Reconstructing Data for Modelling Collective Biography: A Case of Zemstvo Deputies in Russia in the Second Half of XIX Century

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Abstract

The article presents the main stages of prosopographical research and the formation of collective portraits of deputies of local self-government in Russia in the second half of the XIX century. The problems of searching, organizing, modelling, analyzing and presenting data are considered. In forming the source basis of the study, a combination of a source-driven approach and data obtaining principles were used, depending on the types of characteristics studied. The author shows the transformation of the initially created local database dedicated to the deputies of the Moscow, St. Petersburg and Perm provinces Zemstvo into an information system with a wider set of characteristics and description fields, focusing on changing data sets and their ability to solve various historical research problems. The article discusses questions relating to the completeness of data, ways to expose collected personal information as digital biographies, as well as usage of an information system designed for historical analysis of the Zemstvo deputies' activities. The author shows how a comprehensive historical study can enrich structured prosopographical data, enabling the user to choose the level of data presentation in the form of collective portraits or personalized data, giving an overview of each deputy and the deputies' activities in the Zemstvo.

Keywords: database, information system, prosopographical survey, collective portrait, data modelling.

1. Introduction

The creation of collective biographies as life writing can take various forms and approaches. On the one hand, the biography can have different scales, from short, full texts to extended volumes devoted to individuals, groups of people or personalities united by some common characteristics (Davies, B. Gannon, S., 2006). The basis for the integration may be, for example, the fame of people and their relation to a place (Anderson M., 2013), participation in historical events (Smith R., 2014) or representative institutions (Parliamentary History, 2019), gender (Collective Biography of Women, 2019), or even common experiences (Hawkins R., Al-Hindi KF, 2016).

The main factor is the representation of personalities in one place in a common format. Digital collective biographies may refer to digitized biographies having analog forms, or may be designed initially as born-digital sources. Prosopographic databases organizing personal information refer to the last type of digital collective biography mentioned. The establishment of such databases may lend itself to a source-driven approach, when a digital collective biography is formed on the basis of the materials of one main source and aims not only at creating a database of people for the purpose of studying them, building collective portraits, etc., but also for preservation and representation the historical source in digital form.

However, certain types of historical sources are often characterized by incompleteness, or insufficient complexity to contain a wide range of significant personal characteristics. Therefore prosopographic databases are often modeled on the basis of data from various sources. These information resources may be of particular value, as they allow for the analysis of collective portraits of the individuals studied, and creation and presentation of collective biographies in digital format. This study of deputies of provincial Zemstvo assemblies in the Russian Empire is a case in point.

This article describes the experience of building a prosopographical database, transforming it into an information system, and creating collective biographies of Zemstvo deputies of three provinces of the Russian Empire such as Moscow, St. Petersburg and Perm in the second half of the XIX century.

2. Historical background

The 60-70s of the 19th century became a significant stage in Russian history, a time of the "great liberal" reforms of Emperor Alexander II. Of particular importance was not only the legislative liquidation of serfdom, which gave freedom to the peasants but also the intensification of the processes for the social modernization.

The introduction of Zemstvo self-government in the Russian Empire was an important link in the chain of liberal reforms of Alexander II. The significance of the Zemstvo was that the new institution contributed to the development of the regional economy and infrastructure, resolving social problems and contradictions, but it was especially important for the government to recognize the need to involve the public to consider these issues and to provide some autonomy for new regional self-governmental bodies. Minister of Finance, S.Yu. Witte, in a confidential note, explained the importance of the Zemstvo as a "school of representative institutions" (Witte S.Yu., 1899), indicating its political role as a

precursor of parliament.

The study of the socio-cultural image and activities of Zemstvo deputies as a collective is a necessary basis for the study of representative institutions in Russia. Only with the creation of the Zemstvo were the main categories of the population able to influence decision-making processes. The culture of interaction of deputies began to take form, the basic principles and orders of the electoral system began to develop and be established, and these elements informed the establishment of the State Duma at the beginning of the 20th century.

Provincial Zemstvo assemblies significantly influenced the development of the socio-political, economic, and social spheres of those provinces where Zemstvo self-government was introduced. Decisions determining the directions of activity, although limited to the framework of the Provisions of 1864, were made in provincial Zemstvo assemblies and inevitably depended on the composition of the collective of deputies, their opinions, competencies, personal experience, and other factors. Thus, the staff of the assembly directly influenced which problems were raised and solved in the Zemstvos, the nature of relations with the provincial authorities, and other factors. Deputies of provincial Zemstvos played an important role in the decision-making process, determining the development of Zemstvo self-government.

In studying the composition of the Zemstvo assemblies, the sociocultural image of the deputies is important – to enable research into factors such as who represented the interests of the population in the Zemstvo, and who solved the social and economic issues of the development of the provinces, and how the collective portrait of the Zemstvo deputies determined the features of the Zemstvo. Famous people and representatives of the local elite, who could be prominent public and political figures of the time and left their documented record in history, were elected to Zemstvo assemblies, especially in the capitals, in Moscow and St. Petersburg. On the other hand, there is no such extensive information about the overwhelming majority of Zemstvo deputies as we have the various sources devoted to individual outstanding personalities on the scale of the capital, a separate region or a state as a whole. Ordinary people were often represented in the Zemstvo, whose memory, if preserved, requires scrupulous research and careful verification. Therefore, the obtaining, modelling and organization of data, and the creation of a prosopographical database for filling with data, allows closer analysis and building a biography of unknown, ordinary people and preserving the memory of them.

3. Historiography

The study of the social composition of the Zemstvos began in the pre-revolutionary period and the study of the deputies' image was carried out in the framework of studying the history of social thought and the Zemstvo assembly as a whole (Svatikov S.G. 1905; Veselovsky V.V., 1911); a special group of investigations consisted of studies of law scholars (for ex., Gradovsky A.D., 1903; Bezobrazov V.P., 1874; Korkunov N.M. 1909), who manifested the predominance of social status in the formation of Zemstvo representation with a preferential right for nobles and large landowners to be elected and attend meetings. In the Soviet period, the study of the history of the Zemstvo institutions and the socio-cultural image of the deputies was not a priority for conducting historical research, which was associated with the political pressure of 'official' science. However, at this time the study of regional Zemstvos began (Pirumova N.M., 1977; Gerasimenko G.A., 1990). Important research was undertaken by M. I. Chernysh, who considered the introduction of Zemstvo institutions in the Perm province, and the social composition of the Zemstvo in Perm, etc. (Chernysh M.I., 1959). In modern historiography, the focus of research has been on various aspects of the Zemstvo institutions and their activities, as well as socio-cultural portraits of deputies of different provinces (Nizamova M.S., 2013; Melnikova Yu.N., 2014). The scholars have noted the leading role of nobles in the formation of Zemstvo bodies, the influence of the socio-political composition of deputies on the level of democracy and representativeness of Zemstvos, and the rivalry of the Zemstvo groups and the significant stages for Zemstvo institutions' development.

At Perm State University, through the Laboratory for Historical Information Science (now the Center for Digital Humanities), an entire new research direction has been formed, a research school for studying Zemstvo history and local self-government in the second half of the 19th - early 20th centuries. The researchers of the Center work on source-study issues on the history of the Zemstvo, evaluate the completeness, quality of sources, identify their information potential, document and analyze sources devoted to Zemstvo history. Digitization of sources, their study and organization of data are based on the use of information technology. Thus, the Perm University has created an information system "Journals of provincial Zemstvo assemblies", which was the result of the project "Journals of provincial Zemstvo assemblies as a source for studying the history of local self-government in Russia (2nd half of XIX - early XX centuries)" (The information system "Journals..., 2007; Kornienko S.I., Maslennikov N.N. & Shabalina D.V., 2005), which is a platform for organizing an important record keeping source on the history of the Zemstvo and data about it, as well as a valuable tool for further investigation.

Based on a broad source base, researchers at the Center for Digital Humanities study Zemstvo history, analyze sociocultural portraits of Zemstvo deputies from different provinces of the Russian Empire (Povroznik N.G. & Kharisova A.R., 2014), and consider various domains of Zemstvo activity, including the development of public literacy. The accumulated experience of studying the social composition and activities of Zemstvo has allowed researchers to address the issues of

mutual influence of the socio-cultural aspects of Zemstvo deputies and their activities and their impact on the functioning efficiency of Zemstvos in general.

It is necessary to emphasize that the problems of modelling the socio-cultural image and the activities of Zemstvo deputies practically has not been the focus of attention of researchers to date. In turn, this issue is significant and relevant from the point of view of the importance of behavioural factors in the decision-making process in the Zemstvos, in terms of developing a culture of participation in the political process, as well as the significant role of the Zemstvo as one of the sources of the social-active part of society and the future parliamentary elite. This study is an attempt to explore complex data on the socio-cultural image and activities of deputies based on information technologies (first of all, such as information systems and databases), reconstruction of collective portraits of Zemstvo deputies of three provinces of the Russian Empire and their comparative analysis.

4. Sources

The predominance of the obtaining data from various sources in the formation of the source basis of the study for the construction and filling of the prosophographical database should be noted. As mentioned earlier, some deputies of the provincial Zemstvo assemblies were distinguished people, and information about them was preserved in various sources, including periodicals – but for the majority of deputies the reconstruction of the character portrait, life, and activities of these people requires considerable effort due to lack of available information and the need to derive data particle by particle. In addition, despite the fact that candidates had to fill out questionnaires with brief information about themselves before the elections, these sources were usually not preserved and only individual copies of such questionnaires could be found in the archives. Therefore, the reconstruction of biographical data on deputies has required searching for individual information from multiple sources.

The study was made on the basis of a complex mix of sources, some of which were specific to some provinces, and accordingly reflect only information available in particular regions. Therefore, the types of sources were not the same for all the provinces selected for this study, and there were different levels of completeness and irregular distribution of data.

Published and archival materials formed the main source base of the study. These sources were documents from the Central Historical Archive of Moscow, the State Archive of the Russian Federation, the Rare Books Department of the Russian Fund of the Russian National Library, the State Archive of the Perm Region, the Perm Regional Museum, and the Rare Book Foundation of the Perm Regional Library in honour of M. Gorky.

The full list of deputies was created on the basis of the "Lists of persons elected to provincial representatives" (for ex. Materials of the Rare Book...), which partially contain information about the estates ("soslovie") and rank of deputies. To supplement the data, lists of candidates for the elections of Zemstvo deputies and ballot lists were used (for ex. Central Historical Archive of Moscow, Fund 11). The regular replacement of deputies posed a difficulty for producing the full list, since the lists of the elected were published at the beginning of the meetings, and the changes in the composition during the meetings were not often recorded.

Demographic characteristics and estate were determined on the basis of official lists of service (for ex. State Archive of the Russian Federation. Fund 575), which were filled in during the elections to the Zemstvo. Formal lists contain a brief biographical note on each elected deputy. Other common features are the county of the election, education, and previous experience of work. These sources are close to the affairs of the personnel of the provincial Zemstvo Assemblies and Zemstvo authorities ("uprava") (The State Archive of the Perm Region. Fund 44). However, this group of sources does not provide information on the majority of deputies of provincial Zemstvos, which required consulting other sources.

Reference sources of the second half of the 19th century became significant sources for obtaining data about estates and main areas of activity. They are the address-calendars, address books, memorial and reference books of the Moscow, St. Petersburg and Perm provinces [19]. These sources allowed the discovery of institutions and organizations (public and state), in which the deputies took part before, during and after Zemstvo. This group of sources also includes estate reference books, calendars, lists of nobility, alphabetic lists of noble families, genealogical collections, address books of the St. Petersburg trade merchants, and lists of persons in the state, public and Zemstvo service, which set out with greater accuracy the deputies' estates. Information on the education of deputies was partly derived from published materials of educational institutions with lists of graduates by name (for ex. The Imperial Alexander Lyceum, 1961), and materials from non-Zemstvo institutions where future deputies worked and trained. These documents contain data on education and professional activities of Zemstvo representatives (for ex. The State Archive of the Perm Region. Fund 72).

Further reference publications were also included in the study, which included lists of cemeteries of the provinces under study (for ex. Gladyshev V.F., 2001). These sources allowed the reconstruction of the dates of birth and death of deputies (rarely mentioned in other types of sources).

Periodicals of the second half of the XIX century became a valuable and informative source. Regional periodicals, in particular the newspaper Perm Provincial Sheets, contained entire sections about the Zemstvos, including lists of representatives elected to Zemstvo assemblies, and announcements of county and provincial Zemstvos, which contain, among other things, indications of

inaccuracies in published information on the activities of Zemstvos, and data on the incompleteness of the lists of persons entitled to participate in electoral congresses. Other periodical sections are important as well, for example, obituaries, which give brief information about the activities of deputies.

Biographies and biographical dictionaries made up an important group of sources (for ex. Semevsky M.I., 1892). Some of them are published in electronic form and can be accessed online, such as the information system on "eminent people" of Bogorodsk [24]. The biographical publications contain information on the activities of the most significant public and state figures who could take part in the work of the Zemstvos. According to the dictionary chapters, it was possible to establish some professional, educational and demographic characteristics of the deputies.

Some of the information about Zemstvo figures was established on the basis of a study of the personal materials from archives (for ex. The State Archive of the Perm Region. Fund 714) or personal sources such as recorded memories and memoirs of Zemstvo figures (A.A Bobrinsky, V.S. Golubev, E.I. Lamansky, G.E. Lvov, S.A. Muromtsev, V.A. Obolensky, B.N. Chicherin, D.N. Shipov and others (for ex. Bobrinsky A.A., 1931).

While the socio-cultural characteristics of the Zemstvo deputies can be reconstructed on the basis of a wide array of sources, the information about the activity of deputies in the assembly was recorded mainly on one type of source, the journals of provincial Zemstvo assemblies.

In relation to the reconstruction of the deputies' activities, a source-driven approach was used for this study. The journals of the provincial Zemsky assemblies of the Moscow, St. Petersburg and Perm provinces were the main resource documenting Zemsky office work and were the central source for understanding this aspect of the deputies' lives and identity. To study the journals the information system "Journals of the provincial Zemstvo assemblies ..." was used. The value of the journals and their informational potential are discussed in the articles by S. I. Kornienko and A. R. Ehlakova (Kornienko S. I. & Ehlakova A. R., 2018). It should be emphasized that the journals had different degrees of detail of the information displayed, including the published transcripts of meetings, which does not allow for all provincial Zemstvos to be identified equally and evaluated in terms of the characteristics of the Zemstvo Deputies. In rare cases where published assembly journals were not available, unpublished meetings transcripts, records, and handwritten texts of journals stored in archives were analyzed (for ex. The State Archive of the Perm Region. Fund 65).

5. Methodology

The study of collective portraits of Zemstvo deputies was carried out in two major stages and initially covered the deputies elected to the provincial Zemstvos in 1865-1890. At the next stage, expanding the range of socio-cultural characteristics and reconstruction of data on the activities of deputies, the focus moved to the first triennium since the elections. The Zemstvo deputies were elected for three years and the first such triennium for the Moscow and St. Petersburg provinces is 1865-1868, and 1870-1872 for the Perm province.

4.1 Local personal database. Socio-cultural image of deputies

The analysis of the complex sociocultural characteristics of Zemstvo deputies was enabled by the organization of sources and the creation of a relational database "Deputies of Zemstvo assemblies: the second half of the XIX - early XX centuries" (The personal database "Deputies..., 2008) managed in MS Access. The database contains a complete list of deputies of the provincial Zemstvo assemblies of the Moscow, St. Petersburg and Perm provinces elected in 1865–1890, which amounted to 1018 entries (individuals). On the basis of queries to the database, quantitative data describing the sociocultural image and some parameters of the deputies' activities were identified and analyzed (Gorbacheva (Povroznik) N. G., 2008).

The "Deputies ..." database consists of 11 tables where the main table is "Personal" and 10 auxiliary. The "Personal" table contains a list of elected representatives, the description of which is structured into the following main fields, including personal and social characteristics:
- full name;
- dates of birth and death;
- estate;
- rank;
- level of education;
- educational institution;
- province; and
- county;

as well as some characteristics of activities in the Zemstvo:
- Zemstvo institution;
- type of membership;
- participation in commissions; and
- election by the representative from Zemstvo in other organizations.

As a result of data analysis, for the first time in the historiography, an entire set of socio-cultural features as demographic (age structure of the Zemstvos; change in the average age of deputies), educational and professional characteristics, as well as properties of representatives' activities (attendance of meetings, participation in commissions, etc.) was identified (for more details, see Kornienko S.I., Povroznik N.G., Ekhlakova A.R., 2017). An analysis of the sociocultural image of Zemstvo deputies based on queries to the database showed that the composition of Zemstvos did not remain unchanged during 1864–90, but was constantly changing. The dynamics of the estate, demographic, educational characteristics of deputies were altered, and deputies' professional level was also changed. Some statements by previous researchers on

social layers and on the dynamics of estate representation in provincial Zemstvo assemblies were disproved. For instance, as the study showed, during the years 1864 - 1890, representatives of the nobility dominated the capital Zemstvos, which comprised 70-80% of the total number of deputies. The composition of the Perm provincial Zemstvo assembly was not so uniform. The largest groups in the Perm Zemstvo were merchants, peasants and officials, and the predominance of a particular group was not constant, but alternated between 1870 and 1890. In the Perm provincial zemstvo, contrary to the statements by B.B. Veselovsky (Veselovsky B.B., 1911), there was no predominance of representatives from the peasant estate and the number of peasants in this period did not exceed the number of representatives of other social strata.

A number of the data obtained cast doubt on the opinion that had taken root in Zemstvo historiography about the ever-deepening crisis in the Zemstvo in the 1870s-1880s, which was associated with low attendance. It was shown that the regularity of visits by certain deputies was almost the same on average. An analysis of the social characteristics of these deputies allows us to talk about the formation of a "professional" stratum. Some of the results were obtained for the first time, for example, data on the impact of the deputy's experience, age, and educational characteristics, as well as a number of competencies on the possibility and likelihood of his being elected to the Zemstvo. In addition, a comparison of the socio-cultural image of the deputies of the provincial Zemstvo assemblies of the provinces under consideration allowed for identification of their common and special features. Thus, the analysis of the database allowed finding of new arguments for proving a number of stipulations on the history of the Zemstvos existing in historiography, questioning some established points of view related to the social structure of provincial Zemstvo assemblies, as well as introducing new knowledge with a higher level evidence base.

4.2 Information system "Zemstvo deputies"

As a result of the work on the database and its analysis, new research questions emerged, in particular relating to the ways that the sociocultural characteristics of the deputies influenced the activities, and assessment the interdependence between the deputies' image and activity. Implementation and transformation of the previous local database managed by MS Access was not a viable option for a number of reasons, and the database was only partially used as a structural and substantial basis for filling the new information resource.

The database "Zemstvo Deputies" of the newly designed information system "Zemstvo Self-Government in Russia" (Zemstvo self-government.., 2019) has become part of an information resource available online. Functionally, the structure of database was expanded by adding related sociocultural characteristics (for example, fields about nationality, religion, place of permanent residence, occupation, and some others were introduced),

and a set of fields describing the deputies' activities was developed.

The reconstruction of the full range of activities was carried out on the basis of a study of the legislation on Zemstvo of the second half of the XIX century, but the journals of the provincial Zemstvo assemblies were the main sources for obtaining data.

The following fields are highlighted as the main fields for describing the activities of deputies:
• attendance of meetings (number of visits per session);
• appointment or election to the Zemstvo administrative position (chairman, secretary, member of the Zemstvo Authority Body);
• election to the Zemstvo representation in various non-Zemstvo institutions and organizations;
• election to Zemstvo commissions (temporary and permanent);
• the signing of documents;
• reading reports or other documents at meetings;
• presentations in meetings about commission reports;
• speaking at meetings on various issues;
• expressing a dissenting opinion (submitted as a text message, published in a specific section in journals); and
• absence in the meeting.

The characteristics of the deputies' activities are presented in quantitative data formats, which made it possible to carry out a correlation analysis of the relationship between the different characteristics of the socio-cultural image and activities.

In addition, in the structure of the information system in the description of each deputy, data on the thematic (quantitative and qualitative) variety of speeches is displayed. Presentation of data on the speeches of deputies is based on the study of the corpora of journals' texts, the creation and analysis of personal sub-corporas of speeches of deputies in meetings, as well as the creation of cognitive maps reflecting quantitative and qualitative information about speeches. Space diagrams are published on the personal page of each deputy in the project "History of the Zemstvo" (for ex. Personal page of Smyshlyaev…, 2019) and display information about the set of topics of the deputies' speeches in the meetings, allowing assessment of the priorities in the deputies' activities in the assemblies based on the distribution of their attention to certain aspects.

Currently, the system contains information about 265 deputies and data on socio-cultural characteristics and performance indicators. The smaller number of personalities compared to the previous database is explained by the study in the current project only of those deputies who were elected to Zemstvos in the first three years from its establishment in the region. However, it is assumed that in case of confirmation of the effectiveness of the chosen approach, the project can be continued and other personnel will be included in the system and their set of features as well.

The search module of the information system allows the

user to obtain complete lists of deputies of each province or district, as well as to explore deputies individually by specific characteristics of their socio-cultural image and activity.

The information system is developed on the MySQL DBMS and powered by CMS WordPress.

6. Discussion

The prosopographical database and information system allows the user to create and study collective portraits of groups of deputies, compare these collective images with images of deputy groups from different regions, and identify common and special features, so revealing information and knowledge which cannot be obtained by traditional methods. The project can be further developed by increasing the number of deputies, expanding the chronological framework, and adding other provinces of the Russian Empire to the project. However, the question arises of how much personal information about each individual deputy remains valuable and important as an independent set of features, and not as part of a large collective portrait? Are individual characteristics and identities obscured by taking a collective approach? The answer to these questions is obvious and complicated at the same time.

The unifying basis in the case of the information system about deputies is the participation of these individuals in the work of local self-government, the newly established Zemstvo, the forerunner of the Russian parliament. Consequently, the role of each deputy, his contribution to the activities of the Zemstvo can be considered as a general, to some extent impersonal work, or as an individual.

Can a Zemstvo case be regarded as an individual case? Could the role of one person or a small core of active participants dominate the general Zemstvo work, direct and define it? And how important is it for us to know in more detail about the image and activities of each individual deputy, if he actively participated, but he did not necessarily determine the course of development of the Zemstvo province? How many such important personalities are present in Zemstvos? To answer these questions, we can observe the set of features devoted to a deputy's activity. Additionally, it is possible to apply social network analysis approaches. Zemstvo assemblies as an object of research have a number of features that make it difficult to apply tried and tested methods of modelling legislatures (Porter M., 2007; Smetanin A.V., 2009). These features include a limited amount of information in the sources about the personal activity of each person, differences in the structure of the Journals of Zemstvo Assemblies, the lack of collection of signatures for draft decisions, and a fairly high level of the deputies' passivity. Building links in the network and determining the interaction between deputies were carried out on the basis of their direct interaction in the conference room. So, the support for the opinion of the previous speaker or the statement of the identical point of view in the framework of the same meeting was recorded as a single act of positive interaction. The dispute or the statement of fundamentally different points of view on the same issue was regarded in the framework of the methodology as an act of negative interaction. Social network modelling, building social and semantic networks of Zemstvo deputies, showed the fragmentation of the assemblies, determining the foundations of the formation of groups of deputies and the system of interconnections between deputies. As a result of the analysis, it was shown that in the Perm provincial assembly only 38% of deputies, and in Moscow 52%, were connected by a network. The journals of the Petersburg Zemstvo did not allow forming of a statistically significant basis for network analysis due to the specifics of the information displayed in them and the prevalence of a collective "they" or a neutral "was proposed" over an individualized display of information (for example, deputy N "said").

Network analysis data (Povroznik N.G., Smetanin A.V., 2018) poses the question of whether absenteeists and deputies who were present but did not actively express their position should be ignored and the main focus should be devoted to only the active core?

Indeed, network interrelationships are becoming increasingly important in contemporary biographical research (Arthur P.L., 2017) and not only because network analysis allows users to visualize the connections of individuals, but also because the different scale and different meanings of personalities in the studied network become apparent.

In this case, while ignoring part of the collective, the whole collective portrait will appear differently and reflect those who really worked, and not those who were elected. It is probably worthwhile to form collective portraits of individual groups according to the contribution of the participants. In any case, the research task is to study in detail each deputy, his sociocultural image and activity, and then determine his role, significance, and contribution to the common purpose. With this approach, deputies find themselves under the watchful historical "microscope", when the role, place, and value of each deputy becomes obvious, and the uniqueness of each person is not lost in the team. In these circumstances, the creation of digital biographies allows us to choose which approach is more revealing and appropriate. We do not impose any single point of view on the questions postured, but see a solution in modern digital technologies that provide opportunities for different data representations, both collective and individual.

Zemstvo has become to some extent an opportunity for deputies to express themselves. We cannot say for sure about the meaning and role of each deputy in the life of society at that time, but the real fact that they have been trusted by a large number of people in the form of being elected to self-governing bodies speaks about their influence, authority, and motivation to work. Historical sources and, first of all, Zemstvo documentation, contain unique data such as transcripts of the speeches of

deputies in the assembly, the diversity of their activities, which certainly provides important information not only for understanding the development of the Zemstvo in whole but also for personal activity. Unfortunately, there are not many sources about the diverse activities of personnel, alternative to Zemstvo documentation, and they are mainly represented by memoirs written by a few of the deputies. The particular importance of this project lies in finding out more about the major deputies, who did not leave other noticeable and significant documented traces in history, except for activities in the Zemstvo.

Also, a positive strength of the database and information system designed for this project is that in the future it may be applied to solving problems other than the tasks implemented in this study. The functional limitation of this database is that only a part of the life biography of the subjects is the focus of this study. At the same time, in aiming to produce a more complete, unlimited framework of certain chronology or subject matter, the digital biography of individuals remains relevant. In terms of future applications, researchers should look for points of contact between the created system and its compatibility with other projects, biographical encyclopedias or personal regional projects in order to enrich the information space with unique data. The creation of life stories and the development of digital storytelling can be promising, which has the potential to attract a wider, not only expert, audience, increase the social impact of such projects, and enhance their social significance. Despite the fact that the system cannot at the moment become the basis of a complete biography of figures due to its fairly narrow research focus and limited sources for which it is impossible to completely reconstruct professional and any other activities of the majority of deputies outside the Zemstvo, yet it has the potential to become the basis for producing significant digital stories dedicated to Zemstvo history and personalities.

7. Conclusion

This project responded to the need to create a resource available online so that the collected, processed and published data received could be processed and analysed for research purposes. The possibilities of using the database and information system are not limited to solving the tasks of the current research project, namely, analyzing the socio-cultural characteristics and activities of deputies, creating collective portraits, modeling the socio-cultural and professional image of Zemstvo deputies of selected provinces. It was also essential that the available information about deputies as individuals who lived and worked in the past, contributed to the development of local self-government, and even to the course of history in Russia, be exposed as part of the digital public space, a part of the historical information environment.

8. Acknowledgements

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