

# The Mechanisms of Constructing the Image of the Far Eastern Provincial City in the Soviet and Post-Soviet Periods

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## Abstract

The article presents an analysis aimed at identifying an axiological strategy of forming a positive image of Komsomolsk-on-Amur in different historical periods. When creating a positive image of a provincial city, a regional identity is formed, which contributes to solving one of the most pressing problems for the Russian Far East, related to the need to preserve human resources.

The paper examines the modern stage of forming a positive image of the city based on the example of the electronic version of the newspaper “Far East Komsomolsk-on-Amur”, since the media have different functions in the modern society, including the informative and ideological functions. The identified ways of creating a positive image include building a new model of life during the construction of the city, aimed at a bright future of the city which is full of cultural events, spreading information about happy life in the city by fixing and informing the whole country about the achievements of Komsomolsk-on-Amur residents and updating information about the heroic past of the city. So far, the methods influencing the image of Komsomolsk-on-Amur have not undergone significant changes since the Soviet times. Therefore, the analysis of the texts taken from the city's newspapers has made it possible to determine the leading dominants in the axiological strategy of creating a positive image of Komsomolsk-on-Amur.

## Keywords

Axiological Strategy; Media Resources; Image; Regional Identity; Values; Provincial City; Dominant of Self-Presentation; Country Leadership; Economic Development; Cultural Events



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# Механизмы формирования имиджа Дальневосточного провинциального города в советский и постсоветский периоды

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## Аннотация

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В статье представлен анализ, направленный на выявление аксиологической стратегии формирования позитивного имиджа Комсомольска-на-Амуре в различные исторические периоды. При создании положительного имиджа провинциального города формируется региональная идентичность, которая может способствовать решению одной из самых актуальных проблем для Дальнего Востока России, связанной с необходимостью сохранения человеческих ресурсов.

Современный этап формирования положительного имиджа города можно исследовать на примере электронной версии газеты «Дальневосточный Комсомольск», поскольку в современном обществе СМИ выполняют различные функции, в том числе информационные и идеологические.

Выявленные пути создания положительного имиджа включают построение новой модели жизни при строительстве города, нацеленной на светлое будущее и насыщенной культурными событиями; распространение информации о счастливой жизни в городе путем фиксации и информирования всей страны о достижениях жителей Комсомольска-на-Амуре; обновление информации о героическом прошлом города.

Методы, влияющие на имидж Комсомольска-на-Амуре, не претерпели существенных корректировок с советских времен. Анализ текстов городских газет позволил определить ведущие доминанты, входящие в аксиологическую стратегию создания позитивного имиджа Комсомольска-на-Амуре.

## Ключевые слова

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аксиологическая стратегия; медиаресурсы; имидж; региональная идентичность; ценности; провинциальный город; доминанта самопрезентации; руководство страны; экономическое развитие; культурные мероприятия



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## **Introduction**

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Today, the Russian Federation at the state level pays great attention to the creation and promotion of a positive image of the country, which consists of the image of its large and small cities. Creating a regional image has become very popular among both the representatives of power structures and the population of Russia. In a large country, this allows not only to solve many economic problems, but also contributes to preserving the rich national, cultural and linguistic traditions that indicate the identity of the Russian regions. By creating a positive image of the city, a regional identity is formed, which can facilitate a solution to one of the most pressing problems for the Russian Far East related to the need to preserve human resources. The present study shows that the geographical factor is not always the main one when describing the life in a provincial city. The city located at a considerable distance from the capital can retain the characteristics of a capital city. At the same time, a definition, clarifying the term “capital”, should be added. In this regard, the economic and sociocultural characteristics of the city life will be of interest to its population. A striking example of the city which has retained the features of the capital for many years is the city of Komsomolsk-on-Amur.

## **Materials and methods**

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In order to study the processes of creating a positive image of the city and regional identity, an analysis of materials published in the Komsomolsk-on-Amur newspaper “Far East Komsomolsk” was made. The newspaper was created on the initiative of the city administration in 1932. It mainly publishes official information. In the modern society where information is of great importance, the media have various functions, including the informative and ideological functions. In the era of the information society, perhaps there is no institution that has a greater impact on public opinion than mass media. The media are generally accessible, socially oriented and easy to understand, and the wide audience allows them to influence a significant part of the society. The role of media and communications in contributing to development of countries in different spheres is discussed in the works of the Russian and foreign scientists (Vasilyeva, 2010; Dzialoshinskiy, 2005; Dzialoshinskiy & Dzialoshinskaya, 2015; Dobrosklonskaya, 2005; Fedorov & Levitskaya, 2018; Levy, 2018; Seidov, 2016; Stier, 2018). More people can now connect and make meaning through media which provide an important resource for new movements for justice and social progress (Couldry & Rodriguez, 2018). In addition, the fact that a newspaper possesses its own website makes it possible to expand the newspaper audience of different ages, status, place of residence, etc., to quickly publish relevant information, and use various visual content. All this significantly transforms the modern communicative space and influences the image of a region (Graber, 1997, pp. 5–9).



The research methods used in this study include interpretation (inference of implicit meanings), linguistic and axiological analysis. The article involves hypothetical-deductive and inductive methods, observation, description, analysis, synthesis, and comparison.

To address issues affecting the history of Komsomolsk-on-Amur, the traditional methods of historical research were used, including the comparative-historical and problem-chronological methods.

## Results

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In the recent years, the Russian leadership has been striving to develop the Far Eastern territories (the state program “Social and Economic Development of the Far Eastern Federal District,” 2019). However, the successful economic development of the Russian Far East is practically impossible without preserving and increasing the human capital in a region remote from the center (Oleinik, Shmidt, & Karp, 2019).

The most important tasks of the Russian leadership at all levels are to significantly improve the image of the Russian Far East, to shape the worldview of the inhabitants of the Far Eastern territories, reflecting the love for their small homeland, and, therefore, to stop the outflow of people from the territories of the Russian Far East.

In modern science, the image has become a subject of research in history, journalism, psychology and linguistics, etc. (Dagayeva, 2017).

In linguistics, major studies on the image belong to E. S. Kubryakova. Analyzing actual examples of the use of the word “image”, E. S. Kubryakova describes which structure of knowledge is behind this word and how it is fixed. Thus, a well-known researcher singles out the constructability of the image: “images are created” (Kubryakova, 2012, p. 182). Creating an image should be in accordance with a certain standard, a stereotype of presentation. According to E. S. Kubryakova, an important characteristic of the image, is its goal-setting. “At the same time, goals and motives can vary widely from the noblest to the lowest” (Kubryakova, 2012, p. 183).

Researchers argue that any sector of life can affect the image if it falls into the sphere of wide attention (Petkova, 2016, pp. 277–281). However, there are basic spheres and factors that traditionally underlie the image of a region or a state. Such components of the image include 1) achievements of region inhabitants in the field of sports, culture, science and art; 2) history of the region development; personalities in politics; economic and industrial spheres; political sphere (Ibid.).

One of the ways to create a positive image is to use axiological strategies. In the present study we follow the definition of the axiological strategy proposed by the researcher N. E. Togoshieva: “a set of speech actions aimed at achieving a specific illocutionary goal through the transformation of the value model of

the addressee's world in the direction that is desirable for the speaker”(Togoshieva, 2010, p. 100).

In the public opinion, the concept of a city positive image as actively developing and providing opportunities for career and creative growth for its residents, is stereotyped. In today's realities, these characteristics are typical largely to metropolitan cities. In the dictionaries, the capital is defined as the political, administrative and economic center of the state, where not only political institutions are concentrated, but also socio-economic and cultural life is actively developing (Ushakov, n.d.). The high level and quality of life in the capital is attractive to a significant part of the country's population.

The opposite of the metropolitan life is the life of a provincial city. Traditionally, the province is a territory located far from the capital and major cultural centers (Dahl, n.d.). The stereotype was fixed in the minds of the population that the life in a provincial city is less dynamic and lags behind the capital in all respects, which means it does not allow citizens to fully realize their talents and cannot make the life of its population truly happy and comfortable. At the same time, the researchers emphasize that, having local uniqueness and originality, the province is able to play a special socio-cultural function (Voronina, 2012, p. 85) and be the bearer of specific social, mental, spiritual and axiological characteristics (Parshina, 2020).

It seems that such a definition does not fully reflect the specifics of the life in many provincial cities. Not in all cases, the provinciality of the city can be determined only by its distance from the capital (the geographical factor). It is the people living in the city who make the city provincial or non-provincial. A striking example of the city that in the 20<sup>th</sup> century could not be considered provincial is Komsomolsk-on-Amur.

The heroic and tragic events are closely intertwined in the history of Komsomolsk-on-Amur. Being thousands of kilometers far from the capital, Komsomolsk citizens did not perceive themselves as provincials in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The whole country knew about the heroes, the first builders, who, under severe climatic conditions, built a large industrial city in the taiga. The Communist Party journalists, E.V. Dorodnov and G.N. Khlebnikov, wrote the official history of the city. They arrived in Komsomolsk in 1934. Thanks to their reports, the Soviet people gained confidence that there were no insurmountable obstacles for them.

Representatives of culture supported the romance of construction of Komsomolsk-on-Amur. Thus, in 1940 members of the famous Arbuzov studio wrote the play “The City at Dawn”, devoted to the first years of the Komsomolsk builders' life. In the post-war period, in 1957, the play formed the basis for the eponymously named youth performance staged by E. Simonov in Moscow Theatre named after E. Vakhtangov.

The image of the young Soviet city was gradually formed. Komsomolsk-on-Amur became attractive for young people who came from different regions of



the USSR. For Soviet citizens, the life in Komsomolsk-on-Amur was associated with a model of a new life of that time with a bright future and saturated with cultural events, with dynamics and the ability to use advanced scientific technologies. One of the first builders, S.I. Smirnov, wrote, “our <...> city arose as a result of the course of the Communist Party and the Soviet government towards the socialist industrialization of the Far East. Komsomolsk-on-Amur woke up from the centuries-old silence of the taiga. The region strode triumphantly”(Dorodnov, 1980, p. 23).

The information about forced labor of camp prisoners during the construction of the city was not mentioned in the publications of the periodical press. The real difficulties that the first builders encountered and those difficulties that made them leave were not mentioned either. This did not correspond to the tasks solved by the country in the Far East. According to the ideology of that time, in the young Soviet city, industrial giants built by the hands of prisoners could not even theoretically appear to ensure the security of the Soviet country.

Gradually, the status of the city of Youth was fixed for Komsomolsk-on-Amur. The residents of the city began to proudly bear the name *Komsomolsk citizens*. The achievements related to the history of the young city and were broadcast promised the Komsomolsk citizens wealth and honor, thus making Komsomolsk inhabitants heroes of their time in the public opinion of Soviet people. It was assumed that the life of young Komsomolsk residents would not be strikingly different from the life in the capital.

By the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, in Komsomolsk, household issues were mainly resolved, and the daily life of Komsomolsk citizens became more comfortable. Komsomolsk-on-Amur was already a mature and well-established city, which was to solve new tasks set by the state.

The dynamic development of industrial enterprises – the Far Eastern giants, the opening of two universities and the creation of scientific and educational centers, engineering departments and other structures contributed to the growth of intelligentsia in Komsomolsk-on-Amur. High-level specialists from Moscow, Leningrad and other large centers came to work in the city. The social structure of the city began to change. The training level of the city specialists was very high. For example, it was at Komsomolsk-on-Amur aircraft factory, which worked closely with the evening polytechnic college (the future Komsomolsk-on-Amur State University (KNAGU)), where since 1950 the joint work with the engineering department headed by P. Sukhoi, the legend of world aviation, had started. Despite the territorial remoteness from the capital, conditions were created for residents to actively interact with the metropolitan scientific and cultural centers. It was the representatives of the technical and creative intelligentsia who had set the high academic and intellectual standards for city residents, forming a new city image. Komsomolsk-on-Amur became a city not only of glorious labor, but also a major intellectual center of the Far East.

Broadcasting information about a happy life in Komsomolsk-on-Amur was carried out in various ways. The central and city press timely recorded and informed the whole country about the achievements of the Komsomolsk citizens. In Soviet literature, N. Zadornov's novel "Amur-Batushka" ("Amur-Father") about the life of the first settlers in the Far East received high appraisals and popularity. In 1982, the composer S. Tulikov wrote the famous Amur Waltz (the lyrics are from M. Plyatskovskii). This song performed by pop-group "Samotsvety" often sounded at the All-Union song festival "Song of the Year" and was known in different parts of the USSR. Currently, it is an informal anthem of Komsomolsk, uniting the Komsomolsk citizens of different generations.

Updating information about the glorious past of Komsomolsk-on-Amur was not accidental. Komsomolsk again found itself in a whirlpool of events on a national scale. In 1974, a decree of the Council of Ministers and the CPSU Central Committee "On the construction of the Baikal-Amur Railway" was issued, which laid the foundation for the construction of the Baikal-Amur Railway (BAM) (The Central Committee of the CPSU Council of Ministers of the USSR, 1974). Komsomolsk-on-Amur became one of the main stations of BAM. Once again, specialists in the fields of professional activity, representatives of different nations and cultures, headed for the all-Union construction site (Usov, 2019). The comprehensive development of Komsomolsk received an additional impetus.

The image of the city had again undergone adjustments. On the pages of periodicals Komsomolsk-on-Amur began to be more often called the industrial capital of the Far East. Along with honor, this nomination imposed certain obligations on the Komsomolsk citizens. The standard of living in Komsomolsk-on-Amur in all senses should have corresponded to the level of the capital city. For young Komsomolsk citizens, the conditions for the development of creative and sports talents were created; the candidates and doctors of science from different parts of the USSR were involved in teaching work in higher educational institutions of the city, and the graduates of Komsomolsk universities went to post-graduate schools in Moscow universities. In the city's enterprises, breakthroughs began to be introduced and new directions of activity were mastered. Komsomolsk again was discussed in the Soviet media. This high and honorable status corresponded to Komsomolsk, and Komsomolsk residents spoke with honor of themselves as the residents of the Far Eastern industrial capital.

Due to objective circumstances that the country faced at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, in the Russian realities of the turn of the century, Komsomolsk-on-Amur had to go a path which was already mastered in the Soviet times. Having no additional influx of population and being actually cut off from the central parts of the country, the city faced the need not only to survive, but also to form a new image.

The goals and motives for creating a positive image of Komsomolsk-on-Amur are easily recognizable. Since the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, there has been



a decrease in the city population. This situation has been facilitated, firstly, by the excess of the growth of mortality over the birth rate and, secondly, by an active outflow of the population to other cities of Russia and other countries. Therefore, the creation of the regional identity of a resident of Komsomolsk-on-Amur and the maintenance of the previously formed patriotic feelings for their small Motherland among Komsomolsk residents, which can make the population stay in the city, may be considered part of the state's social order. A similar order of the state is fair, because "it is the image of the city, being formed in the minds of people, that affects the perspective of its development" (Lyulko, 2012).

The analysis of the texts of the newspaper "Far East Komsomolsk" (DVK) allowed us to determine the leading strategic dominant that is part of the axiological strategy of creating a positive image of Komsomolsk-on-Amur, namely, the dominant of self-presentation, which is realized with the help of a certain set of language and extralinguistic means that affect the perception. The use of this axiological dominant in the media discourse of a regional city is determined by the addressee's goal to influence the addressee by informing and indirectly form a sense of patriotism, and love for a small homeland in him. By choosing the dominant of self-presentation when constructing a statement, the addressees of the media discourse create texts that inform readers about the latest success of the city residents and the ongoing development of the city.

We will consider some examples of the embodiment of the self-presentation dominant in the texts of a regional newspaper:

"The Komsomolsk citizen became the absolute champion of the Far East in chess (*Far East Komsomolsk*, n.d.); "Svetlana Vladimirovna became the winner of the municipal competition and prize-winner of the regional stage of "Teacher of the Year" competition. In 2017, the class led by Svetlana Donskaya took 2nd place in the municipal competition "The coolest class". Her students show the results of certification in mathematics consistently higher than the city and regional ones in average and are regular winners and prize-winners of mathematical Olympiads and competitions at various levels" (*Far East Komsomolsk*, n.d.). Such texts inspire a sense of collective pride by fellow citizens who have earned fame at various levels and in various fields. The key axiologically marked verbal signs are the absolute champion, the winner, the coolest, consistently higher, the prize winner, etc. All the lexico-semantic variants cited are united by the basic meanings of "success" and "victory".

It is important to note that the name and surname of the hero are always mentioned in such messages about the victories of Komsomolsk residents. This is done not only for the accuracy of the information presented in the article, but also to help the readers recognize their friends, colleagues, acquaintances, and neighbors in these people. As a result, the reader is aware of the opportunity to achieve success as an ordinary resident of a city such as Komsomolsk-on-Amur, thereby confirming popular wisdom – Not gods burn pots.



The development of the city is one of the main topics of the articles in the analyzed newspaper. According to the region and city administration, the constant city development will be able to maintain the human potential of Komsomolsk-on-Amur.

The numbers and quantitative indicators given in the articles can be a marker of success: “RN-Komsomolsk Oil Refinery LLC, as part of its energy saving and energy efficiency program, saved over 8 thousand tons of standard fuel, in monetary terms, 33.25 million rubles in 2019. This is 52% more than in 2018. This work will continue this year” (*Far East Komsomolsk*, n.d.).

The development of the city can be traced in the use of “world”, “international”, the magnitude of events happening in the city is emphasized: “An appropriate personnel reserve is already being prepared for a world-class project”; “The international boxing tournament takes place in Komsomolsk-on-Amur” (*Far East Komsomolsk*, n.d.).

The use of the self-presentation dominant can be signaled by the mention in the article of a successfully implemented project outside the regional territory, which most residents of the city know about. Along with the nomination of a positive example, there is an idea of implementing such a project in a regional city. For example, “Sirius” is the name of the modern educational center in the city of Sochi, created in 2014 based on a number of Olympic venues on the initiative of the President of Russia. Therefore, such a center may appear soon in Komsomolsk-on-Amur (*Far East Komsomolsk*, n.d.). In such texts, a projection on the desired future is traced, which consists in signifying the goal.

The formation of regional identity can be seen on the pages of the column “Family of the Khabarovsk Territory”. This project is being implemented jointly with the city administration and informs the city residents about the labor dynasties of Komsomolsk-on-Amur, their successes and their significant role in the city’s public life. In addition, one of the goals of the column is to revive family traditions and strengthen ties between generations: “At the Komsomolsk Oil Refinery, a subsidiary of Rosneft, many glorious dynasties work. One of them is the Burba-Nikitina dynasty: Such families are the pride of the enterprise, its support and confidence in the future” (*Far East Komsomolsk*, n.d.). The authors of the articles in the column are trying to convince the youth of Komsomolsk to stay in their hometown on the example of such families, since you can successfully live and work in this small (by the standards of Russia) city.

It is worth mentioning the column “Planet Taiga”. Khabarovsk Territory is rich in tourist attractions, many of which can become the sought-after symbol of the region and country. The activists of this project are convinced that the disclosure of tourism potential can become one of the new points of the economic growth in the Khabarovsk Territory, and the social function of tourism will help to reduce the outflow of the population. The pages of this column emotionally describe scenic spots in the vicinity of the city: “Komsomolsk-on-Amur is generally located



in a unique place, only few of us are aware of this. Within 3 hours, we can find ourselves in real mountains with a height of over 1200 m, and during the day get to unique natural monuments, such as the Amur Pillars” (*Far East Komsomolsk*, n.d.). The main idea of the Planet Taiga project is to help residents discover the uniqueness of the place where they live. By instilling a love for native places and active studying of the territory, you can raise a patriot of your native land.

The newspaper in question deliberately forms the image of an advanced industrial city. We can prove it by frequent use of such lexical and semantic variants as *plant*, *enterprise*, the names of city-forming enterprises (Komsomolsk Oil Refinery, Amurmetall, Komsomolsk aircraft factory, Komsomolsk ship-building plant, etc.), production sphere vocabulary, as well as current clichés (competitive industry, modernization of production facilities, energy-saving programs, etc.). Thus, the image of the city - “Komsomolsk is a working city” - is formed in the media.

## Conclusions

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Creating a positive regional image allows to tackle many modern geostrategic issues, both economic and sociocultural, for example, the development of new industries, the preservation, attraction of the population, the improvement of the quality of life of the region’s population and some others.

A large role in the formation of a positive image belongs to the leadership of the country, territory and city, which is able to form a state order for strengthening and developing the region.

The axiological strategy of creating a positive image is updated through certain strategic dominants of the various stages of the city’s existence, including building a new model of life during the construction of the city aimed at a bright future which is full of cultural events; broadcasting information about a happy life in Komsomolsk-on-Amur which was carried out in various ways by recording and informing the whole country about the achievements of Komsomolsk residents; and, finally, updating information on the heroic past of Komsomolsk-on-Amur. These strategic dominants are identified in the central and city press, since the media are designed not only to inform the population, but also to indirectly exert a suggestive impact on it.

The state order can form the social composition of the urban population, which is constantly changing over time. The image of the city is affected by the general cultural level of that part of population that is involved in the educational, scientific, and technical process. In the case of a decrease in the general cultural level of this part of the city population (which is smaller in number), the overall level of the population of the entire city decreases, and, consequently, the image of the city changes.

The methods that influence constructing the image of modern Komsomolsk-on-Amur have not undergone significant changes since the Soviet times. The anal-

ysis of the texts of the newspaper “Far East Komsomolsk” has helped determine the leading strategic dominant in the axiological strategy of creating a positive image of Komsomolsk-on-Amur, namely, the dominant of self-presentation, expressing the stereotypical image of the city as a constantly developing city, a working city, and a city where successful people live, a city where the prevailing system of upbringing and education form the conditions necessary for self-realization not only in their small homeland, but also in other regions.

This study opens up prospects for further research on the methods of constructing the city image.

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\* Социальная сеть, признанная в России экстремистской.