

**'Crisis' in locals' narratives:
Constructing Personal Biography
and Collective Identity**

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First mentioned in XVII
Became a city in 1778
Population (2010) – 3419

Perception of crisis

“Systems are not presented as subjects; but, according to the pre-technical usage, only subjects can be involved in crises. Thus, only when members of a society experience structural alterations as critical for continued existence and feel their social identity threatened can we speak of crises.”

Habermas, 1973 (1980)

Self-description of social unity

- Crisis as semantic performance.
- Unity is “categorized in negative terms.”
- “Unity refers to its own identity, copes with its own complexity, uses simplified model of itself to orient in its own operations.”
- “Perception and description of crisis <...> operates as self-fulfilling prophecy.”

Luhmann, 1984

Two scenarios of crisis

'EVENT'

- Temporary limited
- Unacceptable, can/ought to be resolved
- Provokes political mobilization
- Embedded in discourses about social change and appropriate forms of political action

Holton, 1987

- Reference point of practical actions

Luhmann, 1984

'STATE'

- Permanent condition (or even immanent)
- Has no bounds

Holton, 1987

- Does not imply clear possibility of new patterns
- "Soap opera" instead of "epic narrative"

Holton, 1990

Metaphors of crisis

‘EVENT’

⇒ Aesthetic metaphor

The *moment* in drama development when antagonisms reach the highest point.

‘STATE’

⇒ Medical metaphor

The *period* in illness development that determines whether the patient will die or recover.

Koselleck, Richter, 2006

General and negative account

Well, I mean, if you want to know now, whether the life is better or more difficult than before, it is of course worse. For us... it is just you weren't there, you don't understand that [soviet] time.

- So, you regard your native place somehow pessimistically...
- You should live here for at least a year and you would get this pessimistic attitude too. You would feel the life, learn everything.

Basic characteristics of crisis state

Absence/lack of:

Resources	Money, salaries
Institutions	Soviet factories
Action	No job, hard drinking, laziness
Attributes of a civilized city	Cafes, cinema, 'boutiques'
Ontological safety	Extremely bad medical service
Capability to change the situation	

- The youth is fleeing away, yes. Because there is no work. If in our times there was a school that trained teachers, wood manufacturing was working, a dairy factory, a joiner's shop a baking factory, brick production. And now? Nothing, nothing at all. <...>
- Nobody is protesting?
- No, it is quiet here, everybody is satisfied with everything. [laughs] And what's the use [of protesting]? The government is far away from here.
- If we shout, what will happen? We would become nervous but nothing will change nonetheless. Everything will stay as it is.

Stuck in

‘Here’

‘Now’

- ...This is utopia, this is a marsh, and God save you and your family and your children from living the same way we live... the state won't help us and your sociological stuff won't help us either... nothing will change, nobody needs us. There live 5-6 people, they hold powersaw bench business, and the others are on their own, like a wind...
- And what about relatives? And younger guys? Are they leaving too?
- Sure. They . Well done, they do the right thing... In general, my generation stays, but the youth leaves. This is utopia... No cafes here with a snooker table or places to drink good tea... No such thing here... <...> Utopia.

* *Utopia* sounds similar to Russian word *top'* which means "marsh", "mire".

Absence of projects of future

- If there is an opportunity to leave, would you do this?
- Sure, gladly.
- Where? <...>
- Kostroma [the center of the region].
- Why Kostroma is better?
- **There is no future here. Especially for youth. Every thing is hardly breathing.**
- Could there be any possibility that everything will just die out here?
- Certainly. Well, not *die out*... 3-4 thousands will be left. Everything will be shrinking...

Nostalgic commitments

My generation... I can hardly believe that it all collapsed suddenly. There was a powerful empire, there was a pride for it. We lived in Soviet Union and everybody was proud for their nationality, I am a Russian – I am the best, I am the strongest. We were brought up with this idea. That is why we won the Great Patriotic War, because who can beat Russians? Nobody, never and nowhere.<...> But now...

Success

is associated with

- individual actors and his/her own efforts
 - non-locals, external actors
-
- Do people want to change anything?
Is there a will to do something?
 - If we see what is happening now...
Nobody even wants to cut the grass around the place where they live. Even the gardens are messy. All active people left, I think. Almost all. The active people usually moved here from somewhere else: N came from the Moscow region, I am from Kazakhstan, like this. Anybody else is not local, too. The locals here live like in a mire.

Decay

is represented as

- part of collective identity
- objective and self-evident condition which determines individual trajectories and coexistence of locals

Paradox:

the attractiveness of permanent crisis

- ... I am satisfied with Kologriv, I kind of like this place very much.
- What exactly do you like here?
- I do not know, I like everything here.
- But you have said people live bad here...
- Here... well... according to their standards. I do not say that they live bad here, I just say that they want their income to be higher. **In all other respects, they have normal life. Quiet and measured.**
- <...>
- The most important things for you here are quiet and the absence of bustle, right?
- Certainly. People here are very good.
- Good people? In what sense?
- I do not know, they are normal, good people. Kind.
- You have said “good”, what do you mean by this?
- Well, I do not know... I like people here more... I used to live in Kaluzhskiy region. Here people are more hospitable, benevolent.

Questions

- What switches the scenario of crisis from 'event' to 'state' mode?
- Is this switch determined by structural characteristics only? Or by representations as well?
- What is the difference between 'crisis' as foreground representation and internal narrative?











