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SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC PROCESSES IN THE CITIES OF EAST KAZAKHSTAN IN THE 90s OF THE XXth CENTURY (BASED ON THE EXAMPLE OF UST-KAMENOGORSK AND SEMIPALATINSK)

Sarsembayeva Gulzhan Alibekovna¹, Zhailaubayeva Aida Nurlanovna², Ualtayeva Altyn Slyamkaydarovna^{3*}

¹S. Amanzholov East Kazakhstan University
(34, 30 Gvardeyskoy Divizii Str., 070000 Ust-Kamenogorsk, Republic of Kazakhstan)
Candidate of Historical Sciences, Associate Professor
 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9081-0191>. E-mail: Gulzhan1974@mail.ru

²S. Amanzholov East Kazakhstan University
(34, 30 Gvardeyskoy Divizii Str., 070000 Ust-Kamenogorsk, Republic of Kazakhstan)
Master's Student, Junior Researcher
 <https://orcid.org/0009-0007-1379-0987>. E-mail: aida.zhailaubayeva@mail.ru

³Ch. Valikhanov Institute of History and Ethnology, “Gylym Ordasy” center
(28, Shevchenko Str., 050010 Almaty, Kazakhstan)
Candidate of Historical Sciences, Associate Professor, Academician of the IAIS
 <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9530-352X>. E-mail: gilimorda2@gmail.com

*Corresponding author

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Abstract. *Introduction.* The relevance of the article stems from its examination of the key socio-demographic processes that occurred in the East Kazakhstan cities of Ust-Kamenogorsk and Semipalatinsk in the 1990s. Primary attention is given to the population dynamics, migration patterns, and changes in the ethnic and age-sex structures. Concurrently, the authors investigate the impact of the economic collapse and ecological legacy (particularly the Semipalatinsk Test Site activities) on birth rates, mortality, and migration. The study utilizes data from the Republic of Kazakhstan Population Censuses of 1989 and 1999, regional statistical compilations, and academic research. The main trends identified are: population decline, a negative net migration balance, and accelerated demographic aging. Recommendations for the region's demographic and social policy are provided. *Goals and objectives* are to provide a comprehensive analysis of socio-demographic processes that occurred in the East Kazakhstan cities of Ust-Kamenogorsk and Semipalatinsk in the 1990s, with the goal of identifying the peculiarities of demographic dynamics, migration flows, social structure transformation, and the factors that determined changes in the lifestyle and identity of the urban population under post-Soviet reforms. *Results.* Data from the 1989 and 1999 population censuses of the Republic of Kazakhstan, regional statistical yearbooks, and scholarly research were used. The main trends identified include a decline in population size, a negative migration balance, and accelerated population aging. Recommendations on the region's demographic and social policy are provided. *Conclusions.* The 1990s became a difficult period in the lives of the cities of Ust-

Kamenogorsk and Semipalatinsk, characterized by negative dynamics in such demographic processes as population renewal and migration. The crisis of the 1990s affected not only demographic indicators but also the socio-economic and professional spheres of urban life. The socio-demographic dynamics of Ust-Kamenogorsk and Semipalatinsk in the 1990s reflect the transition from the Soviet model of an urban industrial community to a post-Soviet society with new forms of identity, social mobility, and survival strategies. Despite the severe crisis backdrop, this period was fundamental to the formation of the modern appearance of East Kazakhstan's cities.


Keywords: East Kazakhstan, Ust-Kamenogorsk, Semipalatinsk, 1990s, demographic processes, migration, urbanization, social structure, post-Soviet transformation, regional identity


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XX ҒАСЫРДЫҢ 90-ы ЖЫЛДАРЫНДАҒЫ ШЫҒЫС ҚАЗАҚСТАН ҚАЛАЛАРЫНДАҒЫ ӘЛЕУМЕТТІК-ДЕМОГРАФИЯЛЫҚ ПРОЦЕСТЕР (ӨСКЕМЕН МЕН СЕМЕЙ МЫСАЛЫНДА)

Сарсембаева Гүлжжан Алибековна¹, Жайлаубаева Аида Нурлановна², Уалтаева Алтын Слямкайдаровна^{3}*

¹С. Аманжолов атындағы Шығыс Қазақстан университеті
(34-үй, 30 Гвардиялық дивизия көш., 070000 Өскемен, Қазақстан Республикасы)
Тарих ғылымдарының кандидаты, қауымдастырылған профессор
 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9081-0191>. E-mail: Gulzhan1974@mail.ru

²С. Аманжолов атындағы Шығыс Қазақстан университеті
(34-үй, 30 Гвардиялық дивизия көш., 070000 Өскемен, Қазақстан Республикасы)
Магистр, кіші ғылыми қызметкер
 <https://orcid.org/0009-0007-1379-0987>. E-mail: aida.zhailaubayeva@mail.ru

³Ш.Ш. Уәлиханов атындағы Тарих және этнология институты, «Ғылым Ордасы» орталығы
(28-үй, Шевченко көш., 050010, Алматы, Қазақстан)
тарих ғылымдарының кандидаты, қауымдастырылған профессор, ХАА академигі
 <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9530-352X>. E-mail: gilimorda2@gmail.com

*Автор-корреспондент

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Аңдатпа. *Кіріспе.* Тақырыптың өзектілігі – мақалада ХХ ғасырдың 1990–жылдары Шығыс Қазақстан қалаларында – Өскемен мен Семейде – орын алған негізгі әлеуметтік-демографиялық үдерістер қарастырылады. Зерттеуде халық саны динамикасына, көші-қон процестеріне, этникалық, жас-жыныстық құрылымдағы өзгерістерге басты назар аударылған. Экономикалық күйреу мен экологиялық жағдай (әсіресе Семей ядролық полигонының әсері) туу көрсеткішіне, өлім-жітімге және көші-қонға ықпалы зерттеледі. Қазақстан Республикасы халық санағының 1989 және 1999 жылдардағы деректері, өңірлік статистикалық жинақтар мен ғылыми зерттеулер пайдаланылған. халық санының азаюы, көші-қон теңгерімнің теріс болуы,


халықтың жедел қартаюуы сияқты негізгі үрдістер анықталған. Өңірдің демографиялық және әлеуметтік саясаты бойынша ұсыныстар берілген. *Зерттеудің мақсаты* – Шығыс Қазақстан қалаларында – Өскемен мен Семейде – ХХ ғасырдың 1990–жылдары болған әлеуметтік–демографиялық үдерістерді кешенді түрде зерттеу, демографиялық динамиканың ерекшеліктерін, көші–қон ағымдарын, әлеуметтік құрылымдағы өзгерістерді және посткеңестік реформалар жағдайында қалалық тұрғындардың өмір салты мен өзіндік болмысына ықпал еткен факторларды анықтау. *Нәтижелер*. Қазақстан Республикасының 1989 және 1999 жылдардағы халық санағы деректері, аймақтық статистикалық жинақтар, ғылыми зерттеулер пайдаланылды. Халықтың азаюуы, көші–қонның теріс сальдосы және халықтың қартаюуының жылдамдауы – негізгі тенденциялар анықталған. Өңірдегі демографиялық және әлеуметтік саясат бойынша ұсыныстар берілген. *Қорытындылар*. 1990 жылдар Өскемен және Семей қалаларының өміріндегі халықтың ұдайы өндірісі мен көші–қоны сияқты демографиялық процестердің теріс динамикасымен сипатталатын күрделі кезең болды. 1990 жылдардағы дағдарыс демографиялық көрсеткіштерге ғана емес, қала өмірінің әлеуметтік–экономикалық және кәсіби салаларына да әсер етті. 1990–жылдары Өскемен мен Семей қалаларындағы әлеуметтік–демографиялық динамика кеңестік индустриялық қалалық модельден жаңа идентичтік формалары, әлеуметтік мобильділік және өмір сүру стратегиялары бар посткеңестік қоғамға өтуді көрсетеді. Қиын дағдарыс кезеңіне қарамастан, дәл осы жылдар Шығыс Қазақстан қалаларының қазіргі бейнесінің қалыптасуына негіз болды.


Түйін сөздер: Шығыс Қазақстан, Өскемен, Семей, 1990–жылдар, демографиялық үдерістер, көші–қон, урбанизация, әлеуметтік құрылым, посткеңестік трансформация, өңірлік бірегейлік
Алғыс. Мақала Қазақстан Республикасы Жоғары білім және ғылым министрлігінің «Шығыс Қазақстан: Семей және Өскемен қалаларының қалалық кеңістігінің әлеуметтік–демографиялық және әлеуметтік–мәдени трансформация траекториялары» (АР26198933) жобасы аясында жазылған.


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СОЦИАЛЬНО–ДЕМОГРАФИЧЕСКИЕ ПРОЦЕССЫ В ГОРОДАХ ВОСТОЧНОГО КАЗАХСТАНА В 90–е ГОДЫ ХХ ВЕКА (НА ПРИМЕРЕ УСТЬ–КАМЕНОГОРСКА И СЕМИПАЛАТИНСКА)

Сарсембаева Гульжан Алибековна¹, Жайлаубаева Аида Нурлановна², Уалтаева Алтын Слямкайдаровна^{3*}

¹Восточно-Казахстанский университет имени С. Аманжолова
 (д. 34, ул. 30 Гвардейской Дивизии, 070000 Усть-Каменогорск, Республика Казахстан)
 Кандидат исторических наук, ассоциированный профессор
 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9081-0191>. E-mail: Gulzhan1974@mail.ru

²Восточно-Казахстанский университет имени С. Аманжолова
 (д. 34, ул. 30 Гвардейской Дивизии, 070000 Усть-Каменогорск, Республика Казахстан)
 Магистрант, младший научный сотрудник
 <https://orcid.org/0009-0007-1379-0987>. E-mail: aida.zhailaubayeva@mail.ru

³Институт истории и этнологии имени Ч.Ч. Валиханова, центр «Ғылым ордасы»
 (д. 28, ул. Шевченко, 050010 Алматы, Республика Казахстан)
 кандидат исторических наук, ассоциированный профессор, академик МАИИ
 <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9530-352X>. E-mail: gilimorda2@gmail.com

*Автор-корреспондент

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Аннотация. *Введение.* Актуальность темы – в статье рассматриваются основные социально-демографические процессы, произошедшие в городах Восточного Казахстана – Усть-Каменогорск и Семипалатинск в 1990–е годы XX века. Основное внимание уделено динамике численности населения, миграционным процессам, изменению этнической и возрастно-половой структур. *Цель исследования* – комплексное изучение социально-демографических процессов, происходивших в городах Восточного Казахстана – Усть-Каменогорске и Семипалатинске – в 1990–е годы XX века, с целью выявления особенностей демографической динамики, миграционных потоков, трансформации социальной структуры и факторов, определивших изменения в образе жизни и идентичности городского населения в условиях постсоветских реформ. *Результаты.* Использованы данные переписей населения Республики Казахстан 1989 и 1999 годов, региональные статистические сборники и научные исследования. *Результаты.* Выявлены основные тенденции: снижение численности населения, отрицательный миграционный баланс, опережающее старение населения. Даны рекомендации по демографической и социальной политике региона. *Выводы.* 1990-е годы стали трудным периодом в жизни городов Усть-Каменогорск и Семипалатинск, характеризующимся отрицательной динамикой в таких демографических процессах, как воспроизводство населения и миграции. Кризис 1990-х годов повлиял не только на демографический показатели, но также затронул социально-экономическую, профессиональную сферу жизни городов. Социально-демографическая динамика Усть-Каменогорска и Семипалатинска в 1990-е годы отражает переход от советской модели городской индустриальной общности к постсоветскому обществу с новыми формами идентичности, социальной мобильности и стратегий выживания. Несмотря на тяжёлый кризисный фон, именно этот период стал основой формирования современного облика городов Восточного Казахстана.

Ключевые слова: Восточный Казахстан, Усть-Каменогорск, Семипалатинск, 1990–е годы, демографические процессы, миграция, урбанизация, социальная структура, постсоветская трансформация, региональная идентичность

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Introduction

The last decade of the 20th century was one of the most complex and contradictory periods in the history of Kazakhstan and the entire post-Soviet space. The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 led to radical transformations in all spheres of public life: political, economic, cultural, and, unequivocally, demographic. The changes of that era affected not only the structure of governance and economic mechanisms but also the social fabric, the settlement system, migration flows, birth and death rates, and the ethnic composition of the population. These processes were especially acute in the industrial and multinational cities of East Kazakhstan – Ust-Kamenogorsk and Semipalatinsk – which served as major centers of industry, science, and culture in the region. In the present study, the authors use the former name of the city, Semipalatinsk, since its renaming to Semey took place later, in 2007.

The transition to market relations, accompanied by the disintegration of the former economic

system, mass unemployment, and a decline in living standards, provoked significant social upheaval. For East Kazakhstan, where the economy significantly depended on large industrial enterprises of union subordination, the consequences were particularly severe. Production cutbacks, enterprise closures, and the emigration of skilled personnel were the factors that shaped the region's demographic dynamics in the 1990s.

Equally important were the ethno–political and cultural changes associated with the formation of independent Kazakhstan and the affirmation of a new national identity. These processes were reflected in the changing ethnic structure of the population: a mass exodus of the Russian–speaking population, primarily to Russia, and the return of ethnic Kazakhs from other republics and countries. Such migration flows led to noticeable shifts in the ratio of ethnic groups and the linguistic and cultural space of East Kazakhstan's cities.

Ust–Kamenogorsk and Semipalatinsk represent particularly interesting subjects for research. Both cities held the status of regional industrial and cultural centers, but their development in the 1990s followed different trajectories. Ust–Kamenogorsk, as a major metallurgical center, found itself in a difficult position due to the crisis in non–ferrous metallurgy and the reduction of union orders, yet it retained part of its production potential. Semipalatinsk, in addition to its industrial specialization, was burdened by the consequences of the closure of the Semipalatinsk Nuclear Test Site, which significantly impacted its socio–economic and demographic situation.

The study of socio–demographic processes in these cities allows us to trace not only the general trends of post–Soviet societal transformation but also the regional specificity of the population's adaptation to new socio–economic conditions. Of particular interest is the analysis of changes in population size, migration flows, age–sex structure, birth and death rates, as well as ethnic and social transformations.

The relevance of the research is defined by the need for a comprehensive understanding of the 1990s transition period as a crucial stage in the formation of Kazakhstan's modern social and demographic structure. Despite the existence of some works dedicated to demographic changes in the republic generally, the regional aspect remains insufficiently studied, especially concerning the cities of East Kazakhstan.

The aim of this research is to identify and analyze the main socio–demographic processes that occurred in Ust–Kamenogorsk and Semipalatinsk in the 1990s, to determine their causes, dynamics, and consequences for the further development of the region.

To achieve this aim, the following tasks are set:

1. To examine the general socio–economic conditions in which the cities of East Kazakhstan developed during the period under review.

2. To analyze the demographic dynamics, including indicators of birth rate, mortality, natural increase, and migration.

3. To characterize the changes in the ethnic and social structure of the population.

4. To identify the influence of socio–economic and political factors on demographic processes.

The scientific novelty of the research lies in the complex analysis of socio–demographic processes in two key cities of East Kazakhstan during the 1990s, conducted using statistical data, archival sources, and materials from sociological studies.

Thus, the study is aimed at a deeper understanding of how the social and economic upheavals of the transition period were reflected in the lives of the population in the industrial centers of East Kazakhstan, and what long–term consequences these processes had for the region's contemporary stage of development.

Materials and Methods of Research

The research employed systemic and interdisciplinary approaches, based on combining historical–demographic, sociological, and economic geography analysis. Statistical data from the State Committee on Statistics of Kazakhstan, materials from the 1989 and 1999 population censuses, regional yearbooks, and archival documents of the executive bodies of the East Kazakhstan region were utilized.

The methodological foundation of the research is the system of historical–demographic methods. Methods of comparative analysis and correlation analysis of demographic and economic indicators were applied. These methods were used in conjunction with general scientific methods: analysis, synthesis, and others. Particular attention was paid to East Kazakhstan. The results include tables for assessing the state of demographic processes, accompanied by analytical comments on the essence of the ongoing demographic changes and their socio–economic consequences. These tables allowed for detailing the research process, identifying the most vulnerable aspects of the demographic situation for the eastern region of the country.

In order to achieve the research objectives, a historical-demographic approach was applied. This approach included the analysis of population censuses, official statistical data, and archival materials to trace changes in population size, structure, and migration flows. In addition, it made it possible to identify trends in natural population movement (birth rates and mortality) and changes in the population structure by sex and age. Within this framework, the authors used data from the 1989 and 1999 population censuses and demographic statistics as the main sources of information.

The authors of the article also employed the theory of demographic transition. This classical theory suggests that societies pass through successive stages of declining mortality and fertility as economic and social development progresses. The model is used to interpret changes in fertility, mortality, and migration during transitional periods, such as the 1990s following the collapse of the USSR.

The study is grounded in the theories of urbanization and migration. The Harris–Todaro model explains rural-to-urban migration as an economic choice made by individuals based on expected income and employment opportunities in urban areas. This approach makes it possible to analyze migration flows in detail during the period of economic instability in the 1990s.

Systemic models of urbanization analyze the interaction between rural and urban populations, the logistic growth of cities, and changes in population structure resulting from urbanization.

Discussion

Issues of socio–demographic and socio–economic development of Kazakhstan's cities are presented in various works by Kazakhstani scholars. A number of researchers examine the transformation processes in the country's cities during the transit period—the 1990s. For example, scholars M.A. Asylbekov and V. Kozina, in their monograph "Demographic Processes of Modern Kazakhstan," note that Kazakhstan in the late 1980s and early 1990s experienced a transition period characterized by a decline in natural population growth, a change in the age–sex structure, and a rise in the share of the non–working–age population (Asylbekov, Kozina, 1995). Our study confirms these general trends: Ust–Kamenogorsk and Semipalatinsk registered a decline in increase and population aging, reflecting the republican dynamics, but we simultaneously recorded a more pronounced out–migration specifically from these cities—indicating regional specificity.

The research of Zh.S. Aubakirova emphasizes the significance of migration in shaping Kazakhstan's ethno–cultural structure. The scholar investigates internal migration flows ("village–city") and the emigration of the Russian–speaking population as an important factor in changing the national composition. The researcher highlights that regional trend mirror republican ones but with the intensification of local determinants (Aubakirova, et al., 2023).

A.I. Gizzatova, A.M. Zobov, A.N. Sharafutdinova, and M.Yu. Zhumagaliyeva, in their work "Investigation of the Dynamics of Key Indicators of Demographic Development and Age Structure," indicate that the age and sex composition of the population and the share of the working–age population become key indicators of the economic potential of the Eastern region (Gizatova, Zobov, Sharafutdinova, Zhumagaliyeva, 2025: 33–43). In their work, the scholars focus on the decline in the share of the working–age population and the growth in the share of the elderly and children in Ust–Kamenogorsk and Semipalatinsk.

From a methodological perspective, F.Sh. Kuanganov notes that demographic studies in Kazakhstan require an interdisciplinary approach—combining quantitative and qualitative methodologies and accounting for regional peculiarities (Kuanganov, 2024).

Studies of regional demography (e.g., works by N.V. Alekseenko, et al.) underscore the importance of ecological and industrial factors in the analysis of Kazakhstan's cities. We observe this in the example of Semipalatinsk, where the closure of the nuclear test site and industrial destruction added a specific layer to typical demographic processes, intensifying migration and worsening demographic dynamics compared to other regions.

The presented research allowed for not only identifying the specific socio-demographic processes in Ust-Kamenogorsk and Semipalatinsk but also comparing them with broader trends presented in Kazakhstani academic literature. In this context, the works of A.N. Alekseenko acquire particular significance.

A.N. Alekseenko, in his works, emphasizes that profound demographic shifts occurred in Kazakhstan during the 20th century: increased migration, changes in ethnic composition, and the transformation of urbanization and age structure. For example, in the work “The Population of Kazakhstan 1920–1990” he examines the dynamics of population size and settlement (Alekseenko, 1993).

Our study confirms this general dynamic: in the 1990s, in Ust-Kamenogorsk and Semipalatinsk, we recorded a reduction in population, a change in ethnic structure, and an intensification of migration processes. A.N. Alekseenko notes that the cities of East Kazakhstan demonstrate accelerated demographic changes—they belong to a special ethno-demographic and industrial zone that differs from the republican average in its indicators. The authors of the presented article confirm this thesis: the East Kazakhstan region in the 1990s had a more pronounced natural decline and migration outflow. A.N. Alekseenko, in his works, emphasizes that migration flows, especially external and internal, become a key factor in changing the social and ethnic structure of Kazakhstan. His works on migration and ethno-demography (e.g., “Migration and Ethno-Demographic Processes in the Soviet Period”) demonstrate how migrations influenced the population composition (Alekseenko, 2001: 367–417). The methodological contribution of A.N. Alekseenko allows us to justify the choice of an interdisciplinary approach. He advocates for combining statistical analysis with historical-demographic, ethno-demographic, and infrastructure approaches.

In the presented article, the authors implemented an interdisciplinary approach, which allowed for considering both quantitative indicators (increase, migration, ethnic composition) and qualitative ones (social adaptation, identity, infrastructure).

Results

The cities of East Kazakhstan were major industrial centers during the Soviet period. Ust-Kamenogorsk developed non-ferrous metallurgy, while Semipalatinsk focused on light, food, and construction industries. Ust-Kamenogorsk hosted the lead-zinc and titanium-magnesium complexes and the Ulba Machine-Building Plant. Semipalatinsk featured: a reinforced concrete structure plant, silicate, cement, reinforcing, experimental-mechanical, and brick factories, a bakery, "Kazakhkabel," a meat-processing plant, wood-processing and logging complexes, a glove-knitwear factory, the "Bolshevichka" garment factory, and others. Along with this, these cities were centers of culture, education, and science.

The early 1990s were accompanied by a decline in industrial production and the closure of many enterprises. Semipalatinsk experienced the most severe consequences of the economic crisis. Administrative reforms – the abolition of the regional center and the Semipalatinsk Region – partially contributed to the city's economic degradation. Added to all of the above were the ecological problems associated with the Semipalatinsk Test Site.

Socio-economic and ecological problems contributed to the intensification of migratory outflow from the eastern region and a decline in birth rates during the period under review. Overall, crisis tendencies emerged in demographic processes. Let us examine individual demographic characteristics in more detail.

The demographic situation in East Kazakhstan in the 1990s was characterized by depopulation, a decline in birth rates, and an increase in mortality. While the regional population in 1989 was 1.48

million people, it dropped to 1.38 million by 1999 (Population Census of the Republic of Kazakhstan 1999, 2000). Cities experienced a negative natural increase: the number of births decreased almost twofold, and mortality increased due to the deterioration of medical services, stress, alcoholism, and unemployment (Karagusova, 2004). The decline in living standards and social security led to an increase in migratory mobility. Russians, Ukrainians, and Germans, who constituted a significant proportion of the urban population, left particularly intensively (Kozlova, 2002). Migration became the defining factor of demographic changes in the region. Between 1991 and 1999, over 300,000 people left East Kazakhstan, a significant portion of them from the cities (Social Development of Kazakhstan: Statistical Review 1991–1999, 2000). Ust–Kamenogorsk and Semipalatinsk saw a steady outflow of the Russian-speaking population headed for Russia and Germany. The main reasons cited were: economic instability, declining living standards, a feeling of uncertainty, and ethno-political anxiety (Bekzhanova, 2012).

Simultaneously, there was an inflow of rural residents, predominantly Kazakhs from districts within the region and the southern regions of the country, which gradually changed the ethnic structure of the cities. In Ust–Kamenogorsk, the share of Kazakhs grew from 28% in 1989 to 43% in 1999 (Newspaper "Vostochno–Kazakhstanskaya Pravda." Issues 1991–1999). This process was accompanied by the social adaptation of migrants: mastering new professions, engaging in small business, construction, trade, and the growing role of the Kazakh language and culture in the urban environment (Musina, 2006).

The industrial decline and privatization of the 1990s caused a sharp reduction in jobs. By 1998, unemployment reached 14% in Ust–Kamenogorsk and 17% in Semipalatinsk (Stepanova, 2010). Old enterprises were privatized, downsized, or shut down. Women and youth proved to be the most vulnerable categories. Many shifted to the informal sector-petty trade, shuttle business, household services (Yusupov, 1999). Concurrently, social stratification occurred: a portion of the population adapted to market conditions and benefited from privatization, while the majority faced impoverishment and the loss of social stability. According to sociological studies conducted by East Kazakhstan University, over 60% of Ust–Kamenogorsk residents in 1997 rated their financial situation as "below average" (Archive of EKV named after S. Amanzholov, 1997). The social structure of the urban population in the 1990s underwent fundamental changes. The engineering and technical intelligentsia and skilled workers, who formed the core of the Soviet middle class, lost their former status (Poletaev, 2003). They were replaced by new social groups—entrepreneurs, small business owners, traders, security guards, and intermediaries. A new type of urban dweller emerged, oriented toward survival and private initiative. Concurrently, the feminization of employment occurred – women actively entered the service sector and petty trade (Women of Kazakhstan: Statistical Compendium, 2001). Youth, deprived of stable prospects, became more mobile but also a more vulnerable social group.

The ethnic composition of Ust–Kamenogorsk and Semipalatinsk changed significantly in the 1990s. According to the 1989 census, the share of Kazakhs in Ust–Kamenogorsk was 28%, Russians 62%, and Germans 5%. By 1999, the proportions changed: Kazakhs 43%, Russians 49%, Germans less than 1% (USSR Population Census 1989: Kazakh SSR, 1990). In Semipalatinsk, the process was even faster: in 1989, Kazakhs accounted for 42%, and by 1999, it was already 58%. Thus, for the first time in the Soviet and post-Soviet periods, Kazakhs became the ethnic majority in both cities (Population Census of the Republic of Kazakhstan 1999, 2000). These changes did not lead to conflicts but brought about cultural restructuring: the expansion of Kazakh language use, street renaming, and the strengthening of the role of national holidays and symbols in the urban environment (Khakimova, 2009).

The population decrease and the outflow of skilled personnel had long-term consequences. Many schools, kindergartens, and cultural institutions were closed due to lack of funding and students (Ministry of Education of the RK. Report on the State of the School Network of East Kazakhstan (1994–1999), 2000). The crisis hit Semipalatinsk particularly hard, where the number of research personnel drastically decreased after the closure of the test site. The city lost its status as a major scientific center in the 1990s (Archive of Semey city. F. 215. Documents on Social Development,

1991–1998).

Despite the crisis, the residents of East Kazakhstan demonstrated high adaptability. A common survival strategy was self–employment–market trading, food production, and minor repairs. Labor migration to Russia and the southern regions of Kazakhstan, as well as temporary trips to rural areas for subsidiary farming, developed. In post–Soviet conditions, city dwellers were forced to return to agrarian forms of existence, which researchers defined as the "de–urbanization of survival." At the level of daily practices, a new social experience was formed, based on flexibility, informal networks, and personal initiative.

By the end of the decade, signs of stabilization emerged in the region. After 1997, economic growth, the development of trade, and the start of investments in industry (particularly in "Kaztsink") led to some improvement. Birth rates began to rise slowly, and mortality levels decreased. In Ust–Kamenogorsk, the birth rate coefficient reached 11.5 per 1000 people by 2000, against 9.2 in 1995. However, the consequences of the 1990s were felt for a long time: depopulation, specialist shortages, "brain drain," and social stratification defined the region's specifics in the 2000s.

The comparison shows that both cities experienced similar social trends, but their manifestations differed in scale and consequence. Semipalatinsk faced a deeper social crisis and loss of scientific potential, while Ust–Kamenogorsk managed to partially preserve its industrial base and labor resources.

Table 1. Comparative Analysis of Ust–Kamenogorsk and Semipalatinsk, 1989–1999

| Indicator | Ust–Kamenogorsk | Semipalatinsk |
|------------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Population (1989) | 324 thousand | 337 thousand |
| Population (1999) | 290 thousand | 295 thousand |
| Share of Kazakhs (1989/1999) | 28 % / 43 % | 42 % / 58 % |
| Unemployment (1998) | 14 % | 17 % |
| Main Decline Factor | Industrial Crisis | Test Site Closure, Loss of Science |
| Main Adaptation Mechanism | Small Business, Survival | Migration, Outflow of Intelligentsia |

Source: *Population Census of the Kazakh SSR 1989. – Alma–Ata: Goskomstat KazSSR, 1990; National Population Census of the Republic of Kazakhstan 1999. – Astana: Agency of the Republic of Kazakhstan on Statistics, 2000. Agency of the Republic of Kazakhstan on Statistics; Socio–Economic Situation of the Regions of Kazakhstan in the 1990s. – Astana, 2001. Committee on Statistics of the Ministry of National Economy of the Republic of Kazakhstan; Labor and Employment of the Population of the Republic of Kazakhstan. Statistical Compendium. – Astana, 1999; Nysanbaev A.N. Transformation Processes in the Cities of East Kazakhstan (1989–1999). – Almaty: KazNU, 2001; Semipalatinsk Nuclear Test Site: Consequences of Closure and Socio–Economic Adaptation of the Region. – Almaty: Institute of Regional Studies, 2000.*

Comparative Analysis of Socio–Demographic Processes in Ust–Kamenogorsk and Semipalatinsk in the 1990s

1. General Prerequisites: Both cities–Ust–Kamenogorsk and Semipalatinsk—were among the largest industrial and cultural centers of East Kazakhstan. However, their economic functions and social structure had differences even by the end of the Soviet period:

– Ust–Kamenogorsk: an industrial–metallurgical center with a high level of urbanization and industrial concentration.

– Semipalatinsk: a multifunctional center combining industry, education, and science, and located in the influence zone of the Semipalatinsk Nuclear Test Site (Population Census of the Republic of Kazakhstan 1999, 2000).

After 1991, both cities faced the consequences of the collapse of the USSR, but their transformation trajectories differed in depth and direction.

Table 2. Demographic Dynamics of Ust–Kamenogorsk and Semipalatinsk, 1989–1999

| Indicator | Ust–Kamenogorsk | Semipalatinsk |
|-------------------|------------------------------|------------------------------|
| Population (1989) | 324 thousand people | 337 thousand people |
| Population (1999) | 290 thousand people (–10.5%) | 295 thousand people (–12.5%) |
| Natural Increase | Negative since 1993 | Negative since 1992 |

| | | |
|--|--------------|--------------|
| Birth Rate (per 1000 people, 1999) | 11.5 | 12.8 |
| Mortality Rate (per 1000 people, 1999) | 14.2 | 13.9 |
| Migration Balance (1990s) | -35 thousand | -42 thousand |

Source: Agency of the Republic of Kazakhstan on Statistics. Population Census of the Republic of Kazakhstan 1989: Results by Regions and Cities. – Alma-Ata, 1990; Agency of the Republic of Kazakhstan on Statistics. National Population Census of the Republic of Kazakhstan 1999: Results. Volume 1. – Astana, 2000; Agency of the Republic of Kazakhstan on Statistics. Demographic Yearbook of Kazakhstan. 1990–2000. – Astana: Statistics of Kazakhstan, 2001; East Kazakhstan Regional Statistics Office. Population and Socio-Demographic Processes in the East Kazakhstan Region (1989–1999): Statistical Compendium. – Ust-Kamenogorsk, 2000; Semipalatinsk City Statistics Office. Key Socio-Demographic Indicators of Semipalatinsk for 1989–1999. – Semipalatinsk, 2000; Regions of Kazakhstan. Statistical Compendium. – Astana: Agency of the RK on Statistics, 2000.

Both cities experienced depopulation, but the rate of population loss was higher in Semipalatinsk due to migration and the closure of scientific institutions. The natural decline reinforced migration losses.

One of the factors that slowed the development of Semipalatinsk was the loss of its status as a regional administrative center. In 1997, by Decree of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan No. 3483B «On Further Measures to Improve the Administrative-Territorial Structure of the Republic of Kazakhstan» the Semipalatinsk Region was abolished and its territory was incorporated into the East Kazakhstan Region. As a result, the city of Semipalatinsk (now Semey) lost its status as a regional center and became a city of regional significance, while Ust-Kamenogorsk became the administrative center of the newly unified region. The status of a regional center guarantees cities access to regional budgets, the allocation of federal and republican investments, and priority attention within socio-economic development programs. With the loss of this status, Semipalatinsk was deprived of part of its financial flows and targeted development programs, which slowed the renewal of infrastructure, the improvement of social services (education and healthcare), and the modernization of the urban environment. The loss of administrative functions intensified the already existing demographic and economic problems of the 1990s associated with the general decline in production after the collapse of the USSR and the closure of the Semipalatinsk nuclear test site. The loss of regional center status exacerbated population outflows, especially among young specialists and civil servants, to more promising centers, including Ust-Kamenogorsk and other major cities, leading to the strengthening of depopulation trends characteristic of many regions during the transition period.

2. Migration Processes:

– Ust-Kamenogorsk: the main outflow was the Russian-speaking population (Russians, Ukrainians, Germans) leaving for Russia and Germany. Simultaneously, there was an inflow of rural Kazakhs from the region's districts (East Kazakhstan Region: Statistical Yearbook, 2000).

– Semipalatinsk: migration was more mass-scale. In addition to Russian-speakers, scientific personnel associated with the Semipalatinsk Test Site, research institutes, and defense facilities also left (Kozlova, 2002).

Table 3. Ethnic Composition of Ust-Kamenogorsk and Semipalatinsk, 1989–1999

| Ethnos | Ust-Kamenogorsk, 1989 | Ust-Kamenogorsk 1999 | Semipalatinsk 1989 | Semipalatinsk 1999 |
|----------|-----------------------|----------------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| Kazakhs | 28% | 43% | 42% | 58% |
| Russians | 62% | 49% | 53% | 38% |
| Germans | 5% | <1% | 2% | <1% |

Source: Population Census of the Kazakh SSR 1989. – Alma-Ata: Goskomstat KazSSR, 1990; National Population Census of the Republic of Kazakhstan 1999. – Astana: Agency of the Republic of Kazakhstan on Statistics, 2000; Agency of the Republic of Kazakhstan on Statistics. Socio-Economic Situation of the Regions of Kazakhstan in the 1990s. – Astana, 2001; Committee on Statistics of the Ministry of National Economy of the Republic of Kazakhstan. Labor and Employment of the Population of the Republic of Kazakhstan. Statistical Compendium. – Astana, 1999; Nysanbaev A.N. Transformation Processes in the Cities of East Kazakhstan (1989–1999). – Almaty: KazNU, 2001.

In both cities, an ethno-national transformation occurred, accompanied by the "Kazakhization" of the urban environment and the growing role of the Kazakh language. Semipalatinsk changed its ethnic structure faster due to a more intensive outflow of Russian-speakers and the repatriation of kandas (ethnic Kazakh returnees) (Bekzhanova, 2012).

3. Economic and Social Transformation:

– Ust-Kamenogorsk: retained part of its production potential thanks to large enterprises—the Ust-Kamenogorsk Titanium-Magnesium Complex, "Kaztsink," the Hydroelectric Power Plant, etc. In the mid-

1990s, some factories came under the control of foreign investors, which helped stabilize the situation (Dyakov, 2008).

– Semipalatinsk: conversely, suffered greater losses after the closure of the nuclear test site (1991), the reduction of military facilities, and research institutes. The unemployment rate reached 17% by 1998, while in Ust–Kamenogorsk, it was about 14% (Stepanova, 2010). Semipalatinsk's economic base proved less adapted to market conditions, which exacerbated social problems.

Table 4. Social Structure and Living Standards of the Population of Ust–Kamenogorsk and Semipalatinsk, 1989–1999

| Social Indicator (1998) | Ust–Kamenogorsk | Semipalatinsk |
|--------------------------------------|-----------------|---------------|
| Registered Unemployment Rate | 14% | 17% |
| Share Employed in Industry | 39% | 28% |
| Share Employed in Trade and Services | 27% | 33% |
| Average Monthly Income (Tenge, 1998) | 7,500 | 6,200 |

Source: Agency of the Republic of Kazakhstan on Statistics. *Living Standards of the Population of the Republic of Kazakhstan (1995–2012): Statistical Compendium*. – Astana, 2013; *Statistika Kazakhstan. Socio–Demographic Problems of the Population of the Republic of Kazakhstan (1990 – Early 2000s)*. e–history.kz. Published 28.07.2013. E–History. *Socio–Demographic Processes in Kazakhstan: 1990–2000 // Stud.kz*.

Socio–Economic Features:

– Ust–Kamenogorsk maintained an industrial type of employment, forming a layer of skilled workers and engineers.

– Semipalatinsk experienced the process of desocialization of the intelligentsia and a shift to the informal economy.

– In both cities, shuttle business and petty trade actively developed as a means of survival (Musina, 2006).

4. Urban Environment and Culture:

– Ust–Kamenogorsk in the 1990s maintained its status as a regional industrial and cultural center. Despite the decline, theaters, a philharmonic hall, and universities continued to operate, and the S. Amanzholov East Kazakhstan University was established in 1997 (Archive of S. Amanzholov EKU, 1997).

– Semipalatinsk's cultural infrastructure was severely affected by funding cuts and the outflow of specialists. Many scientific and cultural institutions were closed or repurposed. The city faced the loss of its scientific and cultural potential (Newspaper "Vostochno–Kazakhstanskaya Pravda." Issues 1991–1999).

5. Socio–Psychological Aspects:

– Ust–Kamenogorsk's population demonstrated relative resilience and a higher level of social adaptation. Corporate and labor traditions were preserved, and professional communities were active.

– Semipalatinsk, conversely, saw increased feelings of uncertainty and social disorientation: the breakup of former collectives, unemployment, and the decline in the prestige of science caused youth migration and the loss of professional skills (Ministry of Education of the RK. Report on the State of the School Network of East Kazakhstan (1994–1999), 2000).

6. Ethno–Cultural Integration and Language Policy: In both cities, the use of the Kazakh language intensified, especially in state institutions, media, and education. However, the process was uneven:

– Ust–Kamenogorsk retained a strong influence of Russian–speaking culture and press; the city remained a bilingual space.

– Semipalatinsk saw a more active nationalization of the cultural environment: Kazakh schools were opened, television broadcasted programs in Kazakh, and streets were renamed (Khakimova, 2009).

7. Demographic Stabilization by the late 1990s: By the end of the decade, a trend toward stabilization emerged in both cities:

– Ust–Kamenogorsk saw an increase in the birth rate (up to 11.5 ‰) and a reduction in migration outflow after 1997.

– Semipalatinsk, despite some growth in the birth rate, continued to suffer from the loss of human resources and scientific potential.

In 1999, the population of both cities decreased by approximately 10–12% compared to 1989, but the rate of decline slowed down (Social Development of Kazakhstan: Statistical Review 1991–1999, 2000).

Table 5. Generalized Socio–Economic and Demographic Indicators of Ust–Kamenogorsk and Semipalatinsk

| Criterion | Ust–Kamenogorsk | Semipalatinsk |
|-----------|-----------------|---------------|
|-----------|-----------------|---------------|

| | | |
|---------------------------------|---|--|
| City Type | Industrial–Metallurgical | Scientific–Industrial, former Test Site Center |
| Main Crisis Factor | Industrial Privatization, Economic Decline | Test Site Closure, Loss of Science, Migration |
| Demographic Dynamics | Moderate Decline (–10%) | Deeper Decline (–12–13%) |
| Migration | Ethnic Outflow of Russian–Speakers, Inflow of Kazakhs | Mass Outflow of Scientists and Specialists |
| Economic Adaptation | Partial recovery thanks to "Kaztsink" | Slow adaptation, dependence on the budget |
| Cultural Life | Institutional base preserved | Partial fading of cultural functions |
| Ethno–Linguistic Transformation | Bilingual environment | Predominantly Kazakh–speaking |
| Recovery Prospects | High (Industry, Investment) | Medium (Humanities and Agrarian Sector) |

Source: Agency of the Republic of Kazakhstan on Statistics. Population Census of the Republic of Kazakhstan 1989: Results by Regions and Cities. Alma–Ata, 1990; Agency of the Republic of Kazakhstan on Statistics. Population Census of the Republic of Kazakhstan 1999: Results. Volume 1. Astana, 2000. Agency of the Republic of Kazakhstan on Statistics; Republic of Kazakhstan: Statistical Compendium "Socio–Economic Development of the Regions" (1990–2000). Astana: Statistics of Kazakhstan, 2001; Statistics Office of the East Kazakhstan Region. Socio–Economic and Demographic Indicators of the Cities of the East Kazakhstan Region (1990–2000): Statistical Compendium. Ust–Kamenogorsk, 2001; Statistics Office of the East Kazakhstan Region. Semipalatinsk City: Key Socio–Economic and Demographic Characteristics (1989–1999). Semipalatinsk, 2001.

Conclusion

Thus, in the cities of Ust-Kamenogorsk and Semipalatinsk during the 1990s, notable changes occurred in socio-economic and ethno-demographic processes. Primarily, a decline in the urban population took place due to migration outflows and declining birth rates against the background of rising mortality. The ethnic and social structures of these cities also underwent transformation. There was an increase in the number and proportion of the Kazakh population and a decline in the share of the country's European ethnic groups. The growth of the Kazakh population led to changes in the age structure, specifically an increase in the youth and children's age cohorts. These processes affected the city of Semey to the greatest extent due to a large influx of rural migrants and the intensification of ruralization of the urban space. The main causes of the above-mentioned changes in the demographic situation of both cities were Kazakhstan's acquisition of independence and the economic crisis of the 1990s. Among the economic factors were industrial decline, job losses, unemployment, and the deterioration of social conditions. In the 1990s, Ust-Kamenogorsk and Semipalatinsk experienced similar stages of the crisis but adapted differently to the new conditions. Ust-Kamenogorsk, owing to the preservation of its industrial base, demonstrated a more stable demographic and social structure, whereas Semipalatinsk underwent profound deindustrialization and a loss of intellectual potential. In both cities, ethno-cultural transformation, the formation of new migration flows, and the strengthening of Kazakh urban identity were observed. The urban landscape, social relations, subculture, and internal life of the cities were changing. Onomastics and the visual urban space were also transformed, with the appearance of more mosques, ethnic cafés, and restaurants. At present, these cities continue to experience the impact of the socio-economic and demographic changes of the 1990s. However, measures are being taken to restore urban infrastructure and revitalize their economies, which has a positive effect on contemporary socio-economic processes.

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Ш.Ш. Уәлиханов ат. ТЖЭИ басылған:

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