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# Living standards in North Ossetia-Alania through the prism of economic processes

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**Abstract.** The paper reflects the dynamics of changes in standard of living in the Republic of North Ossetia-Alania during the post-Soviet period. Background. The more than twenty years that have passed since perestroika failed to lead to the expected positive shifts in economy in RNO-Alania. In ratings of regions by population living standards, the republic was consistently among the last places. Aim. To show the discrepancy between the modern level of economic development and the standard of life in the RNO-Alania. Method. The work uses comparative analysis of indicators of living standard and indicators reflecting the structural and dynamic characteristics of economic processes. Results. Official statistics show growth in almost all socio-economic indicators in RNO-Alania. This apparent increase in living standards does not correspond to the low ranking of RNO-Alania, which is consistently in the bottom ten of the rating of Russian regions. The analysis of other indicators determining the population's quality of life, such as: the ecological condition of the territory, the developmental level of health and education institutions, life expectancy, and availability of transport, information and communication networks all correlated weakly with the real socio-economic situation in the region. The study of the republic's districts showed a high unemployment rate due to the lack of industrial and agricultural production, the underdevelopment of small and medium-sized businesses, and low wages. There is an outflow of working-age population to the city of Vladikavkaz and from the districts to outside the republic. Conclusions. The deficit in the republic's budget persisted during the research period, despite the apparent growth in the gross product and revenue part of the budget, but the volume of expenditures is growing at a faster rate. The main reason for this is the sharp decline in industrial production, and the influence of loss-making enterprises that do not generate income in the budget. Living standards are rising only thanks to grants from the federal centre. Recommendation.

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In order to remove the republic from its depressed state it is necessary to increase the fixed capital, to control the process of effective use of the available production capacities, and to invest in a recreational industry that uses natural resources and does not require significant investment.

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## 1. Introduction

In the Soviet period, the Republic of North Ossetia-Alania (RNO-Alania) was the only industrial region in the North Caucasus to have advanced metallurgical and military-industrial complexes, production of structural materials, food and light industry. During reorganisation, radical economic and political transformations put the republic in the group of depressed problem regions with subsidised economies. There has been a sharp fall in the economic and social situation and quality of life in RNO-Alania. There are the “poor” and the “rich”, the jobless and those living below the poverty line.

The research aims to identify the factors impeding the social and economic growth of RNO-Alania, and to find a way out of the depression and to improve the population's quality of life.

## 2. Research materials and methods

The research is based on information in published statistical materials of the Russian and North Ossetian state statistics offices, the Russian rating agencies, polls of RNO-Alania inhabitants, and monographs and articles from scientific journals.

The study is based on methodological approaches and theoretical approaches to the economic study of the region's quality of life that have been present-

ed by Russian and non-Russian sociologists, economists and geographers: W. Izard, A.A. Tkachenko, A.I. Zaslavskiy, D.S. Lvov, S.A. Kovalyov, A.I. Alekseev, N.V. Zubarevich, A.I. Treyvish.

The sectoral and territorial structure of the RNO-Alania economy was investigated in connection with the sharp decline in the volume of economic activity and living standards in the first decade of the 21st century (Torchinov, 2007); the labour market in rural areas of the republic was analysed (Zoloeva et al., 2011); generic factors of financial income and expenditures in RNO-Alania's municipalities were studied (Tsokov, 2011); and an attempt was made to develop a methodology for assessing the living standard of a municipality. It has been proposed that the set of evaluation indicators be changed according to the dynamics of socio-economic situation (Dzasohova, Doe, 2013). Various instruments for regulating the economy of RNO-Alania and improving the socio-economic situation of the population are considered (Dzhusoeva, 2005; Rubaeva, Hosroeva, 2016; Tokaeva, 2018).

The research employed statistical, comparative and analytical techniques, rating estimates, and a sociological poll.

## 3. Research results

More than twenty years since perestroika, the expected positive shifts in the economy have not been

seen in RNO-Alania. In the 2017 rating of regions by living standards, the republic appeared in 72nd place, having fallen from 57th place in 2016. At the same time, in the rankings of the welfare of Russian families, RNO-Alania rose from 78th place in 2016 to 72nd in 2017, and 71st in 2018 (The rating of regions on welfare of families..., 2018).

Rating estimates of regions' positions for the last three years showed the instability of the republic's development, as it moved from one low place to another (from 80th place in 2015 to 78th in 2016, and 79th in 2017), confirming that the economy and all other spheres of public life are essentially "treading water". An analysis of the reasons for the social and economic backwardness of RNO-Alania are thus both timely and relevant.

Statistics show the growth of almost all socio-economic indices. From 2005 to 2015 the gross regional product increased more than four-fold, the actual final consumption of households for the same period saw almost 4.5-fold growth, and average per capita monetary income grew even more – 4.9-fold in a decade. On the last index, RNO-Alania took 65th place in 2016 in the rating of territorial subjects of the Russian Federation. At the same time the population on incomes below the pover-

ty level fluctuates in the opposite direction from total number. In 2005, the population was 707,000, and 120,190 people had an income below the living wage; in 2010 the situation improved a little: with the general growth of the population to 712,000 the number of people on incomes below the living wage decreased to 47,760; in 2015, of 704,000 people, 99,228 were on less than the living wage.

At the same time, the minimum possible monetary income of the average family with two children in 2018 amounted to 15,951 rubles, and 25,466 rubles for those with one child (Life expectancy at the birth on regions of Russia..., 2019).

The specific share of loss-making institutions in RNO-Alania varies around 40%, and in 2016 losses amounted to 2150.0 million rubles. If we consider this indicator by type of economic activity, then 100% of unprofitable enterprises are engaged in the production of machinery and equipment or are enterprises for the extraction of fuel and energy minerals. The production of machinery and equipment on the territory of RNO-Alania is mainly represented by enterprises of the military-industrial complex, most of which are in bankruptcy or partially repurposed, and do not bring income into the republic's budget (Table 1).

**Table 1.** Socio-economic indices RNO-Alania

Index	2005	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Total regional product (million rubles)	311,822.2	753,27.4	85,876.7	974,48.8	118,637.5	125,960.5	127,543.9	125,498.3	-
Actual final consumption of households (In the current prices) million rubles	485,06.7	127,222.1	154,040.1	171,733.2	189,221.5	200,855.7	217,530.5	-	-
Average monetary <i>per capita</i> income of the population (in a month, rubles)	4,669	13,193	13,757	16,165	177,588	19,820	22,003	-	22,773
Tax arrears in the budgetary system RNO-Alania (for January 1, million rubles)	-	2,569.1	-	3,930.4	6,377.9	-	7,587.6	-	-
Specific gravity of the unprofitable organisations, %	-	39.7	-	39.6	41.2	40.0	37.4	37.4	40.5

Source: author's own draft based on data from Regions of Russia. Socio-economic indices, 2017

By “fuel and energy minerals” we mean naphtha, which in fact is a desired, but not viable mineral in the east part of the Central Ciscaucasia. The lack of reserves in some the considerable oil fields in the territory of North Ossetia is indicated by the geological structure of the region (Zhitchenko, 1950). Modern geologists also express doubt about the quantity and quality of the North Ossetia oil (<http://15ironpost.ru/novosti-osetii/ekonomika-osetii/est-li-neft-v-osetii>) extracted in scanty quantities, but capable of inflicting significant ecological damage to the territory adjacent to the Zamankul'skij field and other platforms planned for development. Nevertheless, LLC Alania-Oil continues to defend its billion-dollar projects for almost twenty years.

Unfortunately, we can cite many examples of unwise handling of financial and natural resources, and of disregard for environmental and economic risks on the territory of North Ossetia-Alania; it is enough to point to the Zaramag hydroelectric pow-

er station, the Mamison ski resort, and the Ardonskij oil refinery.

The administrative and territorial structure of RNO-Alania consists of eight municipal districts and one urban district of Vladikavkaz (Fig. 1). In the last 30 years, the socio-economic transformation of RNO-Alania has taken place on the principle of “centre-periphery”. Vladikavkaz is not only the capital of the republic, but also the centre of attraction and concentration of economic and human resources. More than 46% of the total population of the republic is concentrated in Vladikavkaz and a large share of the population of municipal districts works in the institutions of the capital.

The region's overall depression in municipal districts increases as one moves away from the centre. The exception is the Mosdokskij district, 92 km from Vladikavkaz, in the steppe zone in the north of the republic. This is a traditional farming and livestock district with a well-developed agricultural complex. The district occupies a favoura-



**Fig. 1.** Administrative and territorial structure (districts) of RNO-Alania

Source: Author's own draft based on <https://imgbin.com/png/5s7bMKXj/republics-of-russia-Выборы-в-Парламент-Республики-Северная-Осетия-Алания-map-stanitsa-administrativi-teritorialais-iedalijums-png> <https://imgbin.com/png/5s7bMKXj/republics-of-russia-Выборы-в-Парламент-Республики-Северная-Осетия-Алания-map-stanitsa-administrativi-teritorialais-iedalijums-png>

ble economic and geographical position near the administrative borders of several constituent entities of the Russian Federation, and transport routes connecting the eastern and western regions of Cis-caucasia pass through it. The districts most remote from Vladikavkaz – Kirovskij, Irafskij and Digorskij – are characterised by the lowest indicators of industrial production and the highest unemployment (Table 2).

The mountainous part of the republic has high recreational potential, but insufficient infrastructure to realise that potential. The mountain villages of Irafskij and Alagirskij districts are extremely small, and young people leave to the plain to the cities in search of work.

Against the background of the decline in industrial production and jobs, the population is becoming more engaged in home farming; today for rural residents this is the only opportunity to maintain a standard of living above the poverty level (Table 3).

A deeper comprehension of the current state and processes happening in the public sphere of RNO-Alania requires an understanding of the theoretical foundations of economic space. This will permit an understanding of the economic and social relations in the territory RNO-Alania and will reveal the factors influencing the current economic environment.

#### 4. Discussion

There is no direct dependence between the level of social and economic development of the region and the living standard of the population.

The standard of living of the population is one of the indicators of quality of life, which is defined by a large number of elements. Therefore, Russian regions are rated annually for quality of life based on a complex accounting of 70 various social indicators in 11 groups. These are: population income level, employment of population, labour market, housing conditions, safety of accommodation, demographics, ecological and climatic conditions, health and education level, security provided by social infrastructure, level of economic development, and level of small business development.

The average *per capita* income index does not reflect the actual income level of the population as an arithmetic average. This is confirmed by studies carried out in health and cultural institutions, where the income of ordinary workers and management of one organisation may differ greatly.

Each concrete indicator can vary greatly within regions, but integrated assessment is performed by aggregating indicators, and this, in our opinion, distorts the reality. For example, the Republic of Ingushetia has the highest life expectancy at birth, at more than 80 years (Life expectancy at birth in re-

**Table 2.** Unemployed population and industrial production in RNO-A districts

Municipal district	Area, sq. km	Population, as of 01.01.2020	Number of unemployed, persons	Proportion of unemployed in total number, %	Number of enterprises	Industrial production, thousand rubles	Balance of population shifts
Vladikavkaz	291	325,123	2,378	0.7	6,090	7,128,622	-560
Alagirskij	2,014	37,060	691	1.9	424	112,929	-110
Ardonskij	377	31,705	832	2.6	474	72,432	+64
Digorskij	584	20,600	889	4.3	218	12,426	+7
Irafskij	1,376	15,805	773	4.9	168	37,987	-64
Kirovskij	411	27,457	677	2.5	154	57,599	-63
Mozdokskij	1,071	90,412	1,306	1.4	549	245,967	-388
Pravoberezhnyj	441	57,063	986	1.7	586	781,546	+75
Prigorodnyj	1,442	103,537	841	0.8	683	673,742	-345

Source: Own author's draft basing on data from Office of the Federal State Statistics Service for the North Caucasus Federal District, 2020



**Table 3.** Livestock production in RNO-A districts

Municipal district	Livestock and poultry production (live weight, tonnes)	Milk production (tonnes)	Egg production (thousands)
Vladikavkaz	402	2,450	1,143
Alagirskij	3,368	18,442	3,739
Ardonskij	3,883	14,979	9,396
Digorskij	2,448	11,773	7,861
Irafskij	4,724	23,207	3,249
Kirovskij	5,003	15,190	14,416
Mozdokskij	2,143	9,694	9,214
Pravoberezhnyj	3,699	25,478	6,919
Prigorodnyj	6,833	33,781	13,309

Source: Author's own draft based on data from Office of the Federal State Statistics Service for the North Caucasus Federal District, 2020

gions of Russia (expected) for 2015..., 2019) and the highest level of unemployment, at 26.3% (the last place in the rating of regions of Russia). Regarding North Ossetia, for example, in density of paved road network the republic is in the top ten, but the mountainous part of the territory, which accounts for more than half of the republic's area, has only two transit highways: the Georgian Military Road and the Transcaucasian Highway. These roads have great geopolitical and economic value on the Russian scale and at the regional scale, but the lack of road network in the mountainous part is a serious obstacle to the effective development of recreational resources in RNO-Alania. Recreation is the most promising direction of economic development for the republic, and a growth point for the improvement of all aspects of social and economic life.

In another important example, RNO-Alania is an ecologically favourable region, while the republic's system of medical institutions is well developed, with the number of hospital beds in RNO-Alania ranking in 26th place, the number of doctors of all specialties ranking 3rd, and the number of average medical personnel in 35th place. These rankings speak of a well-developed healthcare infrastructure but, at the same time, the incidence of all classes of diseases, irrespective of place of residence in the republic in growing (Regions of Russia 2018). It turns out that many indicators characterising quality of life have weak correlations with reality. Only the standard of living, that is, the economic aspect of quality of life, correlates strongly with all other indicators.

Thus, irrespective of social infrastructure development at the global, regional or local levels, the population's income and expenses ultimately define the quality of life. If the person is poor, then he is not able to afford all the benefits of the society in which he lives. Deep social stratification exists in all types of states, but in economically advanced countries, the real social position of the middle class is higher than in countries with developing economies, and even higher than in countries with economies in transition, and so on.

Thus, regardless of the development of social infrastructure at the global, regional or local levels, income and expenditure of the population ultimately determine the quality of life. A person who is poor is not able to afford all the benefits of the society in which he lives. Deep social stratification exists in all types of states, but in economically advanced countries, the real social position of the middle class is higher than in countries with developing economies, and even higher than in countries with economies in transition, and so on. Widely adopted now, the concept of human development is no exception. The works of A.B. Doktorovich provide a deep analysis of the purpose of the production and accumulation of goods. By the end of the second millennium these ideas were transformed into the concept of human development: "...harmonious development of a person and his qualities, including creative ones; creative abilities and skills are much more of a priority than development, the dominant goal of which is the accumulation of wealth and income growth" (Doktorovich, 2014). The transfor-

mation of social and economic development ideas highlights such concepts as “human resources”, “labour potential”, and “the human capital”, which reflect a person’s role in creating material benefits. Now, finally, there is a clear understanding that the development of the person and of human potential is one of the priority purposes of social and economic development and progress.

The governments of many countries, political leaders, and scientific and research teams supported this concept, which was expressed in numerous works elaborating on its principles and provisions and its adaptation to the specifics of various countries.

Amartya Seong, the Nobel laureate in economics (1998), conceptualised the structure of annual UN reports on human development and assessment of the index of human development (Seong, 1989, 2004). In 2018, the UN ITFFD published the next annual report on countries’ development (Indexes and indicators of human development, 2018). The realisation of the basic provisions of the concept of human development is enabled in the form of national state programmes for strategic development.

In the concept, the humanistic vector of development is to positively affect the standard of living of people, irrespective of a country’s starting position, and with the people being the focus of development, emphasis is placed not so much on economic growth, but on how far people’s freedoms and opportunities are expanded. This last element needs explanation: expansion of people’s freedoms and opportunities assumes investment in the social sphere, and investors are either the state, which allocates budgetary funds for the maintenance and development of social institutions, or representatives of business.

However, in particular, in Russia business represents no more than 5–7% of the social sphere, as, according to the Russian investment forum of 2019 (<https://tass.ru/rossiyskiy-investicionnyy-forum-2019>), investors are not ready to enter the sphere of social services and to invest money in construction of social objects because of the major financial risks. In most cases, projects do not pay off, but the main obstacle is the lack of legislation regulating the relations between the state and private investors.

According to leading Russian economists (Kupershtokh et al., 1996; Way to the 21st century..., 1999; Granberg, 2001; Biyakov, 2004; Tebieva, 2013), the Russian economy as a whole and its regional aspects do not meet the requirements of a market economy. The key indicator of a market economy is the efficiency of the main production capital, which should exceed the efficiency of trade and financial capital. To do this in a market economy, investments are made in production. In the economy of Russia as a whole, as well as in the majority of its subjects, the effectiveness of financial and trade capitals can exceed the profitability of fixed capital on orders. In the regions of Russia, investments are not made in production, even under falling inflation rates (though at such times production is resuscitated, and this should be expanded); instead, production continues to decline.

A classic example of a non-market economy in the conditions of the market is the economy of RNO-Alania. A dynamics analysis of revenues execution in the consolidated budget of the Republic North Ossetia-Alania in the 2007–11 financial years showed that the budget revenues in nominal monetary value tended to increase, but real income decreased, increasing the republic’s budget deficit (Slanov, 2012). This is due to the growth in spending, which was occurring at a faster pace, even when adjusted for inflation; as a result, the budget deficit grew by more than half from 2007 to 2011, from 0.8 billion to 1.36 billion rubles, from 0.8 billion to 1.36 billion rubles. At the same time, transfers constituted about 60 percent of the federal budget because, while paying off old debts from the beginning of Perestroika, the republic acquired new large debts to cover the growing budget deficit. Budget expenses exceeded incomes. This may be connected to the arrival of “new” people to power in the republic, to their new projects for improving the economic and social situation, to their ambitions, etc. Having used the chronic budget deficit of RNO-Alania, they actively attracted loans from commercial banks and budgetary credits from the federal budget. As a result, at the beginning of 2012 the debt was 6.436 billion rubles (Slanov, 2012). The situation in the republic continued not to change in the subsequent years, though power changed hands again: on July 1, 2018, the republic’s debt was 10.182

billion rubles (Results of social and economic development..., 2018).

Numerous changes were made to the Law on the budget of RNO-Alania in 2018, and subsequently in 2019 and 2020 (Law on the budget RNO-Alania ..., 2018). If in the primary document the predicted budget deficit was 45 million rubles, then at the end of April 2018 the predicted deficit was 143.768 million (About introduction of amendments..., 2018). This eloquently shows the increased expenditure part of the budget of the republic. Though the volume of RNO-Alania's own income is 55.1596 million rubles higher than the debt volume of 10.182 billion rubles, this excess will hardly be able to significantly affect the general state of the economy of the republic.

In such a small (8,000 sq. km) and sparsely populated (703 thousand people) republic, all the negative processes are clearly visible: producers deliberately hide profits; the percentage of the shadow economy is high; almost all public sector enterprises are unprofitable and have gone bankrupt (often intentionally so). According to the expected plan (programme) of privatisation for 2018, 124 state unitary enterprises have to be put up for sale with an expected income in 122.99 million rubles (About the approval of the Expected plan..., 2018). Unfortunately, state property is usually offered for sale at "junk" prices. Moreover, buyers act through fig-

ureheads – "managers" of the public sector of the economy and authorities. Administrative capital is increasing in the republic – a special type of parasitic capital that arose as a result of the merger of government officials at all levels and private business, which siphons finances into the pockets of administrative capitalists.

All these facts lead to a bigger economic dependence of RNO-Alania on the federal centre. The irresponsible attitude towards its own profitable base weakens the payment discipline of taxpayers, thereby increasing shortages, indiscipline and the financial insolvency of legal entities, and degrades the social and economic situation in the republic (Tebieva, 2013; Dzalaev, Slanov, 2014).

## 5. Conclusions

The most significant skewing of the current stage of socio-economic development of RNO-Alania is that the illusory increase in the welfare of the population (as evidenced by official statistics) occurs against the background of a negative balance of financial results in the economy of the republic, since, if the enterprise has no income, then there are no deductions to the budget (Fig. 2).

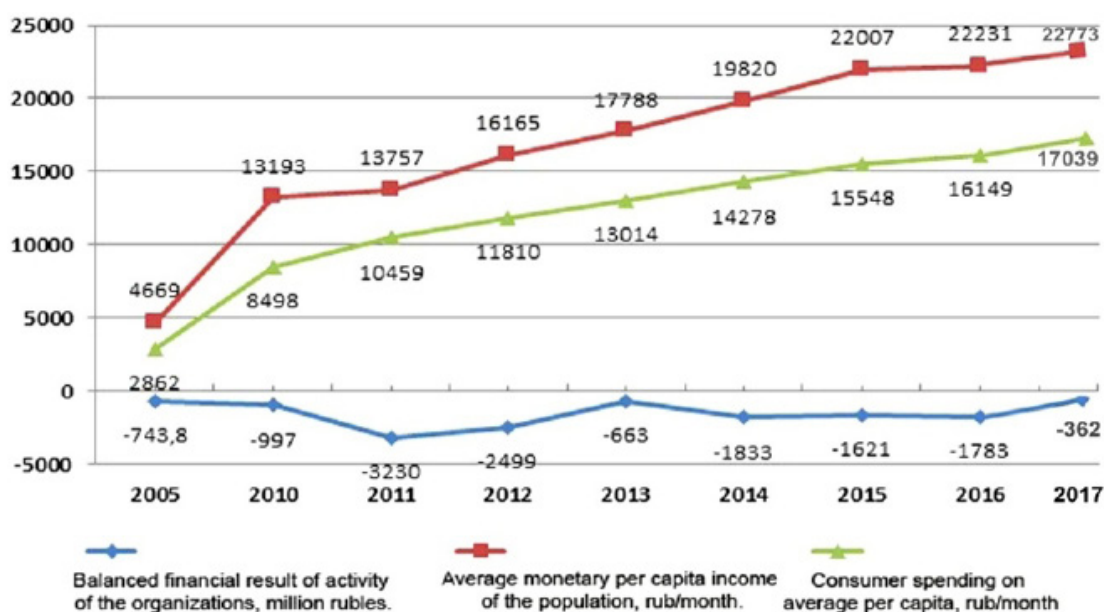


Fig. 2. Dynamics of socio-economic indexes in RNO-Alania

Source: Author's own draft based on statistics from various sources



If the balance of financial results of the regional economy have been negative for a decade, then production is inefficient, products are non-competitive, and budget incomes are insufficient. In this case, growth in the population's incomes and purchasing power are illusory. Grants from the federal budget are not eternal. The region has to build its own effective economy.

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