

REGIONAL INFORMATION RESOURCES AS SUPPORT FOR THE RUSSIAN PRONATALIST POLICY

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Abstract

Demographic trends in Russia, as well as in the European region, are currently being shaped by falling birth rates. In 2020, the main resources and measures of the Russian pronatalist policy were determined in the Presidential Address to the Federal Assembly. Information support for family values and promotion of fertility should become an integral part of national and regional governments' pronatalist policy.

The paper presents a methodology for assessing the degree of regional information support for national pronatalist policy and the results of its application. For our content analysis, we used materials of an official regional daily newspaper. Assessing trends in regional information support, we used the same semantic units as for the analysis of the conscious parenting promotion via media in 2014 and 2017. Our research demonstrates insufficient degree of regional information support for national pronatalist policy in the analysed Russian region.

Key words: pronatalist policy, information recourse, parenting, content analysis, media

JEL Code: J13, J18

Introduction

From 2015 to 2020, the Russian crude birth rate decreased by a quarter to 9.8 births per thousand people, which is the lowest rate since 2002 (Shapieva, Magomedova, and Dadaeva, 2020). In the European region, the demographic trend over this period was even strongly related to fertility decline with the average crude birth rate being 10.4 births per thousand people as compared to 11.42 births per thousand people in Russia (Statista, 2021). At the same time, some European countries have made great strides in tackling this problem; for instance, France is among the first countries that faced depopulation and pursued a purposeful pro-natalist policy (Martin, 2007).

In France, what is more important is neither the amount of the allowance nor the number of benefits, but mechanisms for family support including payment procedures and information

support. Köppen, Mazuy, and Toulemon (2017) report that French family benefits are organised and financed through the CNAF, the bureaus in charge of distributing family benefits. CNAF operates under a 4-year contract with the state that defines the quality of the services provided, including informing and consulting applicants. Since information is the central resource in the economy of the information society, effective usage of information resources as a support for the pronatalist policy seems a promising area.

In Russia, a large recent demographic study indicates that 40,1% of the respondents in Sverdlovsk region need more information on support and assistance measures for their family¹. Thus, our research attempts to analyse the information support for the national pronatalist policy at the regional level.

1 Data and Methods

The theoretical analysis of the national pronatalist policy is based on the functionalism and systems-based approach, and we used content analysis for empirical research.

1.1 Information subsystem of national pronatalist policy

Any system or object of systems-based analysis must be integral with «interconnectedness and resilience» (Hynes et al., 2020). System's specific structure and functions ensure its existence and difference from the external environment. Stewart and Ayres (2001) outline the potential of systems-based approach to policy analysis. A specific function of pronatalist policy as a system is promotion of fertility and higher birth rates in order to combat depopulation. In the long-term, depopulation leads to social order and community destruction. However, children enter society after several stages of growing up under parents' supervision and responsibility, and just one-step birth statistics for the state becomes a multi-step consequence of children's upbringing for parents. We believe that systemic thinking for pronatalist policy functions should be supplemented with the parent's rational behavior theory. Therefore, a specific function of pronatalist policy as a system is promotion of fertility as well as promotion of parenting.

As a system, pronatalist policy includes subsystems, components, and its relations. In policy analysis, subsystems unite a group of management functions (planning, motivation,

¹ Database of the scientific project "Demographic Well-Being of Russia" on the IBM SPSS Statistics Platform». State registration certificate no. 2020670022. Copyright holders are Federal research sociological center of the Russian Academy of Sciences, Rostovskaya, T. K., Ryazantsev, S. V., Kuchmaeva, O. V., Shabunova, A. A. Available online: URL: <http://демография2020.рф/sample-page/> (accessed on 10 August 2020).

forecasting, organisation, control, personnel and material support, and others). The information subsystem of the national pronatalist policy is closely related to its specific function and exists at several territorial levels; even if state authorities form pronatalist policy, regional and local authorities have to support it in their territory. The paper focuses on regional information resources of the pronatalist policy that include:

- 1) official regional media;
- 2) websites and press-releases of regional authorities that shape family policy;
- 3) social media pages of regional authorities that shape family policy.

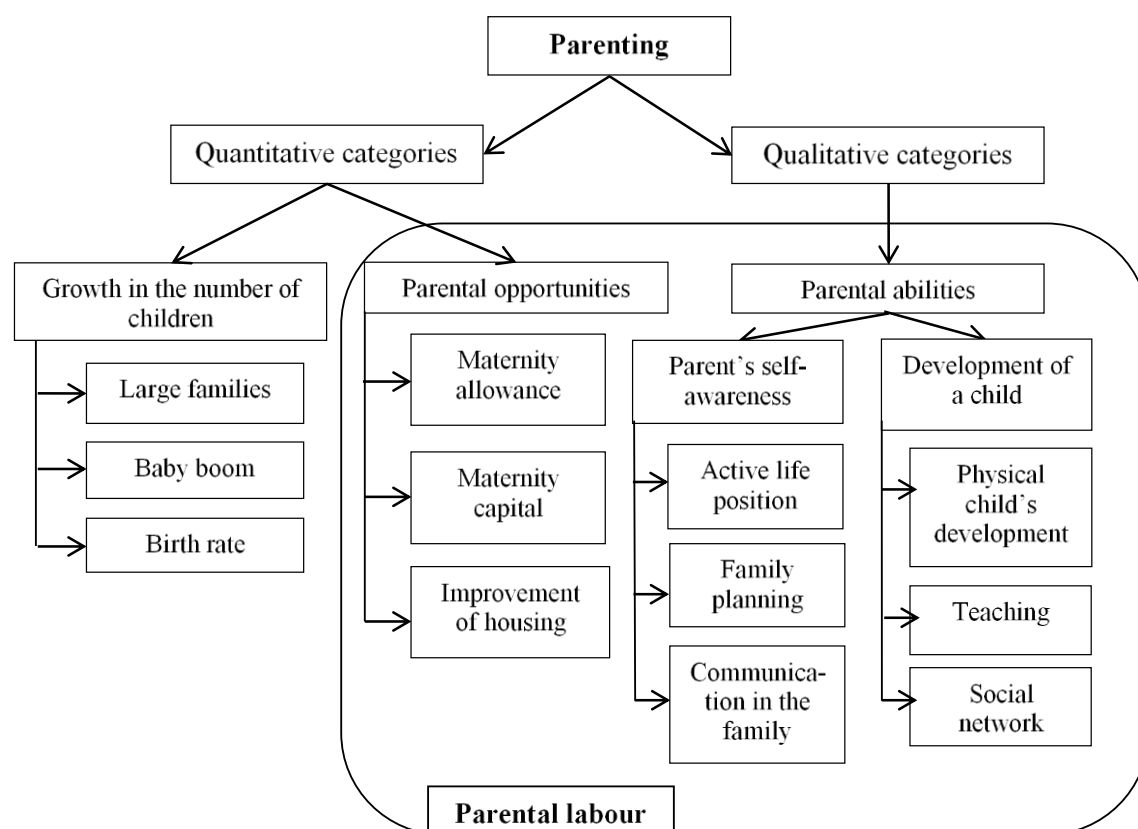
1.2 Content analysis data

Regional information resources proposed are shareware and require minimal financial expenditure on their usage by regional authorities. Thus, regional information resources become the object for the analysis we conducted first. Previously, we analysed social media pages of regional authorities that shape family policy (Bykova, Bagirova, and Oshergin, 2019) and one of official regional media for 2014 and for 2017 (Bykova, 2018). We would like to continue our research and use the same methodology. Our sample included materials from the daily regional official newspaper “Oblastnaya Gazeta” [“Regional Newspaper”] published in 2020. Founded by the regional authorities, it is the most cited print media in Sverdlovsk region with 246 issues in 2020. The newspaper also has an electronic version on their official website and official groups in social media.

1.3 Structural operationalisation of parenting

Our sample included publications with categories of parenting analysed. To improve our approach to structural operationalisation of the concepts “parenting” and “conscious parenting” (Bykova, 2018), we combined them and highlighted quantitative and qualitative categories of parenting. It also allowed us to add the concept “parental labour” to structural operationalisation. We use the concept of parental labour to emphasise that this parents’ activity is a special type of labour with time, financial, emotional, and other costs borne by the parents which creates socially beneficial results such as the child’s human capital (Bykova, Bagirova, and Oshergin, 2019). Our subcategories specify general characteristics of a conscious parenting, resources, and parental labour results existing in the real world. The results of our structural operationalisation are shown in Figure 1.

Fig. 1: Categories and subcategories of parenting for content analysis of social media



Source: Bykova, Bagirova, and Oshergin (2019).

2 Results

The results of analysing the regional information support for national pronatalist policy are presented in Table 1.

Tab. 1: Results of analysing the regional information support for national pronatalist policy via Russian regional media in 2020

Category	Semantic unit	Absolute frequency of mentions (number of times)	Relative frequency of mentions (percentage)	
			by category	in general
1 Qualitative	001 active life position of the parent	37	11.46	4.84
	002 communication in the family	34	10.53	4.44
	003 family planning	28	8.67	3.66

	004 physical child's development	62	19.20	8.10
	005 teaching	107	33.13	13.99
	006 social network	55	17.03	7.19
Subtotal:		323	100.00	42.22
2 Quantitative	007 birth rate	46	10.41	6.01
	008 large families	95	21.49	12.42
	009 baby boom	0	0	0
	010 maternity allowance	159	35.97	20.78
	011 maternity capital	88	19.91	11.50
	012 improvement of housing	54	12.22	7.06
Subtotal:		442	100.00	57.78
Total:		765		100.00

Source: author's elaboration

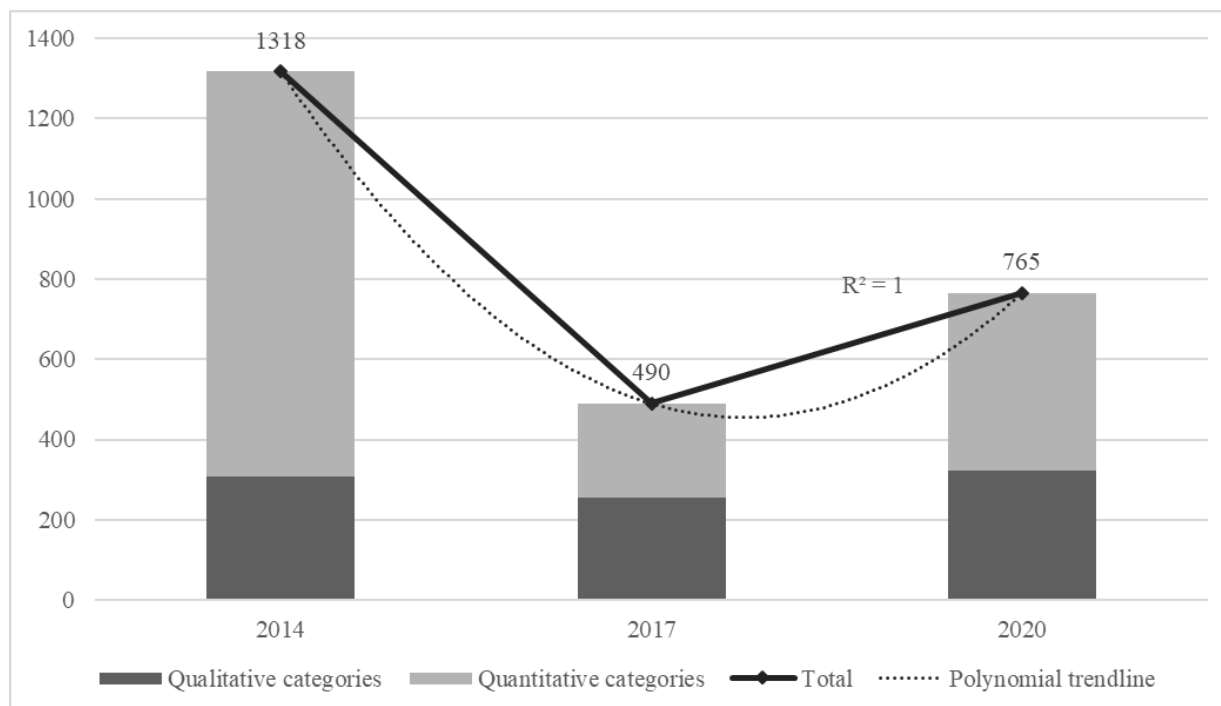
In 2020, the relative frequency of mentions of semantic units related to quantitative categories of parenting exceeds the same indicator of qualitative categories (57.78% compared to 42.22%). Mentions of maternity allowance provided the 35.97 % contribution to this value. A number of papers which specify payment procedures and who is eligible for receiving benefits is devoted to new allowance to support fertility and stimulate the birth rate announced in the Presidential Address to the Federal Assembly in 2020 as well as in 2021. In general, all quantitative categories are mentioned almost equally with the exception of baby boom and birth rate, because, unfortunately, modern demographic situation does not allow us to speak about progress in demographic indicators and high rate of natural increase.

Among with the qualitative categories, at the forefront of the official newspaper agenda with 33.13% of mentions was teaching. Application of reproductive technology and family planning were mentioned only 28 times due to the pandemic and the governor's recommendation to postpone pregnancy planning. Interestingly, we found a low frequency of parents' active life position and communication in the family mentions, because, on the one hand, pandemic allows spending more time at home and improving family relationships, on the other hand, leads to additional parental stress (Calvano et al, 2021) and family violence

(Zhang, 2020). Therefore, parents' active life position and communication in the family might become a broad and timely topic for newspaper's materials.

To assess trends in regional information support progress, we compared results of the content analysis based on the same newspaper and semantic units for every three years since 2014. The results of our comparison are shown in Figure 2.

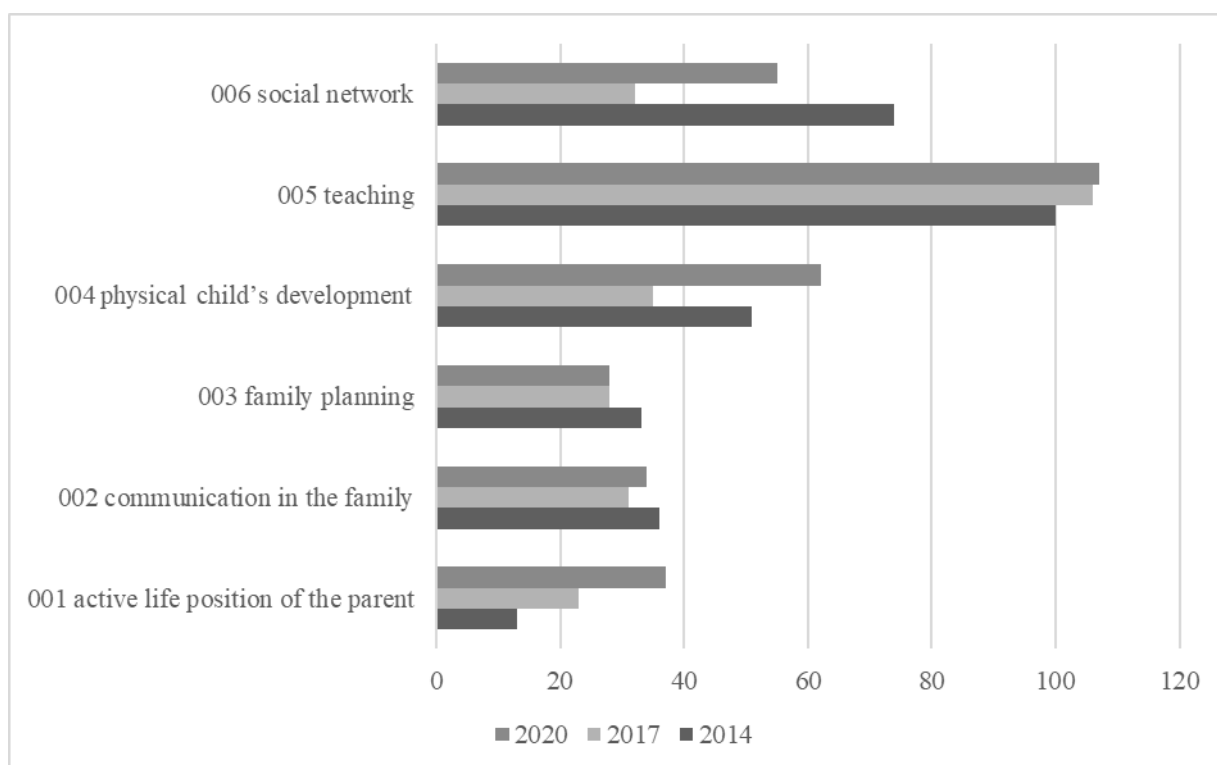
Fig. 2: Regional information support progress



Source: author's elaboration

In 2014, the degree of regional information support reached the highest values especially because of the quantitative categories of parenting. In the previous year, total amount of mentions increased by 56% as compared to 2017, but still reached only 58% of the 2014 level. The absolute frequency of qualitative categories' mentions is approximately equal during the period analysed. The differences observed in the absolute frequency of mentions enforce differences in semantic units' content. Every three years the dynamic of qualitative categories mentions from 2014 to 2020 is presented in Figure 3.

Fig. 3: Dynamic of qualitative categories mentions



Source: author's elaboration

In terms of qualitative categories, our analysis indicates that the absolute frequency of mentions related to all semantic units except social networks and family planning was almost the same or higher as compared to 2014. In brief, the semantic units of qualitative categories of parenting were mentioned in the following contexts:

1. Active life position of parents was related to parent's participation in urban playgrounds improvement.
2. Careful attitude to family was mentioned in historic essays on family life during the Second World War.
3. Family planning was considered in the context of pregnancy tracking apps.
4. Mentions of the Physical health of children and youth were primarily mentioned in relation to hot meals at schools and kindergartens.
5. Children's development was discussed in the context of passing exams and receiving additional education in the pandemic.
6. Social networks were considered in the context of heroic actions of children and communication with peers when learning remotely.

3 Discussion

Modern researchers discuss informing policy decisions and public relations as a “disseminator or interpreter of decisions” (Mykkänen and Vos, 2015). Huebner et al. (2008) claim that information support of strategic issues is essential to start solving them and to give them the “license to operate”. Public relations are also needed in organisations that implement family support programmes to exchange and collect information (Mykkänen and Vos, 2015). We believe that state and municipal companies should also contribute to dissemination of information related to family and fertility support measures.

Durant (2014) says about neither one-way informing nor one-way communication but about “reconnecting with citizens as deliberative partners”. Barrington-Leigh and Wollenberg (2018) also found profound effects of the social engagement as compared with variations in income. We support the view and have previously analysed the first pronatalist policy feedback in social media (Saitova, 2020) to find out more appropriate measures for actual parents. We believe that it is necessary to analyse not only the official regional newspaper, but also other information resources promoting parenting and fertility. Conducting analysis of other information resources is the promising area for our further research.

Conclusion

In Russia, the authorities that shape pronatalist policy proposed unprecedented economic measures to increase fertility, but available information resources of the official media, including regional information resources, are ineffectually used to support the new Russian pronatalist policy. In 2020, the number of mentions of semantic units related to qualitative and quantitative categories of parenting was under the level of 2014. Our research demonstrates insufficient degree of regional information support for national pronatalist policy in Sverdlovsk region of the Russian Federation. In 2020, as compared to 2017, the public federal attention to the pronatalist policy increased by 8.56 times, whereas the regional information support for the national pronatalist policy increased only by 1.56 times. Materials of the official media should correspond to the current pronatalist policy. We believe that promotion of parenting is a necessary condition for improving demographic situation in today’s Russia.

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