

# **Rural gentrification: City dwellers in rural areas of Russia's Non-Chernozem Region**

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*Abstract.* Under the long-term rural outflow to cities, urban migration to rural areas, especially of those not changing urban registration or staying in the countryside seasonally, is almost invisible. However, the influx of new residents affects rural areas greatly since city dwellers have rich social capital and other resources to transform the countryside. Foreign researchers suggest the term 'rural gentrification' to describe such processes. On the example of the Verkhovazhsky district of the Vologda oblast, the author shows how city dwellers participate in different spheres of the rural economic and social life or introduce new types of activities that could be characterized as sprouts of rural modernization if not for their close connection with the traditional rural life. The paper is based on the field studies conducted from 2019 to 2023, combining in-depth and expert interviews with participant observation. In the villages of the Vaga valley, there are guest houses, a center for wood-fired ceramics, a base for restorers of wooden architecture and other facilities created by city dwellers. At the same time, former city residents work in the rural social infrastructure — schools, cultural centers, shops, administrations, offering rural residents new, urban practices (public lectures, book crossing, separate waste collection, second-hand stores). On the one hand, former city residents contribute to changes in certain aspects of rural life; on the other hand, they adopt elements of rural lifestyle, which is manifested in clothing, everyday practices, and way of thinking.

*Key words:* countryside, migration from the city to the village, rural gentrification, cultural initiatives, Vologda oblast, Non-Chernozem Region

DOI: 10.22394/2500-1809-2023-8-4-137-151

## **What is rural gentrification?**

Russian authors, primarily sociologists, anthropologists, economic geographers and demographers, have been increasingly concerned about city dwellers moving to the countryside. Such interdisciplinary attention determines terminological confusion increased by journalists presenting cases of resettlement in rural areas. Thus, economic geographers (Nefedova, Pokrovsky, Treyvish, 2015) and some sociologists (Townsppeople..., 2016) have long used the term 'disurbanization'; sociologists collaborating with foreign colleagues and relying on the European tradition (Zhdanova, 2014) more often

use the term ‘counterurbanization’. Many researchers (Pokrovsky, Makshanchikova, Nikishin, 2020; Zvyagintsev, Neuvazhaeva, 2015) use the term ‘reverse migration’, which could be justified for those who in the recent past had moved to cities and now returned to the countryside. However, the study presented in this article, like the research of other colleagues, shows that often outflows from the village and from the city run in parallel and consist of different social groups.

Moreover, other terms are introduced such as ‘ruralization’ (Ovchintseva, 2021) which does not fully reflect the essence of the phenomenon under study due to emphasizing not the migration as such but that something, including territories, acquires rural features. In publications about the movement of city dwellers to rural areas, the term ‘rurbanization’ is also used to denote the appearance of urban elements in some rural environment. This term was often used by geographers to describe the state policy of ‘rural-urban linkage’, which was implemented in the 1960s–1980s in the multi-apartment comfortable housing in rural areas — instead of village huts with personal subsidiary plots. However, this term does not describe the relocation of city dwellers to the countryside, even if it is accompanied by urban comfort, since the term was introduced to define urban conditions imposed ‘from above’ in rural areas and not the rural grassroots self-organization. One can also meet neologisms not accepted in science, such as ‘anti-urbanization’<sup>1</sup>, which apparently emphasize the rural-urban opposition to show how the new rural way of life of city dwellers differs from the previous urban one. In any case, terminological disagreements highlight the growing scientific interest in the phenomenon which is almost impossible to study quantitatively (many resettlers keep their city registration not to lose access to certain benefits) but can no longer be ignored.

The same applies to the study of *dacha* migrations and *dacha* residents — for a long time seasonal migrations not covered by official statistics were not studied scientifically. But gradually *dachas* began to interest an increasing number of researchers — the history of this extremely widespread Russian phenomenon (Malinova-Tziafeta, 2013), its spatial distribution (Makhrova, Medvedev, Nefedova, 2016; Shchepetkova, 2018), and influence on territories. Many economic-geographical studies of *dachas* were presented as a book (Between..., 2016) with the quantitative assessments of the distribution of *dachas* and with the detailed descriptions of the interaction between *dachas*

1. See, e.g.: From the capital to the village: Why so many Muscovites move to the rural wilderness. URL: [https://moskvichmag.ru/gorod/iz-stolitsy-v-stanitsu-zachem-moskvichi-massovo-perezzhayut-v-derevenskuyu-glush/?fbclid=IwAR2nOd1Bx7qSYbUXFMt6rra3HJVpGD\\_LUPLy59nck83A87V05eWNAa4wI](https://moskvichmag.ru/gorod/iz-stolitsy-v-stanitsu-zachem-moskvichi-massovo-perezzhayut-v-derevenskuyu-glush/?fbclid=IwAR2nOd1Bx7qSYbUXFMt6rra3HJVpGD_LUPLy59nck83A87V05eWNAa4wI).

and permanent population and of the influence of seasonal population on local territorial systems.

Contemporary studies of urban-rural migration often focus on the impact of new resettlers on rural residents or on the countryside, which was also the issue of foreign research about 10–15 years ago, when articles on rural gentrification followed articles on counter-urbanization. Some authors (Phillips, 2010) even argue that these two concepts can be used as synonyms as the transfer of the term ‘gentrification’ (known to all urbanists as referring to the social transformation of urban neighborhoods due to the replacement of local residents with low incomes by representatives of the middle class, which often leads to such neighborhoods’ revitalization (Stockdale, 2010)) into the study of rural areas is appropriate and even necessary, since city dwellers moving to rural areas usually have a higher financial status than local residents and gradually change rural areas, making them more comfortable and attractive for new resettlers.

Thus, the following processes accompany and shape rural gentrification:

1. secondary settlement and/or replacement of the local population by those moving from the city;
2. rising prices for rural real estate;
3. improving quality of housing and improvement of rural areas;
4. strengthening de-agrarianization of rural areas;
5. changing rural lifestyle.

Both the term and the phenomenon of rural gentrification are discussed in foreign studies (Nelson, Oberg, Nelson, 2010; Solana, 2010), often mentioning class differentiation and a conflict between the conditionally ‘indigenous’ population and newcomers, although an increase in financial well-being and an improving rural environment seem to be positive phenomena. Russian researchers of urban migration to rural areas also search for the most adequate terms and assessments. Thus, anthropologists (Melnikova, 2020) discuss whether this process can be defined as colonization or neocolonization — appropriation of the countryside by city dwellers. The terminology of colonization was also used by economic geographers (Averkieva, Nefedova, 2016) to describe the *dacha* expansion of capital residents in the Kostroma Region as the seasonal residents of Kostroma villages called themselves colonists and their villages colonies.

In this study, I explore how the above-mentioned processes manifest themselves in reality, and what the secondary development of rural areas looks like — rural gentrification or neocolonization.

### **Methodology and area of the research**

This study is based on a set of approaches and methods of social-economic geography, focusing on the territory, its characteris-

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Rural

gentrification: City

dwellers in rural

areas of Russia’s

Non-Chernozem

Region

tics and geographical location. The study combines field observations and expert semi-structured interviews with representatives of the administration of the Verkhovazhsky municipal district and with employees of four administrations of rural settlements. Six semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted with urban resettlers in rural areas, and their publications on social networks and in the media about various projects and events initiated by new rural residents were analyzed.

The chosen Verkhovazhsky district does not stand out too much among other districts of the Vologda oblast and the old-developed Non-Chernozem region (Old-Developed..., 2021). Like many others, this district experiences a gradual decline in population and a transformation of the economy based on agriculture and forestry. Both industries are being gradually modernized, which leads to a slight increase in production and to a reduction in the number of employees. In agriculture, there are 22 farms and enterprises of different ownership, which is quite a lot for one rural municipality. In the Vologda oblast, the Verkhovazhsky district is known as one of the last flax growers, while in general it has a dairy specialization as most Non-Chernozem regions. There are many small entrepreneurs in the forestry sector, engaged in logging and primary woodworking. Most rural districts have small sawmills, and there are few entrepreneurs engaged in wooden house construction.

The geographical feature of the Verkhovazhsky district is the federal highway M8 that crosses it from south to north. Highways often complicate the life of rural areas, since they have a barrier function, reducing the quality of life in settlements located on the road and contributing to an increase in the number of crimes related to the transit flow. In the Verkhovazhsky district, such negative aspects of the highway are almost insignificant: the new route is far from the main settlement zone in the valleys of the rivers Vaga, Pezhma and Kuloy; there are almost no villages located on the highway. Each rural municipality has a several-kilometer unpaved part of the road, which does not attract transit transport. At the same time, such a road increases the accessibility of the area, being year-round and providing easy access both to Vologda (and from there to Moscow or Saint Petersburg) and to neighboring Velsk in the Arkhangelsk oblast — a lively, small, ‘southern capital’ of the vast northern region.

The Slavic colonization of these lands began in the 10th century, until the mid-15th century they belonged to Veliky Novgorod, later to the Duchy of Moscow. The economic rise of the Verkhovazhsky lands had been determined by the active use of the White Sea ports for trade with Europe, before Saing Petersburg became the window to Europe. One of the branches of the Volga–White Sea trade route was the Vaga River. After Arkhangelsk had lost its status as the main export port, the lands along the Vaga River retained their economic

importance due to rich forest resources and transit trade. Most local villages and hamlets, except for six Soviet logging stations, can be called historical — they are a harmonious part of natural landscapes in river valleys. Rich history and a picturesque location with good transport accessibility are important factors attracting city dwellers to the Verkhovazhsky district.

### **Is there gentrification in the Verkhovazhsky district?**

If we consider processes identified by foreign researchers as rural gentrification, the Verkhovazhsky district presents a complex picture. In some form, there is the first process — ‘repopulation’ — which is almost impossible to assess quantitatively as new rural residents, like seasonal summer ones, do not always have even a temporary registration in rural areas. Even if they had had it, the influx of city dwellers would not have replenished the ongoing natural and migration decline. At the same time, city dwellers come to the countryside with its specific migration trends. Russian and foreign scholars know little about intra-rural migrations, although today rural areas are as mobile as always (Bell, Osti, 2010). Therefore, under the general mobility trends, at least in the Verkhovazhsky district, former city residents do not always stand out: representatives of different generations come here in families or individually from capitals, from the North, primarily the Arkhangelsk and Murmansk Regions, from cities and districts of the Vologda Region and neighboring areas, and even from more remote regions. There are rural areas experiencing higher repopulation, for instance, in the vicinity of the village Ivanovskoe in the Borisoglebsky district of the Yaroslavl oblast. Here, the teacher Vladimir Martyshin, who moved from Moscow, created in a small rural school the School of Holistic Development which attracts students not so much from the surrounding countryside as from cities, primarily from Moscow, and parents move to Ivanovskoe-on-Lekhite with their children. The ideologist of this movement estimates the number of resettlers during twenty years at about 400 people: “in this village, locals have four houses — the rest left. About twenty houses were built anew. In the neighboring village, seven houses were built... Children’s playgrounds are improved, trees and alleys are planted, i.e., villages are being transformed” (Ovchintseva, 2021: 305).

The impact of city dwellers on the rural real-estate market is controversial. On the one hand, the maternal capital program has already led to an increase in house prices (“*although we are a village, we do not sell houses for less than the maternal capital*” — the head of the Chushevitsky rural settlement). On the other hand, prices for rural houses vary greatly, while the supply is very limited. Despite depopulation, there are few vacant houses in rural areas:

some are used seasonally, some are used occasionally or not used at all but remain family property. Even rural residents often have several houses: in the center and on the outskirts of the village — for different purposes. In general, the interest of city dwellers in rural areas determines small changes in the real estate markets: in villages with urban resettlers, as a rule, there are more registered houses<sup>2</sup>, and the heads of rural settlements make lists of empty houses to find owners or heirs.

In Western Europe, the improving quality of housing and improvement of rural areas under rural gentrification were determined by the changes in the rural population composition: villagers were replaced by former city dwellers — representatives of the middle class with higher incomes, who could invest in housing and environment. However, the concept of the middle class in Russia is vague, so it is not clear whether city dwellers moving to the countryside can be classified as the middle class. New rural residents have very different incomes and ideas about the improvement of housing. According to the field observations in the Verkhovazhsky district, the newest and most comfortable houses are not owned by former city dwellers, who often (although not always) treat with great respect the cultural landscape of the Vologda village, therefore, preserving log huts or building new houses from timber. While the rural elite (primarily those engaged in the forestry business, less often farmers and those engaged in agriculture) prefers the newest and well-equipped houses, sometimes quite discordant with the typical rural housing.

The third process accompanying rural gentrification in Western Europe is the strengthening deagrarianization of rural areas, their post-agrarian transition (Shepanskaya, 2021). In the Verkhovazhsky district, urban resettlers are also rarely engaged in agriculture. However, some authors (Zvyagintsev, Neuvazhaeva, 2015), based on the interviews with resettlers, argue that many wanted to develop subsidiary farming (the question is whether non-commercial subsidiary farming can be considered as agriculture in terms of employment or economic activity) or become farmers. In the Verkhovazhsky district, not every former city dweller has even a simple vegetable garden not to mention the idea of becoming a farmer or getting a job at the local agricultural enterprise. Even those who try to keep bees or geese look for a new experience or solve urgent financial issues rather than strive to get a main source of income. On the one hand, in rural areas of the infertile Non-Chernozem region it would be strange to look

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2. Not all houses of rural residents are registered. Many pay utility bills but not land or property taxes due to not having ownership documents (they did not register houses in the 1990s being sure that no one would evict them even if they have no documents). As a rule, houses are registered to formalize an inheritance or to sell the house.

for agricultural employment. On the other hand, agricultural activities of former city dwellers are hampered not only by the objective natural restrictions: new rural residents are as heterogeneous as the 'old' ones who are often not interested in agriculture even to satisfy their personal needs.

Nevertheless, the most controversial issue is still the influence of new villagers on the general course of rural life as different from the urban one, since the line between the village and the city has been erased all over the world due to the so-called 'cellular globalization' (Pokrovsky, Nefedova, 2013) and other factors. Moreover, not only former city dwellers change rural life, but also rural residents influence the life of former city residents. Some resettlers (primarily religious escapists) initially wanted not to transform the village but to archaize their everyday practices. The revival of traditional culture (folklore, folk paintings, ceramics, weaving) by former city dwellers is difficult to define as the introduction of urban elements into the countryside. Moreover, many respondents mention that they unwittingly brought their lifestyle and even appearance closer to their ideas about the rural (women began to wear skirts and dresses more often, men grew beards), which, however, does not lead to a rejection of any civilizational benefits or to strong personal changes.

Certainly, former city dwellers bring new skills to rural life. Thus, in the Lipki rural settlement, there was a rural driving school founded by the 'young pensioner' from Severodvinsk; in the Morozovsky settlement, there is a yoga studio opened by the former resident of one of its villages, who returned from the city. Urban resettlers help rural residents master software (for example, "1C Accounting" for store sales) and develop websites for rural settlements. A very interesting example is from the village Pezhma in the Velsk district close to the Verkhovazhsky district (in the Arkhangelsk oblast): Galina Nikulina<sup>3</sup>, who moved from Saint Petersburg, helped the villagers equip the main public space of the village — its bus stop. This cozy stop with a lampshade, a carpet, sockets, a wi-fi router and a sign-board "Come Home" was the first village improvement project. Later Galina became the initiator of grant projects to create new public spaces for the rural youth. The same applies to the village Sheloty in the Verkhovazhsky district: urban resettlers help the head of the settlement to apply for grants — the central park was improved, and the navigation elements were made for village guests. Further, I will consider in more detail the mutual influence of rural and urban principles on the example of several families who were the first and main object of the study.

3. "Village Development Headquarters". URL: <https://tass.ru/arktika-segodnya/14217373>.

Initially, the Verkhovazhsky district attracted my attention with an extraordinary annual event in one of its villages — a rural all-around competition with the touching name “Lympiyad in Lipki”<sup>4</sup>, which was suggested by the Vologda writer and journalist Anatoly Ekhalov and members of the Lipki folk ensemble in response to the 2014 Winter Olympics in Sochi. At first, it was the day of the village in the ‘Olympiad’ format; then it became a major district event — teams from different rural settlements and even the center of the Verkhovazhsky district (although it has recently acquired the features of a small town, it is still a large village) competed in chopping wood, mowing, throwing haystacks, starting the *samovar*, carrying water with a rocker, baking pancakes on a fire and so on. In 2020, the “Lympiyad in Lipki” was to be the central event of the all-Russian festival “Village is the Soul of Russia” but was canceled due to the covid-19 pandemic. The organizers of the Lympiad are residents of Lipki, who moved to the Verkhovazhsky district from Murmansk after retirement (albeit being relatively young)<sup>5</sup> and organized the folk ensemble “Radonitsa” [Day of Rejoicing], in which many other former city residents with an active life position participate. During the study in the Verkhovazhsky district, I discovered that many cultural events, especially related to folk traditions, were organized not by rural residents, but by those who moved to the Verkhovazhsky district from different cities (due to the connections with these places or by accident). Thus, the reconstruction of folk traditions turns out to be an integral part of rural gentrification — it is no coincidence that villages with a certain number of former city dwellers become centers for reviving folk crafts, holding events and making documentaries.

### **Pioneers of rural gentrification in the Verkhovazhsky district.**

#### **Zhigalov family in the village of Rogachikha**

Not far from the district center, the village of Verkhovazhye, there is the village of Rogachikha. If Verkhovazhye was a small town, then Rogachikha would be its suburb, and many of Rogachikha’s features (replacement of its rural population by visitors, many seasonal houses and two hotels) would be considered manifestations of suburbanization. Since these are rural areas far from urban centers, the more appropriate term is rural gentrification which was start-

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4. URL: <http://cultinfo.ru/news/2018/7/limpiada-in-lypky-promises-to-become-the-brightest>.

5. Depending on the length of service and some other parameters, residents of the Far-North regions can retire 5–10 years earlier (in certain professions even 15 years earlier).

ed in Rogachikha by the Zhigalovs — city dwellers with the Siberian–Moscow–Saint Petersburg roots, who for some time became adherents of the traditional peasant culture in the Verkhovazhsky district. In the early 2000s, V. V. Zhigalov bought in Rogachikha an old peasant house built by the local peasant Vasily Mekhaev more than a century ago. Zhigalov preserved all interiors, lived in this house with his family and used a part of it as a rural guest house and a museum of the peasant life, which is an example of a very careful attitude to the cultural heritage and its presentation to both guests and locals.

The Zhigalovs received their acquaintances, school groups from all over the district, high-ranking guests from the regional administration, and foreign tourists. This guest house became famous in the Vologda Region as a landmark of the Verkhovazhsky district, but in 2016 it burned down. Neither the owners nor their guests were injured, and, surprisingly, the fire did not make the Zhigalovs return to Moscow or Saint Petersburg, although they have friends and even apartments in both cities. They did not rebuild the peasant house, but together with the local entrepreneur built a rural hotel and a small guest house (painted using the free brush technique by T. V. Gorbatova<sup>6</sup> and her students). The Zhigalovs built a new house for themselves, still live in Rogachikha and, unlike many resettlers from large cities, have not only temporary but also permanent registration in the Verkhovazhsky district.

In addition to the active revival and popularization of the Russian North folk culture, the Zhigalovs play another important role for this territory — due to their extensive social connections, they attract new resettlers and help the hesitant ones make up their minds, since the Zhigalovs prove by their example that moving to the village does not mean giving up all urban benefits. Thus, in Rogachikha, several houses were bought by religious escapist<sup>7</sup>, who moved from Moscow to create a small community, but they still

6. T. V. Gorbatova is a ceramicist and artist, teacher at the Center for Traditional Folk Crafts. Like many other resettlers mentioned in the article, she moved to the Verkhovazhsky district from the city (Vologda) after retirement and took a very active life position, participating in various projects initiated by former city dwellers.

7. There are religious escapist in many other villages of the Verkhovazhsky district. The most striking example is the Old Believer Theodosius Travin, a former Muscovite, remarkable not only for his deliberately archaic appearance but also for his carpentry and saddlery skills almost lost even in the Russian North. He builds houses and bathhouses, solves complex construction tasks, works as a blacksmith, keeps horses, collects ancient horse harnesses and carts, restores and makes sleighs and various types of carriages. However, like other representatives of religious movements, he does not create a special environment around himself — he affects more the cultural life of the Verkhovazhsky district than the course of rural gentrification.

wait for like-minded people. Thanks to Zhigalov, several families from the community of German Sterligov moved to other villages of the Verkhovazhsky district. The Zhigalovs keep in touch with most former city dwellers in this area and with their eldest children in two capitals; their youngest son married a local woman and in 2020 opened the first pick-up point of one federal marketplace in the district center.

Today Rogachikha is a village with almost no natives — in most of its houses live people who moved here from other places, there are no more houses for sale, and those who move to Rogachikha build new ones. At the entrance to the village, there is a wooden temple built by the initiative of the former city dwellers and a stone in memory of those peasants who developed these lands and were the first settlers of Rogachikha. In general, elements of the agricultural landscape — mowed slopes of local hills, several grazing cows, geese and an apiary — are not so much relics of agriculture as decorations for the new rural tourism facilities (two hotels built jointly by the Zhigalovs and a local businessman).

#### **Art residence in Shelota, or potential of social capital**

One of the new attractions in the Verkhovazhsky district is the Vaga wood-fired ceramic kiln, one of the few in Russia, which was built by resettlers from Saint Petersburg in 2020 and partly resonates with the ideas of reviving the local Somov ceramics. In 2016, Svetlana Stepanova moved from Saint Petersburg to Shelota, a separate and smallest rural settlement of the village cluster in the south of the Verkhovazhsky district. In 2015, she was very impressed by the folk festivities on Trinity Day, when many Shelota residents and guests in folk clothes danced in circles, listened to a concert, and talked. Svetlana's decision to move was also facilitated by the meeting with Vologda potters, since ceramics is her favorite hobby (far from her education at the Mining Institute or her work as an accountant).

After moving to Shelota with her youngest son, who went to the local school, Svetlana got a job at the administration of the rural settlement. In addition to her participation in traditional rural events, she introduced her own holiday — an annual ceramic festival — and invited not only her friends-ceramicists from Saint Petersburg and Vologda, but also foreign guests. Moreover, all residents of Shelota were invited to master-classes and the feast — an evening outdoor dinner near the temple, which made the holiday common and rural. Over time, it became impossible to accommodate all participants of ceramic festivals in the huts of organizers, since the festival expanded and became somewhat international (in 2017, guests came from Germany, in 2018 — from Lebanon, in

2019 — from the USA). Therefore, in 2018, on Svetlana's initiative, a guest house was opened in Shelota. However, later Svetlana's work in the rural administration together with her own projects ceased to bring the expected results, since local budget funds are scarce even provided various initiative budgeting. In 2019, Svetlana left the village council and created the NGO "Festival" to expand her activities related to ceramic festivals, especially applications for grants.

Initially, the NGO "Festival" received small funds to host the pottery festival. In 2020, Svetlana won a grant for the construction of a wood-fired ceramic kiln that attracted ceramicists from all over Russia and led to the idea of creating an art residence. In 2021, with the new grant funding, a deck for tent camp and infrastructure were built, which provided the minimal living conditions for ceramists-guests (sauna, shower, summer kitchen). In 2022, with another grant funding, a workshop was built so that craftsmen could come not only for ceramic firing but also for making new products and exchanging experiences. On the second floor of the workshop, there are guest rooms. Since 2021, the art residence has collaborated with the Saint Petersburg Stieglitz State Academy of Art and Design, its students come to Shelota for summer practice, including making objects for rural improvement.

In 2021, the art residence started its full-time work; in 2021, it hosted 6 shifts of ceramists, in 2022 — only 4. Each shift is 6 days, during which the kiln is prepared, heated, used for firing, and then cooled. During this time, craftsmen monitor the heating and firing day and night. They all live in Shelota — in guest houses (there are several in the village) or tents not far from the kiln. They can organize meals on their own but often prefer 'village catering' — food from the rural canteen or prepared by locals who are ready to cooperate with the art residence. In addition to providing food for ceramists, residents of Shelota give masterclasses on birch-bark weaving, weaving on a wooden loom, belt weaving on planks or working on a potter's wheel.

Ceramists revive the village not only with the consumption of services and space: guests of the art residence and of Stepanova are often ready to give masterclasses or open lectures for interested villagers. Thus, Saint Petersburg geologists made a paleontological exhibition in the Shelotsky Museum of Local History; in 2021, guests gave a lecture on geology and paleontology in the village cultural center. Svetlana's social capital allowed to find volunteers and philanthropists to repair the roof of the Trinity Church, purchase bells for a small belfry, and make stained glass for the western window. Another team of volunteers created a logo and printed booklets about Sheloty, made a page about this rural cluster for Wikipedia and printed a series of postcards with paintings by artists who live in Shelota or came here for plein air.

Another ‘spin-off’ of the art residence and/or a result of Svetlana’s social capital is the village-film festival “Pechka”<sup>8</sup> organized by directors from Saint Petersburg and held in Shelota three times — from 2021 to 2023. In 2020, the diploma project of the director Ekaterina Pavlyukova (Ivanitskaya) was filmed here, and residents of Shelota and the Verkhovazhsky district starred in it. The idea of holding this film premiere in the rural House of Culture turned into the idea of a festival of films about rural areas, which was supported by feature-film and documentary directors from Russia and neighboring countries. In 2022, the film campus “Northerners” was opened to unite aspiring documentary directors of the Vologda Region under the guidance of Saint Petersburg specialists in making a full-length documentary “about villagers as guardians of the traditions and culture of northern villages”<sup>9</sup>.

In addition to cultural projects, Svetlana and her family from time to time solve the pressing problems of Shelota. Thus, at the end of 2019, the rural ‘district consumer society’ store was under threat of closure due to a shortage of workers with the “1C Accounting” skills. Svetlana’s eldest son moved to Shelota from Saint Petersburg to work in the rural store and taught several locals electronic accounting so that to gradually transfer this workplace to them. Since 2020, he lives in Shelota, having a remote job in Saint Petersburg. When working in the rural store, he organized a book crossing, a separate waste collection point (Svetlana took wastes to the collection points in Vologda in her car) and a rural second-hand store (clothes are supplied by their Saint Petersburg friends).

Svetlana’s initiatives do not contradict the traditional rural practices and are organically included in the social life of Shelota. At the same time, her friends and acquaintances began to buy houses in the village. She also bought a house not far from hers to organize a second guest house. Another house was bought by Saint Petersburg directors for their events, and two more houses were bought on the periphery of the Shelotsky cluster. Can this be considered the beginning of the urban colonization of Shelota? Hard to say, but this looks like gentrification — rural population is not replaced but expanded by new residents. Prices for houses in the village closest to the art residence increased (usually a rural house is sold at the price of the maternal capital, about 500 thousand rubles, but here similar offers start from 800 thousand rubles).

City dwellers had bought houses and had moved to the village even before the art residence was opened. Thus, in Shelota, there is an artel of restorers of wooden architecture: craftsmen mainly came from cities and want to settle in the village by buying or building a house.

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8. URL: <http://cultinfo.ru/news/2021/10/pervyy-v-rossii-kinofestival-derevenskogo-kino-pechkafest>.

9. URL: <https://northernpeople.ru>.

In this village cluster, live both an artist from Moscow (owns several houses) and religious escapists who moved from other large cities; the border between locals and resettlers regularly changes and becomes vague. It is noteworthy that one local craftswoman, who sews folk costumes, shirts and sundresses, moved to Shelota in the 1990s from Central Asia, i.e., she is a representative of a different ethnic group.

Thus, in the villages of the Verkhovazhsky district, there are rather signs of rural gentrification than its clear course. Rising real-estate prices and the influx of urban population can be considered quantitative indicators of new processes, but gentrification is a qualitative process identified to a greater extent by qualitative parameters. However, its qualitative parameters are the most ambiguous upon closer examination: modernization of certain aspects of rural life by former city dwellers is combined with archaization of their personal practices, and technical innovations do not contradict the revival of traditional crafts. No attempts to describe the influence of former city dwellers on the countryside in terms of the existing approaches provide a holistic picture of the contemporary rural-urban interactions. In the rural Non-Chernozem, so vulnerable and losing inhabitants for decades, any new processes are ambiguous. The example of the Verkhovazhsky district shows that city dwellers not so much contribute to modernization of rural social life as revive and preserve folk traditions, striving not to oppose themselves to the rural world of the Russian North but to become a part of it. Former city dwellers in Verkhovazhsky villages, like under rural gentrification in Europe, create a new environment that attracts new resettlers and sometimes keeps locals from moving to the city.

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### **Сельская джентрификация: горожане в сельской местности российского Нечерноземья**

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**Аннотация.** На фоне продолжительного миграционного оттока сельских жителей переезд горожан в сельскую местность, особенно тех, кто не меняет городскую прописку или проживает на селе сезонно, почти не заметен. Однако на сельские территории приток новых жителей оказывает большое влияние, поскольку горожане имеют богатый социальный капитал и иные ресурсы для преобразования сельской местности. В зарубежной науке для описания таких процессов стал применяться термин «сельская джентрификация». В статье на примере Верховажского района Вологодской области показано, как горожане включаются в разные сферы экономической и социальной жизни села или предлагают новые виды деятельности, которые можно было бы охарактеризовать как ростки модернизации сельской жизни, если бы не их тесная связь с традиционным укладом сельской жизни. Статья опирается на полевые исследования последних пяти лет (2019–2023), которые сочета-

ли глубинные и экспертные интервью с включенным наблюдением. В селах долины Ваги расположены гостевые дома, центр дровяного обжига керамических изделий, база реставраторов деревянного зодчества и другие объекты, созданные горожанами. В то же время бывшие горожане работают и в объектах сельской социальной инфраструктуры: школах, домах культуры, магазинах и администрациях, предлагая сельским жителям новые, принятые в городах практики (публичные лекции, бук-кроссинг, раздельный сбор мусора, секонд-хенд). С одной стороны, бывшие горожане способствуют изменению отдельных сторон сельской жизни, с другой стороны, сами перенимают элементы сельского образа жизни, что проявляется в одежде, повседневных практиках и образе мышления.

*Ключевые слова:* сельская местность, миграция из города в село, сельская джентрификация, культурные инициативы, Вологодская область, Нечерноземье.

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Rural

gentrification: City  
dwellers in rural  
areas of Russia's  
Non-Chernozem  
Region