

The collective identity of the Mari

This article presents the results of an investigation into the collective identity of the Mari people in the Mari El Republic (the Russian Federation), based on the Sign Theory of Identity (Ehala 2007, 2015) focusing on the phenomenon of the collective identity as a social sign. Parts of the Subjective vitality questionnaire and interview were used in collecting research data at fieldworks in 2013–2014 (Mari El, Russia). The analysis revealed that modern Maris have ethnic Mari and ethnic Russian national identities. The emergence of the Russian ethnic national identity is caused by a strengthening of a civic national identity due to the Russian language changing from a signal value to a core value. Absence of a clear distinction between these two identities, and a strong emotional attachment to the Russian language facilitate the process. A decrease in the use of the Mari language has an erosive effect on Mari ethnic identity. The results indicate that Mari collective identity is becoming gradually Russian-oriented.

Keywords: collective identity, core values, social sign, Mari language

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