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## **MATERIALS FOR THE “DICTIONARY OF THE LOCAL TEXT OF NARVA CITY”**

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**Abstract:** The given article describes the tradition of research of urban and local texts in literature studies, urban sociology and anthropology. It also defines the notion of the “local text” and specifies its characteristics. The dictionary is recognized as the optimal form of the local text representation because the local text (as a set of stereotypes, narratives and behavioural patterns that are repeated in the city community) is characterized by discreteness (it does not exist as coherent text). The authors of the article present the project of the encyclopedic “Dictionary of Local Text of Narva City” which includes five thematic sections: “Symbols of Identity”, “Key Events”, “Personalities”, “Communities and Institutes”, and “Loci and Toponyms”. The sources of the dictionary are transcripts of interviews with city dwellers, materials of local mass media, travel guides, and literature on local lore and history as well as literary texts. A

standard dictionary entry contains brief historical background of the object under description as well as past and existing oral “myths”, legends, and narratives about the object, followed by the description of the object’s meaning for life of city dwellers (in their everyday and festive culture, in supporting of their civil and urban identity). As an example of the standard dictionary entry the articles provides the entries “Tank” and “Shishkin’s Pine”.

**Keywords:** urban anthropology, local text, dictionary of local text, urban wedding ritual, urban mythology, postfolklore.

## **1. Notion of the Local Text of Town**

Research of the urban text and reconstruction of urban mythology have long-established scientific traditions. Works by V. N. Toporov and researchers of Tartu-Moscow school of semiotics have played an important role in establishment of the tradition of the “Petersburg text” reconstruction (see Toporov 1995; Lotman 1984; Mints 2004; Timenchik, Toporov, Tsiv’ian 1975 and others). Saying that, researchers have mostly been interested in “high culture” texts (primarily the ones of the literary tradition). The literary approach that dominated in the analysis of the material allowed both to reconstruct individual images in oeuvre of different authors and, simultaneously, to distinguish common motives that were shaping the myth about the town in the literature and culture. Thus, this reconstructed urban myth was being created according to the literary tradition.

The turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> – 21<sup>st</sup> centuries witnesses diversifying of the range of objects that attract attention of urban text researchers: the opposition “the capital text” – the “provincial text” is becoming topical (see Abashev 2000; Zaionts 2003; Fokina 2001 and others). When the

researchers shifted their attention toward the provincial town, it required to extend the spectrum of sources and to add there, besides “high culture” texts, travelogues, memoirs, local lore literature, and journalistic writing. However, this did not result in change of the methodological instrumentarium, as texts of the above-mentioned genres were studied with the same methods as literary texts.

It was quite anticipated and predictable of researchers to address travel guides that show tourists the exterior, “dress-up side” of the town (see Kiseliova 2008). A travel guide as a form of urban text representation turns out to be highly dependent on ideology – in fact, every epoch creates its own town travel guide.

A new – anthropologic – direction in studying of urban texts is being born during the same period. Along with texts of the written tradition this direction analyses products of the oral culture, with one part of these products belonging to the notion of “post-folklore” (see Nekliudov 2013 a; Nekliudov 2013 b): urban legends, gossip, rumour, word of mouth and etc. The other part is outside the framework of the folklore tradition and is implemented in the institutional communication, i.e. in the “educational, museum-excursion, agitational, and ceremonial-festive practice” (Alekseevskii & Akhmetova et al. 2010: 19).

Apparently, the anthropologic direction is formed under the strong influence of the sociologic tradition of analysis of the town and the urban space that derives from works of American sociologist K. Lynch. The concepts of the mental image of the town and mental maps proposed by Lynch (see Lynch 1982) played an important role in development of the anthropologic direction.

Anthropologists themselves emphasize that the anthropologic tradition of studying of “local texts” of modern provincial towns continues the tradition of studying of “urban texts” in the so-called “high culture” as well as follows the “historic-regional” direction of collection and

analyzing of urban legends in the 1920s (Alekseevskii & Akhmetova et al. 2010: 18). Works on the Petersburg mythology by A. N. Anciferov, dated by the 1920s, which are referred to in this regard, were undoubtedly significant also for establishment of the semiotic tradition of urban text studies.

The notion of the “local text” that was introduced to the scientific vocabulary through works on anthropology of the modern town is different from the semiotic image of the “urban text”. Following M. D. Alekseevsky, M. L. Lurye and A. A. Sen’kina we understand the “local text” “as the system of mental, locutory and visual stereotypes, persistent subjects and behavioural practices connected with a particular town and relevant to the community that identifies itself with that town. The local text is represented in the spontaneous and institutionalized communicative practice, local folklore, journalistic writing and research works” (Alekseevskii & Lur’ie et al. 2009: 277).

In defining the notion of the “local text” it seems necessary, first and foremost, to take into account its pragmatics. The key questions for the researcher to ask are as follows: **when** transferring of the local text<sup>2</sup> becomes relevant and **what the purpose** of communicating of this information is. The answer to these questions demonstrates that the main function of the local text is formation and support of the urban identity. The local text is the result of town dwellers’ acquiring of the physical and spiritual space of the town. It is created, as culture on the whole, primarily for oneself, for the in-house use; it becomes the knowledge that is shared with new members of the urban community (young generation) in order to make them a part of one’s cultural and social space (it is no coincidence that a town dweller acquires a large amount of knowledge about the local text during his/her teenage years when the person’s social identity is formed). On the other hand, the knowledge about the local text becomes timely when a town dweller meets a layperson (a guest, tourist, immigrant); in situations of intercultural dialogue (with representatives of other local identities) it becomes necessary to translate fragments of

the local text to outsiders. At the same time, transferring of the local text to a visitor allows the town dweller to become aware of his/her urban identity.

On the whole, it should be admitted that the term “text” is used rather conditionally in relation to dwellers’ imagery of the town that exist only notionally. The local text that the researcher reconstructs is characterized by:

- **movability** (Alekseevskii & Zherdeva et al. 2008: 420) in time (it is conveyed from generation to generation not in full, is constantly added new information to);
- **multilayeredness**, inhomogeneity – it contains the **core** and the **periphery** where “subtexts” are located. These subtexts are in circulation among representatives of different social and professional communities and age groups;
- **discreteness** (Alekseevskii & Zherdeva et al. 2008: 420), as it exists not in the form of a coherent text, but as a set of verbal formulas, stereotypes, images, etc. that a town dweller keeps in his memory and extracts from it should the need arise.

Apparently, not all the elements of the local text are intertwined with system relations, and it predetermines the most successful form of its presentation.

## **2. Dictionary as the Most Adequate Form of Presenting of the Local Text**

We support the idea of M. Alekseevsky, A. Zherdeva, M. Lurye, and A. Sen’kina that dictionary is “the most adequate and, apparently, optimal form of the scientific description” (Alekseevskii & Zherdeva et al. 2008: 420) of the local text.

We know of the two attempts to create local text dictionaries of different towns. The first attempt was made by E. Gruzlov and A. Sveshnikov, who composed and published “Dictionary of Mythology of Omsk” to hold a young artists competition in

2005. As the authors envisioned it, the dictionary was to serve as an impulse for the artists to create their competition works. Being Omsk-dwellers (carriers of the collective imagery), proceeding from their knowledge of the local text, and using the method of “self-description” (or “self-recording”) the dictionary authors created the model of Omsk mythology and then presented this model in the dictionary entries. The authors themselves understood disadvantages of such a manner of handling the material, and they admitted that the main principles of composing of the dictionary were subjectivity, “provocativeness” (striving to “make the reader disagree, argue, suggest their own vision of the “myth” or a “new myth” (Gruzдов & Sveshnikov 2005) and “provoking curiosity”. The authors consciously worked on the “verge of ‘scientificity – literariness’”, “played the dictionary genre” (Gruzдов & Sveshnikov 2005), sometimes acting not only as myth collectors, but also as their authors. In 2010 the authors of the small-circulation and narrow-audience (the competition participants) targeted dictionary made an attempt to improve the subjectivity of the first edition by creating the open group “Dictionary of Omsk Mythology” in the social network “VKontakte”. In this group they offered Omsk-dwellers to discuss and improve the entries of the first edition of the dictionary (*SMO*). The open group in the social network has become a new form of doing “fieldwork”: in addition to discussing the existing entries, group participants can create their own entries, make publications on the wall including links to other publications on the topic, audio and video files, as well as graphic texts. According to the idea of E. Gruzдов and A. Sveshnikov, all of the above-mentioned publications were to become the material for the second, revised edition of the dictionary.

The other attempt to create a dictionary of the local text is presented on the pages of the Internet journal “Antropologicheskij forum” [Anthropologic Forum]. Several issues of the journal published materials for the “Dictionary of the Local Text of Mogilev-Podolsky”. Researchers under supervision of M. L. Lurye used materials of the field expeditions to provincial Ukrainian town Mogilev-Podolsky (on the border between Ukraine and Moldova) in 2007-2008 and distinguished the dominants of the town’s image; defined the thematic sections of the vocabulary of the future dictionary; and presented examples of dictionary entries from different sections of the dictionary. M. L. Lurye’s group sees their ultimate task as creating of separate dictionaries of local texts of different provincial towns that can then be the basis for making “generalizations of a higher scale” (Alekseevskii & Zherdeva et al. 2008: 420).

The “Dictionary of the Local Text of Narva City”, which we have composed, continues the anthropologic tradition of urban text studies. We came up with the idea to study the Narva text and reconstruct the urban mythology in 2009. However, the event that actually prompted the beginning of our work on the dictionary was the field expedition of 2011, which was conducted by Saint-Petersburg State University (the expedition was supervised by M. L. Lurye) on the premises of Narva College of the University of Tartu.

### **Sources of the “Dictionary of Local Text of Narva City”**

The card index of the dictionary consists of materials derived from different sources.

The main source of the dictionary is transcripts of interviews with city dwellers (natives or long-term residents of Narva). The first transcripts (71 interviews) were made in July 2011, within the frames of the expedition conducted upon the initiative of Saint-Petersburg State University. In 2014 interviews recording was recommenced, and today interviews continue to

be conducted by efforts of the staff of the Division of Russian Language and Literature of Narva College.

Additional sources of the dictionary are:

- responses to large-scale surveys that are conducted to specify interview data;
- materials (articles, broadcasts, reports, interviews, commercial and personal advertisements) of local mass medias: printed periodicals (the “Narvskaya Gazeta”, “Narva”, “Gorod”, “Viru Prospekt”), television and radio broadcasts of Narva television and Narva studio of “Radio-4”;
- texts of various electronic (Internet) genres (website, blog, Internet advertising board);
- materials of travel guides, literature on local lore and history;
- literary texts about Narva both of the “high” and “low” (mass) culture.

The limitations to the vocabulary of the dictionary are set on the basis of the analysis of interviews with Narva dwellers and the selection of stories and verbal formulas that can be regarded as “typical”. By a “typical” story we mean a narrative that is repeated in interviews of people who are not related to one another and that has a persistent set of motives. We use the term “verbal formula” to conditionally refer to an utterance that is common among city dwellers, has a stable structure and is reproduced in speech as ready-made.

#### **4. Structure of the “Dictionary of Local Text of Narva City”**

The dictionary of the local text as a form of its representation has to comply with the content and the structure of the local text itself. Despite amorphousness and

discreteness of its existence in the cultural memory of city dwellers, the local text can be structured by efforts of its researchers. Thus, M. Alekseevsky, A. Zherdeva, M. Lurye, and A. Sen'kina, who studied the local text of Mogilev-Podolsky, distinguish the following five components in the structure of the local text of this town: symbols of identity, loci and toponyms, key events, personalities, communities and institutes (Alekseevskii & Zherdeva et al. 2008: 421).

The local text components are reflected in the thematic sections of the dictionary. Being guided by the local text structure suggested by the above-mentioned authors and taking into consideration the particularity of the Narva local text, we propose to divide the “Dictionary of the Local Text of Narva City” into five thematic sections.

The “Symbols of Identity” will be the opening section of the dictionary, and it will contain rather diverse material that describes Narva as a city with certain permanent features. These features can be presented through traditional, signature for Narva events and celebrations (the City Days with the “Runaway Brides” competition, celebrating of 9 May, and the Biker Festival); material objects that Narva dwellers have developed mental associations for and that are closely connected with Narva space (e.g. the “grey passport”); precedent texts that are significant for the city dweller’s self-consciousness (e.g. the song “Kamushki” [Stones], music by A. Morozov, lyrics by M. Ryabinin, performed by L. Senchina). The entries of the section reconstruct a set of stereotypic imagery of Narva and its dwellers that has emerged in the mindset of the city dwellers. For instance, the article “Reputaciya Goroda” [The City Reputation] reflects the common ways in which city dwellers envision advantages and disadvantages of the city that can be summarized with short verbal formulas in the form of city-related definitions (“Narva is an industrial city”,

“Narva is a Russian city”, “Narva is a large village”, “Narva is a border city”, Narva is the 101<sup>st</sup> kilometer”) or the article “‘Indenticnost’ Narvityanina” [Identity of Narva Dweller].

The “Key Events” section will contain entries about events of significant importance for city dwellers. The content of every entry reflects city dwellers’ comprehension of a real historic event that has been committed to the collective memory and that has resulted in urban mythology. The local text does not reflect all the historic events that were important for the city development, and it defines diversity of the entries of this section. It includes entries on events of different scale: on the one hand, “Bombing of Narva in 1944”, “Estonia’s Regaining of Independence in 1991”, etc. and, on the other hand, “Ioann Kronshtadsky’s Visit to Narva”, “Filming of the Movie ‘King Lear’ in Narva”, “Closure of Kreenholm”, “The ‘Bronze Night’ in Peter’s Square”, etc.

The “Personalities” section of the dictionary will unite Narva dwellers’ stories about historical figures who visited Narva; about natives and citizens of Narva who made a great contribution to its development or put the city on the map; as well as about contemporaries with ambiguous / multilayered reputation (city madmen, crime bosses).

The “Communities and Institutes” section will include entries about various formal and informal associations of people on the basis of such characteristics as age, profession, ethnic culture, confession of faith, etc. All of the described associations contribute, to a certain extent, to emergence of the local text. Some of the represented here organizations can also create symbols of the urban identity (for instance, the Kreenholm Manufacture, Narva Power Plants, the “Baltiets” Plant).

The “Loci and Toponyms” section will reconstruct Narva City’s territorial division into vernacular (having a certain reputation) districts. The section will describe single modern city objects that have cultural, social, and everyday significance for city dwellers (monuments, museums, palaces of culture, educational institutions, cafés, bars, shops, etc.) as well as the objects that no longer exist in the modern Narva, but are remembered by Narva citizens. The dictionary entries of the section will provide both the official and unofficial, common among city dwellers, names of city objects.

### **5. Structure of Standard Dictionary Entry**

A dictionary entry of the “Dictionary of the Local Text of Narva City” is structured similarly to an entry of a dictionary of the encyclopedic type (for examples of dictionary entries from the “Loci and Toponyms” section see *Appendix*). The entry starts with the entry word that is the most common within the urban environment name of a notion, object, personality or event (other official and unofficial names are provided in the parenthesis). The entry word is followed by brief historical background. Then the entry provides past and existing oral “myths”, legends, and narratives about the corresponding objects under description. The presentation of the urban mythology is followed by the description of the object’s meaning for life of city dwellers (in their everyday and festive culture, in supporting of their civil and urban identity). The entry includes references to the historic-regional tradition of studying of the object and provides cultural background information on existence of the object in the urban culture. The entry is also supplemented with illustrative material and references information.

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<sup>1</sup> Compare: "The fact that the collecting activity of antropologists has turned towards the urban (both in the terms of location and theme) material, in particular, the provincial one, seems to be caused by several factors, including the apparent continuity of semiotic researches into “local texts” and “local myths” in the national culture (first and foremost, literature). These researches were, in their turn, inspired by works about the Petersburg text by V.N. Toporov and his introducing of the notions of the “urban text and “urban myth” to the scientific vocabulary (Akhmetova & Lur'ie 2004).

<sup>2</sup> Researchers of “local texts” of provincial towns emphasize that a “certain set of stereotypes about the town is communicated by its numerous and different dwellers in certain communicative situations, and the range of such situations is much wider than a museum excursion or answering the researchers' questions” (Akhmetova & Lur'ie 2004). Such “situations of existence” of communicated town narratives as “excursions, schools lessons of

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local history, solemn speeches of representatives of local authorities, etc.” can also be added to the range (Akhmetova & Lur’ie 2004).

<sup>3</sup> Literature on the “local text” contains statements claiming that “elements of the whole (“town dwellers’ ‘common knowledge’ about the town – *J. N., O. B.*) vary in the degree of their significance depending on the age and social-cultural particularities of groups of dwellers: at one extreme there are local lore scholars and teachers, mostly elderly, while at the other extreme one can find “street” teenagers. For the latter local self-identification is significant only for the territorial division of the groups, and thus reputation of districts is much more in demand than that of the town itself” (Akhmetova & Lur’ie 2004). We believe that in addition to this common core of the “local text” that all town dwellers are aware of there also (co-)exist different “subtexts”. The knowledge of these “subtexts” unites groups of dwellers of different age, gender, and social background.

<sup>4</sup> The expedition was conducted within the frames of the Research Summer School “Between Russia and Estonia: Border, Culture, People (Ivangorod – Narva) that was supported by the “Russkiy Mir” Foundation (application no 2010/II-352). Supervisor of the Research Summer School: M. L. Lurye (European University, Saint-Petersburg).

<sup>5</sup> For the purpose of reconstructing of the local text we also use materials of national mass media if they broadcast knowledge about the local texts (e.g. live broadcasts, interviews with Narva dwellers, etc.) or provide a possibility to specify some factual data.