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Role of Local Identity and Perceived Context in Psychological Well-Being of Russians in Estonia

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The present article focuses on the relationship between local identity, perceived inclusiveness of the sociocultural context and psychological well-being of the Russians in Estonia ($N=309;\,M=37,46;\,SD=16,56$). Perceived discrimination and perceived multiculturalism are considered as indicators of inclusiveness of the context, and self-esteem and life satisfaction as indicators of psychological well-being. We used the scales from the MIRIPS questionnaire translated and adapted for Russia by N.M. Lebedeva and A.N.Tatarko, the scale of descriptive multicultural attitudes developed in the Center for Sociocultural Research of the HSE University, and the local identity scale of Droseltis and Vignoles. The results of structural equation modeling show that local identity significantly positively relates to perceived inclusiveness of the sociocultural context. Perceived inclusiveness of the context is positively related to self-esteem and life satisfaction. Indicators of perceived inclusiveness of the context mediate the relationship between local identity and psychological well-being. The study revealed direct positive effect of local identity on life satisfaction. Thus, local identity fulfills an adaptive function, contributing to a more positive perception of the context of acculturation and increasing psychological well-being.

Keywords: local identity, perceived inclusiveness of the acculturation context, psychological well-being, Russians, Estonia.

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Роль локальной идентичности и воспринимаемого контекста в психологическом благополучии русских Эстонии

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В статье анализируется взаимосвязь локальной идентичности и воспринимаемой инклюзивности контекста с психологическим благополучием русских в Эстонии (N = 309; M = 37,46; SD = 16,56). В качестве индикаторов инклюзивности контекста рассматриваются воспринимаемая дискриминация и воспринимаемый мультикультурализм, в качестве показателей психологического благополучия — самоуважение и удовлетворенность жизнью. В анкету исследования вошли шкалы из опросника MIRIPS, переведенные и адаптированные для использования в России Н.М. Лебедевой и А.Н. Татарко; шкала дескриптивных мультикультурных установок, разработанная сотрудниками ЦСКИ НИУ ВШЭ; шкала локальной идентичности Дроселтис и Вигнолес. Результаты структурного моделирования показывают, что локальная идентичность значимо позитивно связана с воспринимаемой инклюзивностью контекста. Воспринимаемая инклюзивность контекста положительно связана с самоуважением и удовлетворенностью жизнью. Индикаторы воспринимаемой инклюзивность

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Trifonova A.V. Role of Local Identity and Perceived...

ности контекста медиируют взаимосвязь между локальной идентичностью и психологическим благополучием. Нами был также обнаружен прямой позитивный эффект локальной идентичности на удовлетворенность жизнью. Таким образом, локальная идентичность выполняет адаптивную функцию, способствуя более позитивному восприятию контекста аккультурации и повышая психологическое благополучие.

Ключевые слова: локальная идентичность, воспринимаемая инклюзивность контекста аккультурации, психологическое благополучие, русские, Эстония.

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Introduction

The collapse of the USSR has influenced social identification and psychological well-being of Russians in the former Soviet republics. In the early post-Soviet period, the crisis of social identity affected both the ethnic and national components of their self-awareness. Among psychological strategies for coping with this crisis, experts mention rapprochement with the host country and formation of a local identity that allows one to perceive the country of residence as a "real" homeland [1]. Unlike national identity, the formation of which may be influenced by the peculiarities of state policy toward ethnic minorities, local identity seems to be ideologically more neutral and psychologically more "safe" way of maintaining positive identity [4]. For those Russians who demonstrate weak or ambivalent ties both with their country of residence and with their historical homeland, local identity can act as an alternative to ethnic and national identities, allowing individuals to maintain a positive self-perception [27]. According to experts, local identity can play a key role in the adaptation of Russians to the changed conditions of the former Soviet republics – especially in the countries where the peculiarities of sociocultural context hamper formation of national and maintenance of ethnic identities. Reinforcing either the national or the ethnic components of social identity, local identity may contribute to psychological well-being of Russians and facilitate their successful integration into the host society [4]. The aim of this study was to investigate the role of local identity in the psychological well-being of Russians in Estonia: does the salience of local identity of Russians in Estonia contribute to their life satisfaction? What is the role of the perceived context in the relationship between local identity and psychological well-being?

Sociocultural context of the study

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, considerable part of Russian residents of Estonia decided not to return to Russia. For many of them, Estonia became their home, and they were not ready to change it for their historical homeland. Moreover, during the years spent in Estonia, many Russians have distanced themselves from Russians from other post-Soviet countries. During the Soviet period, Russians in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania considered themselves the "Baltic" Russians — by their values, lifestyle, and behavioral patterns they felt themselves significantly different from Russians in other Soviet republics [28]. An important role here was played by the subjectively perceived proximity of Estonia to the West and Western culture [7]. The large-scale transformations associated with the collapse of the USSR have greatly enhanced this sense of otherness among Russians in Estonia. The results of empirical studies show that representatives of Russian diaspora feel themselves closer to other Russians in Estonia and to Estonians than to Russians in Russia [13; 28].

Thus, we can talk about the localization of ethnic self-identification of Russians in Estonia. In general, studies show that local identity occupies an important place in the self-awareness of Russians in this country. When asked about the groups with which they identify themselves, 84% of Russians chose the category of "inhabitants of Estonia". Certainly identify themselves with citizens of Estonia 48% of the respondents [27].

The unwillingness of some representatives of Russian diaspora to identify themselves with Estonian citizens may be explained by the peculiarities of ethnic policy of the Estonian state. The dramatic changes in the ethnic composition of Estonian population that occurred during the Soviet period largely predetermined the strategy of nation-building in the independent republic [25]. The perception of a non-Estonian population as a source of

CULTURAL-HISTORICAL PSYCHOLOGY. 2021. Vol. 17, no. 4

existential threat prompted the representatives of the ethnic majority to choose the doctrine of ethnic and linguistic homogeneity, which excluded non-Estonians from the nation [6]. After the collapse of the USSR, only 120 thousand Russians (about 25%), whose ancestors were citizens of the first Estonian Republic in 1918-1940, automatically received Estonian citizenship. The rest of Russian residents of the country had to go through the naturalization process in order to become Estonian citizens [26]. Estonian language was declared the only official language of the Republic, and Russian was equated with foreign languages [15]. Many Russians considered the ethnic policy of the Estonian state to be unfair and discriminatory. Often, among representatives of Russian diaspora this was manifested in the delegitimization of the state policy in the field of interethnic relations [18]. Thus, we can assume that among the Russians in Estonia, local identity fulfills a compensatory function, allowing Russians to feel themselves a part of Estonian society even if they are not able or ready to identify with Estonian citizens.

Theoretical background of the study

The current study is based on the theory of social identity, according to which membership in particular social group influences the processes of social cognition and determines the social well-being of the individual [22].

Local identity is a component of social identity which associates with belonging to a particular territorial community [20]. In contrast to national identity, which often has an ideological connotation and relates to the attitude towards the state as a whole, local identity is associated with the "sense of home" and is ideologically more neutral. It allows a person to feel comfortable and to be her- or himself in some particular place [9]. Empirical evidence shows that local identity is essential for psychological well-being. Thus, study conducted in Latvia and Georgia revealed direct positive effects of local identity on life satisfaction and self-esteem among Russians in these countries [4]. Another study showed that among young Russians in Latvia and Crimean Tatars local identity was positively associated with life satisfaction, but didn't have significant links with self-esteem [16]. Most of the research show that among migrants and ethnic minorities, identification with the host country, as opposed to identification with own ethnic group, is not directly related to self-esteem [24]. Based on this, in the current study, we focused on life satisfaction as the indicator of psychological well-being most closely associated with local identity and formulated our first hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1. The salience of local identity positively relates to life satisfaction among Russians in Estonia.

The subjective perceptions of sociocultural context influence psychological well-being of participants of interethnic interaction [19; 21]. Thus, empirical evidence suggests that perceived inclusiveness of the host society facilitates psychological adaptation of migrants and ethnic minorities [3]. At the same time, the perception of social context as "closed", hostile and discriminatory have negative consequences for the psychological well-being [21].

As one of the indicators of perceived inclusiveness of context we consider subjective multiculturalism, or perceived orientation of host society towards cultural diversity. A key issue here is not just the presence of different ethnocultural groups in society, but also the prevalence of multicultural ideologies and practices. The empirical evidence suggests that perceived multiculturalism can be an important predictor of the successful adaptation of migrants to a new cultural environment. Thus, a study conducted among Koreans in New Zealand shows that the more multicultural in terms of the prevailing ideologies and practices the host society appears to be, the higher is the psychological well-being of migrants [29].

Perceived discrimination can be considered as the one of the indicators of host society "closedness" [3]. Perceived discrimination hampers the process of psychological adaptation of migrants and ethnic minorities and has negative effect on their psychological well-being [8]. For example, among Russians living in Estonia, a high level of perceived discrimination is associated with a lower level of life satisfaction [19]. Taking into account the results of previous studies, we formulated our second hypothesis:

Hypothesis 2. Perceived multiculturalism positively and perceived discrimination negatively relate to life satisfaction and self-esteem of Russians in Estonia.

Subjective perception of sociocultural context is largely determined by social identity [23]. For example, level of perceived discrimination largely depends on degree of in-group identification: the higher the salience of identity, the higher the sensitivity to manifestations of intergroup inequality [11]. Thus, Russians in Estonia with a high level of ethnic identity are more inclined to perceive the Estonian context as unfair, which negatively affects their psychological well-being [19]. At the same time, identification with the host society can play a compensatory role in psychological adaptation of migrants and ethnic minorities. Research shows that national identity is negatively associated with perceived discrimination [14]. Thus, different types of social identity can be considered as "lenses" through the prism of which the surrounding reality and intergroup relations are assessed [11]. Considering that local identity often performs a compensatory function, contributing to successful adaptation of an individual to a foreign cultural environment [4], we formulated our third hypothesis:

Trifonova A.V. Role of Local Identity and Perceived...

Hypothesis 3. The salience of local identity positively relates to perceived multiculturalism and negatively relates to perceived discrimination.

We also formulated our research questions:

Research question 1. How is local identity related to other types of social identity among Russians in Estonia? We address this question due to fundamental changes in identification matrices of residents of the post-Soviet countries after the collapse of the USSR and the differences in the vectors of civilizational development of countries in different regions.

Research Question 2. What is the role of perceived context in the relationship between local identity and psychological well-being?

Method

Sample

309 Russians living in Estonia participated in the socio-psychological survey, age range of participants was 18-75 years (M = 37.46; SD = 16.56), 52.1% were women.

Measures

Local identity. We used 4 items from the Local identity scale [10], for example: "I feel at home here".

Ethnic identity [2]. The scale included 4 items, for example: "I consider myself Russian".

National identity [2]. The scale included 4 items, for example: "I consider myself an Estonian citizen".

Religious identity. The scale included 4 items, for example, "My religion is an important part of me".

Soviet identity. The scale included 4 items, for example: "I consider myself a Soviet person".

European identity. The scale included 4 items, for example: "I consider myself a European".

Perceived discrimination [2]. The scale included 5 items, for example: "I was not hired because of my ethnicity".

Perceived multiculturalism. The scale included 8 items, for example: "In Estonia, the attitude towards people does not depend on their ethnicity".

Self-esteem. The scale included 4 items, for example: "On the whole, I am satisfied with myself" [2].

Life satisfaction. We used a scale that included 4 items, for example: "In many ways, my life is close to ideal" [2].

Respondents answered the questions using a 5-point Likert scale from 1- "Completely disagree", to 5- "Completely agree".

Results

Descriptive statistics are shown in Table 1.

The results show that the mean values of all social identities are higher than the average value of the scale (2,5). The only exclusion is the Soviet identity with the mean value of 2,25. Local identity along with national (Estonian) and European identities ranks second after ethnic identity (see Table 1). Pairwise comparison of variables using the t-test showed that the level of local identity is significantly lower than the level of ethnic identity (t (308) = -3,01, p = 0,00) and significantly higher than the level of Soviet (t (307) = 16,46, p = 0,00) and religious identity (t (307) = 11,71, p = 0,00). Differences in the levels of local, national and European identities are statistically insignificant.

Answering our first research question about the relationship of local identity with other types of social identity, we revealed significant positive correlations of local identity with national (Estonian) and European identities (see Table 2). A distinctive feature of local identity

Table 1

Descriptive st	atistics
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№	Variables	M	SD	α				
Identities								
1	Local	3,78	0,91	0,85				
2	Ethnic	4,01	1,01	0,91				
3	National	3,73	0,99	0,88				
4	Religious	2,73	1,38	0,96				
5	Soviet	2,25	1,29	0,96				
6	European	3,71	1,01	0,93				
Perceived context								
7	Discrimination	1,83	0,82	0,78				
8	Multiculturalism	3,14	0,59	0,77				
Psychological well-being								
9	Self-esteem	4,08	0,58	0,81				
10	Life satisfaction	3,34	0,81	0,80				

is the absence of statistically significant links with Soviet identity: while national and European identities are negatively, and ethnic and religious identities are positively related to Soviet identity, local identity acts as a neutral construct, demonstrating the absence of statistically significant relationship with the Soviet component in the self-identification of Russians in Estonia.

Next, using structural equation modeling, we analyzed the relationship between local identity, perceived context, and psychological well-being. The model (see Figure 1) showed acceptable fit: χ^2 / df = 0,46, CFI = 1,00, SRMR = 0.01, RMSEA = 0.00, PCLOSE = 0.64.

The results showed that the salience of local identity was significantly positively associated with life satisfaction. Thus, our first hypothesis was confirmed.

Testing our second hypothesis, we found that among Russians in Estonia, perceived discrimination was significantly negatively and perceived multiculturalism was significantly positively associated with self-esteem and life satisfaction. Thus, our second hypothesis also was fully confirmed.

To test our third hypothesis, we analyzed the relationship between local identity and indicators of per-

> Local Ethnic

National

Religious Soviet

European

0,26**

2 3

4

ceived sociocultural context. The results showed that local identity was significantly positively associated with perceived multiculturalism and significantly negatively — with perceived discrimination (see Figure 1). Thus, our third hypothesis was fully confirmed.

To answer our research question about the role of perceived context in the relationship between local identity and psychological well-being, we conducted the mediation analysis. The results indicate the presence of significant positive indirect effect of local identity on life satisfaction through perceived discrimination $(\beta = 0.03, 95\% \text{ CI: } [0.004, 0.06])$ and perceived multiculturalism ($\beta = 0.05, 95\%$ CI: [0.02, 0.09]). We also found a significant positive indirect effect of local identity on self-esteem through perceived discrimination ($\beta = 0.03$, 95% CI: [0,007, 0,05]) and perceived multiculturalism $(\beta = 0.02, 95\% \text{ CI: } [0.001, 0.04]).$

Discussion

The results of the study show that local identity plays an important role in the self-awareness of Rus-

-0,24**

Table 2

Relationships between different types of social identity

0,42**

-0.06

relationships between different types of social identity									
Identity	1	2	3	4	5	6			
Local	1								
Ethnic	0,06	1							
Vational	0,55**	0,11	1						
Religious	0,11	0,40**	0,20**	1					
Soviet	-0,07	0,38**	-0,12*	0,32**	1				

0,00

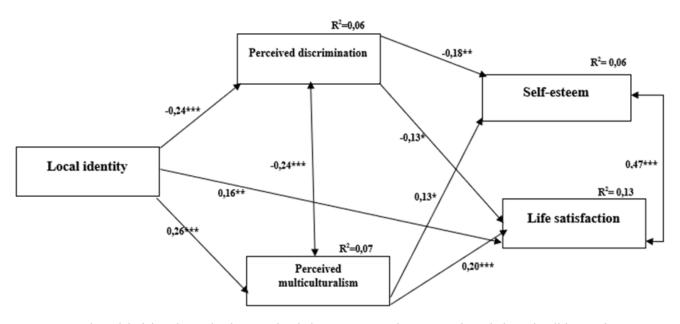


Fig. 1. A path model of the relationship between local identity, perceived context and psychological well-being of Russians in Estonia: * - p < 0.05; ** - p < 0.01; *** - p < 0.001.

Trifonova A.V. Role of Local Identity and Perceived...

sians in Estonia, ranking second after ethnic identity, along with national and European identities. In general, the results confirm the findings of previous studies that demonstrate the importance of local component in the self-identification of Russians in Estonia [17; 27].

Analysis of the structure of multiple social identities shows that among Russians in Estonia local identity is significantly positively associated with national (Estonian) and European identities. Thus, in the self-awareness of Estonian Russians, the local component is closely related to the sense of belonging to the Estonian and European cultural space. For many Soviet people Estonia was a "Russian" Europe, associated with Western values and a way of life [13]. Research revealed the high attractiveness of the Estonian culture, lifestyle, national character for local Russians [7; 13]. This might indicate the emergence of a subculture of "European Russians", in whose self-awareness the local identity of Estonian inhabitants is closely intertwined with the sense of being Europeans [5; 7]. A positive relationship with national identity points to the adaptive function of local identity. Experts suggest that growing importance of the local component in the self-awareness of Russians in Estonia may promote the sense of solidarity with Estonians and increase the social cohesion, reinforcing national identity [17].

Unlike national and European identities, which are negatively associated with Soviet identity, local identity appears to be an ideologically more neutral construct that allows Russians in Estonia to feel a part of Estonian society and European culture without experiencing a conflict with the Soviet past. Due to greater ideological neutrality, local identity acts as a psychologically safe alternative to national identity, the formation of which may be difficult for many Russians due to the peculiarities of the ethnic policy of the Estonian state and the differences in views on historical events of the 20th century. Some experts argue that differences between Russians and Estonians in attitudes toward the Soviet past hamper integration of Russians into Estonian society [19]. Russians in Estonia tend to share a "Russian view" on the history of World War II, according to which Soviet troops liberated Estonia and the other Baltic countries from fascism [19]. In contrast to the Soviet historical tradition, the Estonian interpretation of the past considers the actions of the Soviet Union in the 1940s as aggression, occupation and illegal annexation [25]. In the collective memory of Estonians, these events are associated with the loss of independence, the horrors of Stalin's terror, and deportation. Experts note that the choice of an identification strategy among participants of the acculturation process often depends on the choice of a historical narrative shared by members of the in- or outgroup [12]. In this regard, local identity, being ideologically neutral, seems to be a safe alternative that allows Russian in Estonia to avoid the conflict between their Soviet past and the European present.

The adaptive function of the local component in the self-identification of Russians in Estonia is also evidenced by the positive relationship between local identity and psychological well-being. Thus, the current study identified a significant positive relationship between local identity and life satisfaction, which is consistent with the results of the previous studies in post-Soviet countries [4; 16].

Also, the results of the current study allowed to identify the relationship between perceived inclusiveness of context and psychological well-being of Russians in Estonia. Thus, results show that perceived discrimination is significantly negatively and perceived multiculturalism is significantly positively associated with life satisfaction and self-esteem among representatives of Russian diaspora. In other words, perceived openness of Estonian society, its orientation towards multiculturalism and equality of its ethnic groups contribute to the successful psychological adaptation of Russians in Estonia, while subjectively perceived "closedness" of Estonian society, intergroup inequality, and discrimination create an unfavorable acculturation climate, hampering the psychological adaptation of ethnic minorities. These results are consistent with the findings of the previous studies that demonstrate a positive role of perceived inclusiveness of context in the psychological adaptation of migrants and minorities [3].

Our hypothesis about the relationship between local identity and perceived context was fully confirmed. The salience of local identity was positively associated with perceived multiculturalism and negatively associated with perceived discrimination. The results confirm the findings of the previous studies that suggest that social identity may influence the perception and interpretation of reality [14; 23]. Depending on the importance of different social identities, an individual interprets the surrounding reality in different ways, especially ambivalent and ambiguous situations [11]. Unlike ethnic identity, which may contribute to perceived illegitimacy of the social system among Russians in Estonia [19], local identity, which gives a sense of "home", may promote a more positive perception of acculturation context. The level of local identity is positively associated with perceived openness of Estonian society: the more salient the local identity is, the less often individuals notice discrimination and more often pay attention to the signs of multiculturalism. Results of the current study point to an indirect positive effect of local identity on life satisfaction and self-esteem through perceived discrimination and multiculturalism. By increasing the perceived openness and decreasing the perceived "closedness" of the host society, local identity

КУЛЬТУРНО-ИСТОРИЧЕСКАЯ ПСИХОЛОГИЯ 2021. Т. 17. № 4

CULTURAL-HISTORICAL PSYCHOLOGY. 2021. Vol. 17, no. 4

contributes to the psychological well-being of Russians in Estonia. In this regard, local identity is more adaptive than ethnic identity, which has an indirect negative effect on life satisfaction among Russians in Estonia through status delegitimization, and more adaptive than national identity, which has no significant connections to psychological well-being through the perceived context [19].

The results of the study lead to the following conclusions:

- Local identity occupies an important place in the self-awareness of Russians in Estonia along with ethnic, national and European identities.
- Being an ideologically neutral construct, local identity fulfills an adaptive function and contributes to a more positive perception of context of acculturation.
- Local identity is positively associated with life satisfaction.

• Local identity has an indirect positive effect on life satisfaction and self-esteem among Russians in Estonia, reducing perceived discrimination and increasing perceived multiculturalism.

Conclusion

Results of the current study point to adaptive role of local identity among Russians in Estonia. Acting as an ideologically neutral alternative to national identity, local identity provides a kind of fulcrum, a sense of "home", security, and closeness with representatives of the titular nation, which may compensate for the possible negative influences of the acculturation context and contribute to the psychological well-being of the Russians in Estonia.

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