘poor’. Local inhabitants often refer to their town as ‘Bednyi’, since Bednodemyanovsk is hard to pronounce.

The three towns, although all centres of administrative districts, were at the small end of the urban spectrum. The populations were 5,400 (Achit), 7,900 (Zubtsov) and 8,200 (Bednodemyanovsk) in January 2000. They were chosen not only because of their size, but also because they were assumed to be relatively isolated from the big city economy, since all were three to four hours’ bus ride from the nearest city. Zubtsov, however, proved to be less isolated than the other towns: Moscow has long tentacles.

Unlike British or American small towns, which in some respects are like miniature cities, and which are sometimes more prosperous than inner-city areas, Russian small towns are very different from cities. In particular, the transition to a modern market economy – insofar as it has occurred since 1991 – is more visible in the cities. In July 2003, Putin himself, on a visit to a small town, criticized the lack of development in small towns, blaming it on the chronic underfunding of small-town local governments, and the obstacles facing would-be businessmen.

To understand contemporary Russia, therefore, one needs to know not just about cities, but also about smaller towns and rural areas. Cities, however, are more visible to the Western observer. British and American scholars tend to describe only national or regional-level trends. If discussing the national level, they are often basing their arguments largely on information about cities, because cities do much to determine national averages. If they descend to regional level, they present information based on regional averages or about the regional capitals. Western travellers rarely get off the train to explore the streets and squares of those small provincial towns, which – very occasionally – punctuate the rows of pines and birches visible from their carriage window.

Russian sociologists based at provincial universities more often study towns in the glubinka, the ‘provincial depths’ which lie beyond the regional capital. This book draws on such Russian research. However, most of the book is based on the fieldwork in Achit, Bednodemyanovsk and Zubtsov. Their smallness and
remoteness combined meant that insofar as social trends in smaller towns are different from those in cities, such differences might be expected to show up especially clearly in these particular towns. The towns are treated as case studies, although some tentative conclusions are also drawn about small Russian towns in general.

**Structure of the book: debates and concepts**

The book divides approximately into two sections, exploring first livelihoods, then identities. However, there are smaller overlaps and cross-references throughout the book, and in many respects livelihoods are inseparable from identities: each has an impact on the other.

The Introduction gives a description of the book’s methodology and sources. It continues by discussing some characteristics of Russian towns and villages and the ‘semi-urban’ nature of Russian small towns. It justifies the choice of very small towns as objects of study, and concludes with a brief analysis of centre–regional relations before and after the collapse of the communist regime. This forms the political background to Chapter 1.

Chapter 1 is an overview of social and economic trends in postcommunist Russia, drawing mostly on Russian official statistical handbooks. The chapter aims to provide essential background information for readers who are not Russian specialists, to fit changing livelihoods in the small towns into a national context, and to show how various demographic and economic trends developed over the first postcommunist decade. The second aim is to present information about the regional variation which usually lies hidden behind descriptions of national trends. It is a central thesis of this book that Russia is not, as Milan Kundera once asserted, ‘the smallest possible variety in the greatest possible space’.

For example, in 1999 the official poverty rate was five times higher in Ingushetia than in Tyumen Region. Inequality between regions has grown, and economic differences have often become more pronounced during postcommunism than they were in Soviet days.

Chapter 2 uses statistical publications from a number of regions to look at differences in living standards between small towns/rural districts and cities. Although readers who are more interested in the qualitative data from the case studies may prefer to skip the main part of this chapter, it addresses questions which are fundamental to the research, and it develops the arguments of Chapter 1.

Achit, Zubtsov and Bednodemyanovsk were selected partly because they are in regions with different economic profiles, and this book addresses the question of how much difference it makes to live in a ‘rich’ or a ‘poor’ region. Are the differences between Russian regions, as indicated by socio-economic statistics, mirrored by differences between small towns located in different regions? In other words, is a small town in a poor region very different from a small town in a rich region? Alternatively, are small towns in different regions much the same? This could be true if the apparently richer regions contain greater disparities of wealth than do poorer regions. The bottom line may be the same, but the wealthier
places – the cities – may be richer in rich regions than in poorer ones. Chapter 2 also explores the issues of how far wealth is concentrated in the regional capital and whether remoteness from that capital, and cities in general, is a significant factor influencing the fate of the *glubinka*, the ‘provincial depths’.

Chapter 3 provides some background information about Penza, Sverdlovsk and Tver, the particular regions in which the fieldwork towns are located, to site the towns in their regional contexts, demonstrating the complexity of those contexts. The chapter continues by presenting portraits of the towns themselves, focusing particularly on their economies, and drawing on descriptions given by interviewees, local newspaper articles, and statistical data.

The rest of the book is based mostly on the interviews. In the first, ‘livelihoods’, half of the book the anonymity of respondents has been preserved, but in the ‘identities’ section the *dramatis personae* are allowed to emerge, when interviewees were also public figures, whose doings are described in the local press.

A livelihood has been defined by Ellis as ‘the activities, the assets, and the access that together determine the living gained by the individual or household’.9 According to Kanji, it is the ‘wide range of activities that allow individuals to gain and retain access to resources and opportunities, deal with risk and manage social networks and institutions’.10 In other words, it is more than just employment at one’s main place of work. This is particularly important in postcommunist Russia. In 1992 just 35 per cent of New Russian Barometer survey respondents said that they depended only on their wages from a regular job in the first economy; by 1998 this figure had fallen further still, to 14 per cent.11

‘Assets’ can include human capital – personal characteristics such as health and educational levels of working household members – and social capital. ‘Social capital’ is understood in its simplest definition, as resources which derive from an individual’s connections to the surrounding society, particularly good relationships with, and networks among, other members of the local community. Human and social capital are aspects of identity, hence the overlap between the concepts of identities and livelihoods.

Few people in the small towns lived alone, and it is important to place livelihoods within the context of the whole household, not just the earning capacity of the individual. Chapter 4 looks at household livelihoods by examining, in turn, state-sector workplaces, unemployment, salaries and poverty. It presents some profiles of different types of household, looking at primary employment of the salary-earners and at household composition, and suggests why some households are more successful than others. However, it also points out that all households among the sample were vulnerable to poverty as soon as they had to intersect with the city economy, for example to purchase education or health care, and that, for most families, even everyday subsistence was hardly feasible on the basis of income from a first job alone, since most local wages were lower than the official poverty line.

Chapter 5 therefore addresses the issue of livelihood strategies. Should these be viewed as potential escape routes from poverty, or are they, as Clarke, Pahl and Wallace suggest, a response to opportunity, engaged in by wealthier households?12
How far are they ‘embedded’ in the local culture, as Pine and Bridger, for example, assert?\textsuperscript{13} Is it sensible to talk of strategies when opportunities in the small town are so limited?\textsuperscript{14} Although the neutral term ‘livelihood strategy’ is preferred in this book, the chapter also discusses the term ‘survival’ strategy. What is ‘survival’ in the small-town context? Shevchenko has argued that it is not helpful to label routine practices as if they were reactions to crises,\textsuperscript{15} but perhaps life in the small town can be viewed as a succession of crises.

The 1990s have been seen as a decade of crisis in gender relations,\textsuperscript{16} although this is disputed by Vannoy et al.\textsuperscript{17} Changing gender roles are sometimes linked to the gendering of survival strategies, most starkly by Burawoy et al., who suggest that Russian society is being driven ‘into two mutually repelling poles – a male-dominated pole of wealth, integrated into the hypermodern flow of finance and commodities, and a female-dominated underworld, retreating into subsistence and kin networks’.\textsuperscript{18} Chapter 5 explores both gender relations and the gendering of livelihood strategies, to determine whether such tension and polarization did indeed mark the lives of the small-town respondents. Burawoy et al. use the term ‘involution’ to describe a process of atomization, which has also been mentioned by Ledeneva and by Ashwin, the latter with specific reference to a small town.\textsuperscript{19} Chapters 3, 5 and 6 look at whether networks were shrinking and trust was declining in the small towns.

‘Survival’ is adopted as a useful term because it can link up different aspects of existence: not just material well-being, but also the survival of the community, and individual emotional and physical health. Given the dramatic fall in male life expectancy which marked the 1990s, it seems particularly important to examine stress, discussing the truth of suggestions made by, for example, Shkolnikov et al. and Shapiro,\textsuperscript{20} that Russian men were particularly vulnerable to stress, because of their inferior coping mechanisms.

The survival of identities and fashioning of new ones is explored in Chapters 6–8. Identity is frequently seen as being in crisis worldwide, but in postcommunist societies there is a double crisis, as globalization and the demands of becoming postcommunist coincide. However, globalization had only lightly touched the small towns. Postcommunism, on the other hand, with its perceived drop in status both for professionals and for small towns, had created new dilemmas.

Identity is perceived by postmodernist theorists as multilayered, malleable, elusive and potentially contradictory;\textsuperscript{21} \textit{Small-Town Russia} adopts this approach. Moreover, the book emphasizes that identity is ‘in the eye of the beholder’ and is shaped partly by ordinary individuals in response to the circumstances in which they find themselves, not entirely created by intellectuals, the media or politicians and imposed ‘from above’. It might seem more natural to emphasize structure rather than agency, illustrating how small-town Russians are ‘trapped’ in a certain predicament. It is true that in many respects they are indeed trapped, but the victims of postcommunist economic collapse often forge identities for themselves as coping individuals, not as losers. Frances Pine, for example, writing about Poland, has shown how women in a depressed industrial area, forced into depending heavily on home produce, seemed to make a virtue of their new roles: a ‘politicized
rejection of consumerism’, particularly of foreign consumer goods which symbolized the postcommunist order.22 That identity arises, in Stuart Hall’s words, ‘from the narrativization of the self’,23 is demonstrated in Chapters 6 and 7, which discuss how professional people both adapt their intelligentsia identity to new conditions, and use their understandings of that identity to mould a new civil society. The theme is continued in Chapter 8, which explores the importance of local identities, questioning the truth of assertions that regional leaders are able to create a new sense of regional identity, and also the relevance for small-town respondents of nation-building projects emanating from Moscow.24

It is important to recognize that many, especially middle-aged and older, Russians do not have a postmodern understanding of identity. They are more essentialist, a characteristic which is not surprising, given their Soviet upbringing, with its rigid stereotypes. People are born with certain traits, which are not susceptible to social conditioning. ‘We’re not Tver folk’, said one woman from Smolensk Region, who had moved to Zubtsov. Women are ‘by nature’ destined to be mothers and chief parents. Other people are ‘born traders’ or, more often, born not to be traders. Perceptions that these identities are inflexible influence people’s choice of livelihood strategies. However, to pursue the maintenance of one’s professional identity can also be a survival strategy in its own right.

Chapter 6 asks whether self-perceptions about intelligentsia identity are a barrier or a gateway to success. Do young people feel less ‘encumbered’ by Soviet identities? What is the truth of the common assertion that the intelligentsia is ‘dying’,25 and is the small-town intelligentsia to some extent intertwined with the new entrepreneurial class? (Silverman and Yanowitch have suggested that the new business class is largely drawn from the old intelligentsia.)26 Chapter 7 asks how, if at all, the small-town intelligentsia is creating some kind of modern ‘civil society’. Political scientists often suggest that civil society in contemporary Russia is weak,27 particularly outside the cities, but perhaps, as Simon Smith has suggested, it is precisely in places which are the most Soviet that civil society can put down the firmest roots.28 If this civil society is inward-looking, the local community may be strengthened, but a sense of Russian citizenship and political connectedness to Moscow may be absent. Chapter 8 analyses the ‘love–hate’ relationship between the small towns and the federal capital.

Finally, the book’s Conclusions summarize the findings and draw out the similarities and differences between small towns and cities and also between the three towns. They discuss how much change there has been in the small towns since the Soviet period, considering—largely in order to reject—the usefulness of plotting the three towns at different points along a ‘transition path’.

Because of its contentious character, the term ‘transition’ is generally avoided in the course of the book. ‘Postcommunism’ is preferred, as a more neutral term than ‘transition’, if communism is understood to imply the actual system of rule by the communist party, not the (non)achievement of a communist utopia. The term ‘transition’ has generated considerable criticism, particularly because of optimistic presumptions that an efficiently functioning market economy and liberal democracy lie at the end of the transition path, and partly because of the...
dubious morality and accuracy of assertions that the path will be relatively short: it is ‘just’ a transition phase. By implication, sacrifices imposed on the population are justified, and their suffering is a temporary experience.

In addition to these general criticisms, it can be argued that the term ‘transition’ has more validity with reference to some parts of Russia than to others. The geographer Rodoman suggests that it is wrong to envisage cities and smaller places travelling at different paces in the same direction, towards a market economy.

The backwoods are not only not catching up with the capital, but, in many respects, actually moving in the opposite direction. Pre-industrial, pre-market, feudal relations are reviving: subsistence farming, usury, hoarding of valuables, slavery. It seems that the modernization of the centres is taking place at the expense of the archaization of the periphery.29

Richard Rose, however, suggests that ‘pre-modern social capital’ characterizes Russia as a whole.30

Methodology and sources

The fieldwork took place in the years 1999 (April, May) and 2000 (April, July and September). I gathered statistical data, read local newspapers and other published material, visited schools, hospitals and other institutions, and interviewed their managers. In Achit and Bednodemyanovsk, I was staying with local families, so I was able to observe the lives of small-town professional people at first hand, as well as having many informal conversations with them and their friends. In Zubtsov, I paid social visits to some of my interviewees and also established friendly relations with the staff of the tiny Submarine Hotel.

However, the main part of the work consisted of 141 formal interviews. The interview schedule is reproduced in Appendix 1. The Zubtsov research, conducted in 1999, was based on a pilot interview schedule, which differed slightly from that used for Achit and Bednodemyanovsk in 2000.

Since the questions were open-ended, the interviews differed in length and detail. Generally they were forty-five minutes to an hour long, but some were much longer. Most interviews were conducted at workplaces, some in interviewees’ homes or in the homes of my hosts. Respondents were given the interview schedule to read through in advance and they had it in front of them as they answered the questions.

Issues of access and sample selection were resolved in different ways in 1999 and 2000. My initial idea was to keep as low as possible a profile, to avoid having obstacles thrown in my way by the local administration. Having consulted the telephone directory and the local newspaper editor, and explored through the snow to check out the location of various institutions, I walked into libraries, schools and the museum unannounced and asked if their directors had time to talk to me and could suggest colleagues who might be available. Only once was I challenged with the good Soviet question ‘Who gave you permission?’

I hope that the technique of arranging interviews on the spot produced spontaneous answers to the interview questions, although obviously it could not remove
completely the danger of self-censorship on the part of the interviewees. Moreover, the surprise element in Zubtsov was soon lost as word of my arrival spread and little boys were pointing at me in the street, shouting ‘The Englishwoman!’ As my network of acquaintances grew, I was able to arrange interviews with people in other walks of life, such as former teachers who had gone into business: in other words, a ‘snowballing’ approach which was particularly suited to the close-knit world of the small town, and which helpfully illustrated the nature and importance of the informal networks which I was partly studying. It was not only desirable, but also necessary to adopt this method: organizing things in advance is always a problematic endeavour in Russia, given the culture of preferring to arrange things face to face and on the spot, and the propensity of officials to generate as much red tape as possible. In the case of the small towns the obstacles to organization in advance also included poor telephone and postal connections and lack of internet access. Moreover, I never encountered any objections from respondents that snowballing was unethical. Potential respondents naturally had the option of refusing to participate in the survey.

Interviews conducted in people’s homes tended to be the most successful, and this prompted me to stay with local families in Achit and Bednodemyanovsk. Here my hosts phoned up local institutions on my behalf, but usually just on the eve of the interview day, so the element of spontaneity was preserved. At weekends I interviewed my hosts’ friends and colleagues. Despite the fact that — through want of alternative channels — I had had to arrange my stay in Achit through the local authority, the administration there did not try to interfere in my work, and the district boss (‘head of administration’) was an interviewee. I organized my stay in Bednodemyanovsk through an academic colleague in Penza. My heart sank when he arranged for me to arrive in Bednodemyanovsk in an expensive foreign car belonging to the Penza Minister of the Interior, which took me straight to the deputy head of the district administration, the late Nikolai Nozhkin. Nonetheless, after I declined his offer of fixing up the interview appointments on my behalf, Nikolai Ivanovich kindly refrained from interfering, despite the fact that, as Chapter 7 illustrates, his approach to organizing intellectual life in the town was extremely ‘Soviet’. My contact with Bednodemyanovsk officialdom even produced a positive practical result in the form of a layer of asphalt on my hosts’ lane before my second visit.

In the end, only two people refused to be interviewed. Several interviewees were, understandably, nervous in advance, supposing in one case that I would grill them about what they knew of Tony Blair, but once they had read through the interview schedule they felt more relaxed about answering the questions. When the interview was actually in progress, the respondents tended to talk at length. A few of the younger and less well-educated interviewees did, however, get stuck on the identities section. It was revealing, for example, that they found it harder to place themselves socially.

With the help of my hosts and other local acquaintances I identified and obtained a sample which was loosely representative of the local intelligentsia in three respects: by profession (with a preponderance of teachers); by sex
(mostly women); and by age, with an intentional slight bias towards younger interviewees, whose views seemed particularly important if it was to be possible to establish how much change was occurring. Managers formed 30 per cent, which unfortunately detracted from the representative quality of the sample, but did have the advantage that I was able to study the professional elite.

116 of the 141 interviews were with what might be termed the ‘core’ intelligentsia of each town, that is, people working in education, the media, culture, the legal service or health. This was 10–15 per cent of the total number of such people in each town. (There were about three hundred core intelligentsia). The remaining interviewees were members of what I have termed the ‘fringe’ intelligentsia, typically teachers who had changed jobs and/or local officials. The distinction between the categories is explained in more detail in Chapter 6. Ten interviewees, two Tatars and eight Russians, were migrants from the ‘Near Abroad’: Azerbaidjan, Kazakstan and Central Asia.

Only 24 per cent of the sample were men. This was deliberate, given that most of the small-town intelligentsia were women, but in some senses it was a disadvantage, since gender is a theme of this book, and a sample of 34 men was slim basis for drawing conclusions about their experiences. On the other hand, with 107 women interviewees, it did seem possible to suggest at least some tentative conclusions about women’s livelihoods and identities, while recognizing the inadequate basis for comparison.

I discussed with some interviewees during the pilot survey in Zubtsov whether the town’s name should be concealed, as well as the names of the respondents, but they did not want it to be. For some respondents it was the expected publicity for their towns which was a motive for participating in the survey. (The newspaper Zubtsovskaya zhizn’ published an article under the headline ‘Europe will hear about Zubtsov’.)

The quantitative part of the research is based largely on statistics about Russia’s regions produced by Goskomstat, the State Statistics Committee. The probable inaccuracy of many of these statistics is discussed in Chapter 1. A fundamental problem is the inadequacy of many population statistics, given the thirteen year gap between the censuses of 1989 and 2002: the 2002 census discovered that the Russian population was nearly 2.8 million larger than had been expected, meaning that per capita economic and other statistics would have to be recalculated. Many problems derive from the reluctance of Russians to register their status with official organizations. It is known, for example, that there are more migrants and refugees, or unemployed people, than official registers suggest. There is also, of course, an element of ‘covering up’ on the part of some official agencies and businesses who supply information to Goskomstat. This means, for instance, that the decline in industrial production may have been exaggerated by firms wishing to avoid paying tax.

Unfortunately, non-Goskomstat sources like the Russian Longitudinal Monitoring Survey, based as they are on samples, were not a substitute for Goskomstat data. They do not cover the regions in the same systematic way as...
Goskomstat. Goskomstat is also invaluable in that it can provide detailed data on a sub-regional level, and this data was used to make comparisons between the fieldwork towns and small towns in other regions in Russia. Sverdlovsk Goskomstat’s splendidly inaccurate slogan ‘80 years on the information market’ is a reminder of how easy research is today, by comparison with the Soviet period.

Qualitative met quantitative research when I interviewed and talked to statisticians working in regional capitals and small towns. They were uniformly helpful. It was striking how most regarded themselves as functionaries who collected raw figures, but did not seek to understand the trends they uncovered. In the small towns, they were not always trained statisticians. Records were kept largely by hand in offices very short of filing cabinets. I found one instance of confusion,

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<th>Achit m</th>
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| Table 0.1 Interviewees, by town, sex and occupation |