

"Western Gates of the Urals": geocultural branding of a small city

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Abstract. The article presents an analysis of the image resources of Vereshchagino - a small town in the Perm region, which should be used in the process of implementing the strategy of its geocultural branding. In popular scientific works and mass media, the city is called the "Western Gate of the Urals", meaning that the Vereshchagino railway station is a key point, bypassing which, freight and passenger trains leave the Ural region. In 2023, Vereshchagino station will celebrate 125 years since the moment of its foundation. At the beginning of the XXI century, the dynamic development of the urban environment in Vereshchagino was interrupted. The municipal authorities missed the opportunity to pursue a policy of territorial marketing branding, to actively promote the brand images of the town in the Ural geocultural space. Today, Vereshchagino has accumulated typical problems for a provincial town – demographic, communal, and socio-cultural ones. Urban communities express dissatisfaction with the visual and aesthetic appearance of the urban environment. According to the author's point of view, the development and implementation of the Vereshchagino geocultural branding strategy is a progressive solution that allows creating creative industries in the city and ensuring sustainable socio-economic development. As a methodological basis, we used the conceptual ideas of the creative action of the British scientist Ch. Landry, as well as the postulates of the theory of geocultural branding of the city by the Russian researcher D. N. Zamyatin.

1 Introduction

The history of Vereshchagino began at the turn of the XIX-XX centuries. During this period of time, the construction of a railway transport network was launched on the territory of urban and rural settlements of the Ural region. In 1895, on the site of the future town of Vereshchagino, the construction of one of the sections of the Perm-Kotlas railway began, including construction of a terminal, a railway station and a locomotive depot. By 1898, the main works on the construction of objects were completed, the station was named "Ocherskaya", and in 1903 it was renamed as the "Voznesenskaya" station [1]. The opening of the movement of passenger and freight trains on the Glazov-Kama section took place in November 25, 1898. In 1907, the settlement formed at the station was named "Alexandrovsky" [2]. In the spring of 1916, the Ministry of Railways granted the request of railway workers and station employees to rename Voznesenskaya station and the village of Alexandrovsky to Vereshchagino. In the articles published earlier, the author's point of view was stated, according to which this initiative was recognized as one of the first collective creative actions in the history of Vereshchagino, indicating that people understand the visible and invisible meanings of creativity and social asceticism [3].

During the Soviet period, there was a steady socio-economic development of Vereshchagino. In 1924, the

settlement became the administrative center of Vereshchaginsky district, then in 1928 an urban-type settlement, and finally, on June 19, 1942, Vereshchagino received the status of a town of district subordination. The population had grown from 6 thousand in 1931 to 22 thousand people in 1959 [4]. In the second half of the XX century, a complex of city-forming enterprises was established there: a knitting factory, a bakery plant, a dairy plant, a reinforced concrete plant, a steam locomotive repair plant, etc. In the 1950s-1980s, the urban space had been actively developing, and residential multi-apartment construction was carried out at a rapid pace. It is important to note that in the 1990s Vereshchagino showed positive indicators of economic and socio-cultural development. In contrast to other Perm towns, the demographic situation here was stable, by 2001 the number of citizens reached 25.2 thousand people. People from rural areas moved to the city, specialists came with families from Perm in search for better opportunities to maintain material well-being. In 1993, the book called "Vereshchagino - Western gate of the Urals" by local historian V.G. Melchakov was published [4]. In 1995, a monument to the Russian battle artist V.V. Vereshchagin was erected on the station square. Traditions of weaving and technologies of working with textiles were implemented in the factory production of knitted clothing, the production of which was carried out at a high level of artistic skill. We express the opinion that at the turn of the 1990s-2000s, Vereshchagino had unique conditions for implementing

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programs for brand identification of local image resources. Creative urban communities should be engaged in promoting Vereshchagino brand images in the Ural region. The geobrand "Western Gates of the Urals" could serve as an organic basis for the creative scenario of the urban environment development. However, the recent history of the town has shown that the municipal authorities and local communities were not ready to implement innovative programs. The geocultural potential of Vereshchagino was not in demand and was not used in the current plans of socio-economic development. In turn, this led to serious negative consequences. Let's describe some of them.

First, the city has ceased to be an attractive and comfortable place to live. By 2007, its population had decreased to 22.6 thousand people [5]. As of January 1, 2020, 21.2 thousand people already lived in Vereshchagino [6]. The average life expectancy in 2019 was 65 years (for men - 59 years, for women - 73 years) [7]. The outflow of the population, primarily young people and highly qualified specialists, can be explained by the traditional reasons for a provincial city: difficulties in finding employment (especially in the state and municipal service), the unavailability of innovative educational and medical services, the underdevelopment of the cultural and business sphere, the slow pace of commissioning new housing, the lack of creative industries, etc. Second, the working part of the population of the Vereshchaginsky urban district is only 37%, the overall unemployment rate is estimated at 7% [8]. There is a fairly high level of "otkhodnichestvo" (temporary, most often seasonal work outside the place of permanent residence). According to the authors of this study, this figure is equal to 25%. Citizens who have permanent residence in Vereshchagino prefer to work outside of it. As the researcher of this problem Yu. M. Plyusnin notes, at present there are at least 15-20 million people of such workers in Russia. According to him, a third of all families in the province live on latrines, that is, a type of economic activity that is almost not taken into account by official statistics [9]. Third, in the urban environment of Vereshchagino, the problems of municipal economy were exposed: a high percentage of worn-out housing and communal networks, unsatisfactory condition of road infrastructure, unsettled garden and park areas, desolation of suburban areas, etc. In winter, in the city you can observe snow-covered benches and garbage bins, icing of pedestrian paths, untimely clearing of snow from house territories, etc. These data allow us to conclude that today the implementation of the strategy of geocultural branding of the city is vital for the city of Vereshchagino and its population.

2 Materials and methods

The theoretical and methodological basis for this work is fundamental and applied research in the field of cultural studies and geography, history and ethnography, economics and sociology, design and technical

aesthetics, museum studies, as well as the works of local historians and specialists in the field of urban studies. The solution of the problems considered in the article is based on the concept of geocultural branding of the city in the form in which it is presented in the scientific works by Doctor of Cultural Studies Dmitry Nikolaevich Zamyatin [10], as well as on the theory of the creative city by the British scientist Charles Landry, in particular, on his vision on creative action [11]; [12].

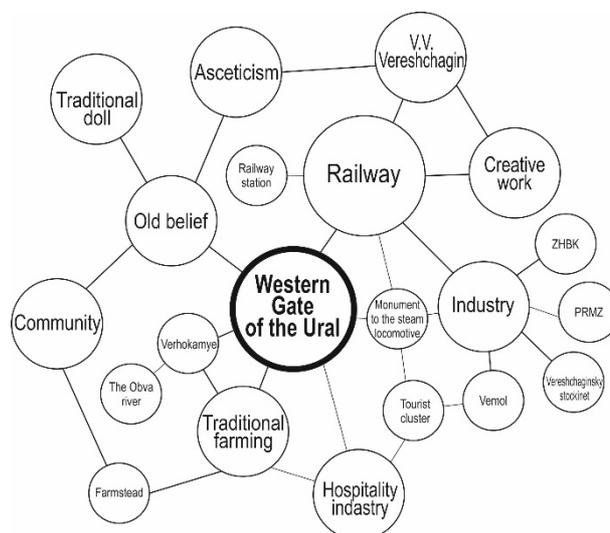


Figure 1. Geocultural scheme of Vereshchagino

So, geocultural branding of territories is a project-network activity aimed at the applied use of the geoculture of the territory (regional identity, historical and cultural heritage, archetypal geographical images, local myths or cultural landscapes) in order to form and promote a socially significant and effective (attractive) territorial image [13]. A city, a municipal district, or a rural settlement can be represented as a purposeful, detailed, structured image. And this image of the territory can be built, formed as a geocultural brand. The territory's geocultural brand is its strategic asset.

Based on this definition, it becomes obvious that the visual and semantic framework of the urban environment is formed on the basis of a certain geoculture of the city. In this concept, we include a phenomenal core (urban legends, legends, unofficial toponymy, folk-spoken ("live") speech, places of memory), around which cultural realities are built, which have not lost their symbolic and semantic meaning in the maelstrom of urban events. Both individually and in combination with each other, cultural realities can act as cultural codes of the city or as the basis for the strategy of urban cultural policy. In those of them, where the subjects of the mutual influence of space and culture, nature and human activity find expression, the attributes of a geocultural resource are clearly traced. The distinctive feature of the latter is that it is organically woven into the space of the city, its dynamics and changes are the focus of attention of local communities and individual urban residents. In the rhythms of everyday life in urban life, geocultural resources are endowed in the minds of citizens with earth-like features.

Ch. Landry said that "Each city can find its own form of creativity, which is unique. The very nature of the city will contribute to the development of creativity, which is due both to the existing niches in it and to the hybrid ideas that arise on this basis. The cultural strategies that we offered to the cities were aimed at solving complex problems. The success or failure of the strategies depended less on the material assets of the city, and more on the ideas and approaches to solving problems" [12].

It seems that the tactic of gradual deployment of the city's geocultural potential can be an effective solution. At the first stage, urban communities identify a list of local geocultural resources, identifying those that can become image resources in the course of project activities. As a rule, a large city is characterized by the presence of three or four geocultural resources, for a small city – one or two. At the second stage, creative actions with a geocultural resource are tested in an urban environment. It should be noted that at this time, creative solutions, techniques, and technologies are being worked out, the combined result of which is to determine the parameters of the future promising model of a creative city. The third stage is the development of the city's geocultural branding strategy and the beginning of its implementation. The fourth stage is the achievement of intermediate results in the process of becoming a model of a creative city. The fifth stage is the presentation of the city's creativity on a Russian and global scale.

3 Results

First of all, we will present the author's geocultural scheme, which shows the image resources of Vereshchagino town (Figure 1).

In this geocultural scheme, it is proposed to recognize the creative idea "Vereshchagino – the Western Gate of the Urals", which is well known to citizens, as a geocultural brand of Vereshchagino. It was already noted above that the prospects for launching this brand were outlined in the late 1990s. From the local periodicals of recent years, the discourse about the "Western Gate of the Urals" has entered the content of social media platforms [14]. Let's list the image resources that make up the conceptual basis of a geocultural brand:

- Railway and its infrastructure (railway terminal, platform, station, station square, railway bridge), which have been developed in a historical place and serve as a place to receive guests of the city, including tourists and sightseers.

– JSC "Vereshchaginsky PRMZ "Remputmash" is a city-forming object, founded in 1961 on the basis of a locomotive depot that has existed since 1899. About 700 people work at this enterprise. It should be noted that the company specializes in the repair of track equipment (freight cars, wheel sets), as well as in the manufacture of self-propelled snowplows. We note also that, when at the end of 2018, the Perm plant named after Shpagina was closed, part of its production capacity was transferred to the Vereshchaginsky PRMZ. Today, the

museum-socio-cultural space "Shpagin's Factory" is located on the squares of the former Perm plant.

- Railway symbols: the monument to the locomotive FD21-3092 (built in 1941), the sculpture "Railway Worker's Doll" on the pier territory (2019), etc.

- Monument to the battle artist V. V. Vereshchagin on the station square (sculptor A. A. Uralsky, 1995).

– House of Culture of railway workers. It was built in 1928 and was originally called the "Club of the October Revolution". It hosts festive events, community meetings, competitions and festival programs.

The crest of Vereshchagino also reflects the image resources of the territory, such as the railway, the richness of the regional nature, golden brushes for creativity).

In addition, the geocultural brand "Western Gates of the Urals" could be supported by appealing to such cultural institutions of the city district as:

- library and museum organizations;

- educational organizations and local history centers;

- religious organizations;

- city equestrian club.

At the same time, a serious problem hindering the launch of geocultural branding should be recognized as the lack of a developed sphere of the hospitality industry in Vereshchagino. The first hotel in the city was the Priuralie Hotel, opened in the fall of 1968. However, its number of rooms (12 rooms), as well as the number of rooms of several mini-hotels, currently does not allow to accommodate large groups of tourists and sightseers. Accordingly, without the creation of a city network of the hospitality industry, the task of developing a tourist cluster seems almost impossible.

We will highlight several priority tasks that need to be achieved in the process of implementing the Vereshchagino geocultural branding strategy:

- establishment of creative sites in the town for the cultural activities of urban residents and their creative groups (for example, the open-air museum "Gates of the Urals", where it is possible to place different variations of gates, doors, keyholes, etc.);

– construction in Vereshchagino of the outdoor environment and parks of themed sculptures with small architectural forms (e.g., puppet images of urban fair, steam locomotive from different materials – wood, glass, plaster, foam, etc.);

– introduction of creative visual appearance of Vereshchagino in accordance with art geocultural concept of the brand (e.g., styling benches, advertising structures, exterior public buildings and houses);

- development of a positive image of Vereshchagino in the media and information space of the country as a city "open" for people of creative professions;

- creation and development of the tourist cluster "Obyorskoe porechye - the center of traditional crafts".

It is important to try to involve Vereshchagino as a social partner of JSC "Russian Railways", its subsidiary – JSC "Perm Suburban Company", in the process of implementing geocultural branding. Today, an electric train of the latest type "Lastochka" runs from the Perm II station to the Vereshchagino station. With the successful launch of the tourism cluster and the development of the

hospitality industry in the city, the West Ural Express project can become a real creative action. Tourist groups will be able to get to Vereshchagino in just 1.5 hours. JSC "Russian Railways" can also assist in the organization of exhibition areas for the placement of cars and dining cars of different historical eras.

4 Discussion

The authors of this article held a round table called "Creative City: cultural environment and creative potential of modern Perm" on the 13th of February, 2020, in the framework of the VI Open Regional Championship "Young Professionals" (WorldSkills Russia). This event was held at Perm Construction College. Some of the issues discussed were devoted to the category "Creative initiatives of the population of small towns in the Perm region". So, L. P. Bazarieva, relying on her practical experience of visiting cultural events in Vereshchagino, Ocher and Bolshaya Sosnova in 2019, brought up for discussion the problem of the lack of creative industries in small towns. Among those present at the round table was a delegation from Vereshchagino. The chief bibliographer of the Vereshchagin Central district library named after V. G. Melchakov, I.A. Sazonova, said that the local communities of the city district are waiting for changes. In the city, the bus stops on the bus routes look the most expressionless. Creative people try to produce creative products within the framework of different competitions and festivals. One of the most popular events among the citizens is the contest "Madame-Maslenitsa", where children's initiative groups under the guidance of masters create unique images of the doll "Maslenitsa". In turn, the representative of the Women's Council of the Vereshchaginsky city district, N.A. Sushcheva, expressed the opinion that Vereshchagino has image resources for putting into practice the original model of the creative city.

As a result of the round table, its participants adopted a number of practical recommendations, including:

- initiation of a series of events (round tables, panel discussions, Internet forums) on the topic "Geocultural branding of Perm and the territories of the Perm Region» by university and professional creative communities in 2021-2022;
- competitions for creative projects to transform the urban environment (street spaces, pedestrian sidewalks, squares and alleys) hold by municipal authorities, regularly develop a grant system to support creative projects of talented young people (schoolchildren, students, young professionals);
- support of the author's creative initiatives on geocultural branding of small towns of the Perm region, which are based on the historical and cultural phenomena of the Perm land.

On March 31, 2020, S.A. Dianov, Yu.V. Dianova and L.P. Bazarieva planned to hold a round table in Vereshchagino on the topic "Creative action for the socio-cultural environment of Vereshchagino: scenarios of creativity". The partner was the Vereshchagin Central

District Library named after V. G. Melchakov. However, this event did not take place due to the introduction of restrictions in the Perm Region in connection with the coronavirus pandemic. The round table is scheduled to be held in June 2021.

5 Conclusion

The conceptual idea of the geocultural brand for the city of Vereshchagino "Western Gates of the Urals" is based on the phenomenal core of the geoculture of its territory. Historical railway infrastructure, dynasties of railway workers, symbols of the labor feat of railway workers during the Great Patriotic War (1941-1945), the name of the outstanding artist V. V. Vereshchagin, who visited the pier village thanks to the highway in 1904, books of the local historian V. G. Melchakov and modern poets living in Vereshchagino are unique resources that should be used when launching the town's geocultural branding. The process of educational activities is especially important, conveying the importance of geocultural branding of the city to the young residents of Vereshchagino as the most active and mobile category of citizens.

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