

# Civic Consciousness in the Russian Youth Community



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**Abstract:** *The features of civic consciousness in the youth community as a structure of mental programs determining the civic practices of youth in modern Russian society are considered herein. The influence of Russian statehood and the dominant national-civic identity, youth policy, as well as emerging civil society institutions, on the formation of the civic consciousness of young Russian citizens and their civic participation in public life is revealed.*

**Keywords:** *civic consciousness, civic participation, mental programs, national-civic identity, civil society, youth policy, civic practices, civic activism, civic responsibility, volunteerism.*

## I. INTRODUCTION

According to researchers, youth, being today at the forefront of social innovation, acts as an active agent of social changes in society [1, 2]. At the same time, the risks of marginalization of youth and the growth of social deviations in the youth community have intensified in modern society. Such a social phenomenon as “childish adults” appeared due to the presence of a significant number of young people with a low level of civic consciousness, prone to infantilism and avoidance of social responsibility.

Young people in modern Russia are seen primarily as the “potential” of future social development and as the most vulnerable social and demographic group in need of social protection [3, 4]. Moreover, the older generation of Russians mostly treats youth as a passive and marginalized social group, not ready to make independent decisions and take social responsibility for their actions. “This, according to researchers, implies a special format for paternalistic attitudes towards young people on the part of elder ones, as well as the mentorship on the part of the authorities” [5: 265-267]. As a result, according to experts, Russian youth has still been simplistically “perceived as a problem affecting the social well-being of society, and the resources allocated to youth policy – as the losses to be minimized” [6: 26].

However, Russian youth is not only a future social resource, but also a social group able to make a significant

contribution to the social development of society [7-9]. Therefore, the idea of social support for Russian youth as the most vulnerable social and demographic group has almost exhausted itself by now. Today, Russian youth needs the creation of conditions for direct participation in social transformations and civic activities, the purpose of which is

to promote the common good and solve socially significant social problems, rather than a support.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Various aspects of civic consciousness in the youth community have already been considered in scientific, including foreign, literature, primarily in the context of civil society formation in Russia [10-13]. At the same time, in research practices, there are various ideas about civic consciousness in the youth community in Russia [14, 15]. Some of these ideas are based on the scientific terminology that has developed in the Western European socio-cultural context, where the notion dominates that civic consciousness is “a comprehensive, rather than just legal and political concept. On the one hand, civic consciousness implies that all male and female citizens should fully enjoy human rights and feel protected by a democratic society. On the other hand, civic consciousness also implies that everyone should get involved in the issues related to life in society and act throughout his or her life as an active and responsible citizen, respecting the rights of others” [16]. Other notions take into account the socio-cultural traditions in Russian society, in the framework of which special values and meanings are attributed to civic consciousness. In this regard, in research practices devoted to the study of civic consciousness in the Russian youth community, many approaches with their own disciplinary and paradigm specifics, treating civic consciousness primarily as a social institution, normative idea, or personal quality, have developed.

Considering civic activity as a feature of the democratization of Russian society, researchers pay attention to the low level of civic activity of the Russians, including among young people [17]. The attention of researchers is also focused on the processes of the formation of civic consciousness of youth [18], the value basis of its protest moods [19], the problems of implementation of the youth policy in Russia [5]. Recently, researchers have been particularly interested in the issues related to the institutionalization and development of the youth volunteer movement in modern Russian society [20]. However, the features of civic consciousness in the youth community in Russia have not been the subject of special scientific research.

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### III. PROPOSED METHODOLOGY

#### A. General description

When identifying the characteristics of civic consciousness in the youth community, a number of methodological difficulties arise due to the fact that the research practices associated with its study are based on different paradigm foundations within the framework of the dominant institutional-role structural-activity and personality-activity approaches [21]. In this regard, the scientific knowledge obtained in the study of civic consciousness among young people is fragmented, limited by the established paradigms. The desire for the scientific study of civic consciousness in the youth community as a holistic social reality involves the development of a multidimensional methodological construct of scientific research, within which civic consciousness can be instrumentally considered as the structure of mental programs of youth, determining their civic practices, and the civic practices themselves, representing various repertoires of civic youth participation in the solution of the problems that are socially significant for society.

#### B. Algorithm

Civic consciousness as a structure of mental programs includes, first, the ideas about civic consciousness (cognitive aspect); second, civic consciousness as a value (axiological aspect) and, third, civic consciousness as a setting (conative aspect). Civic consciousness as a structure of mental programs is characterized primarily by an active life position, social initiative, critical attitude to social reality, subjectivity and the desire of a young man to reveal his or her social potential. In this regard, civic consciousness in the youth community is a qualitative characteristic of a citizen who, having civil rights and freedoms, is socially competent and responsible in his or her civic activity, in contrast to the statist loyalty of a subject to whom rights and liberties are granted by the state.

Specific civic practices as various repertoires of civic participation of youth in society are individual or collective civic activities aimed at solving the problems of public interest. In this case, one should distinguish between formal civic practices initiated “from above” by various agents and informal “lower” civic practices that arise in the process of social communication as a result of youth self-organization.

### IV. RESULT ANALYSIS

The features of civic consciousness as a structure of mental programs that determine the youth civic practices in Russia are determined by the specifics of Russian society and national identity. Russian society is inherently state-organized. In the society, the normative and value space of which is set by the state, a special normative personality type, called the “political person”, has been formed. The mental program of this person includes the desire to transfer the solution of all his or her problems, including the private ones, to the political sphere, and therefore statist-paternalistic ideas, values and attitudes dominate in it [22].

Moreover, civic consciousness as a structure of the mental program of youth in Russian society is associated with the features of the dominant state-civic identity. The basis of this identity is the state consciousness of Russians, which

generates a civic consciousness that is official, faithful, and loyal to the state. In this regard, the civic consciousness of Russians, including young people, lacks the civic consciousness based on feelings of community with the citizens of the country, solidarity with them, as well as the ideas about social responsibility for the fate and lives of others, and the willingness to participate actively and competently in the affairs of society and the state [23]. At the same time, under the conditions of a civil society emerging in Russia, the conditions for the emergence of a national-civic identity based on civic identity and orienting young people to civic activism and social responsibility have also arisen [21].

A sociological analysis and interpretation of the results of a sociological study aimed at identifying the cognitive, axiological and participative aspects of civic consciousness in the mental programs of the Russian youth community make it possible to draw a number of conclusions. First, civic consciousness as a representation in the mental programs of youth is associated, on the one hand, with “understanding of their own civil rights” (52.6%) and “respect for the rights and freedoms of other citizens” (41.8%), on the other hand – with “carrying out their own civil duties before society and the state” (48.3%). However, only 29.5% of young people understand civic consciousness as “participation in the solution of economic, social and political problems, socially significant for the country”. When answering the question of what is included in the circle of civic responsibilities, the majority of young people surveyed noted that the main duty of a citizen was to comply with laws (57.1%). Among the main civic qualities, “love for one’s country” was also noted (37.5%), as well as “readiness to protect it from enemies” (44.8%). The moral and altruistic aspect, expressed in the “awareness of moral obligations to society and the state” (21.0%) plays a certain role in the understanding of civic consciousness by the youth community. Second, civic consciousness as a value in the mental programs of youth is expressed in such preferences as “to have the rights and duties of a Russian citizen” (51.7%), “the opportunity to live in Russia” (41.4%), “to be a patriot of Russia” (25.6%), “to feel involved in the history and culture of the country” (21.0%), “to respect the representatives of different peoples of Russia, their culture and traditions” (20.4%). However, only 15.5% of young people believe that civic consciousness should manifest itself in “contributing to the development of civil society and democracy in Russia”. Third, civic consciousness as a setting in the mental programs of youth is mainly associated with “compliance with the laws” (57.1%). At the same time, only a small part of young people demonstrate their readiness to participate in the elections (21.5%), defend their state (16.7%), uphold civil rights (15.8%), and be responsible for the fate of the country (15.5%), work for the good of the country and the people (13.3%), critically perceive social reality in order to improve it (9.3%) [24].

Thus, the civic consciousness of Russian youth is still weakly “linked” to the values of civil society.

However, according to the results of sociological studies, when compared to other age groups, most people, who perceive positively the civic values, related to the protection of civil rights and freedoms, demonstrate a critical attitude toward social reality and political management practices, noting the civic importance of the opposition to the arbitrariness of the authorities and the importance of active participation in public life, upholding personal interests and manifestations of civil initiative, belong to the youth.

Civic practices in the youth environment as various repertoires of civic participation of youth in the solution of socially significant social problems are caused not only by its mental programs, but also by the peculiarities of the formation of civil society in Russia. These features, determining the institutional environment of youth civil practices, are related to the fact that the formation of civil society in Russia occurs, on the one hand, “from above” as a result of the state’s activities, and, on the other hand, “from below” based on civic initiatives. At the same time, the authorities consider civil society as a “mediator” between the state and various social groups, which makes it possible to identify social problems and public reactions to managerial decisions. In this regard, the authorities, on the one hand, strive to control society with the help of “soft power”, and on the other hand, they tend to transmit the managerial impulses from top to bottom via civil society institutions.

The formation of Russian civil society “from below” has another focus due to the features of the functioning of civil associations in Russia, as well as the specifics of the mass consciousness of Russians. In Russian society there are various civic associations; the social space of civic initiatives is expanding. However, civic associations' activities are constantly monitored by the state authorities, and many of the civic initiatives are subject to political or economic bargaining. In this regard, most civic associations seek dialogue with the state authorities, hoping to organize feedback channels and showing a certain state loyalty in exchange for economic or other social preferences. Therefore, many civic associations in practice turn out to have only formal independence, and the authorities are trying to use them primarily for the legitimization of managerial decisions. In turn, Russian civil society institutions have only negligible impact on public policy. In this regard, the researchers conclude that in Russian society, “public initiatives are developing in parallel with the efforts of the state structures” [21].

Civil practices in the youth community are also determined by the peculiarities of the state youth policy, which in modern Russia is mainly of a state-patriotic nature. Therefore, the most important trend in this policy is the development of the priority of national-state identity in the youth community, as well as fostering a sense of pride for the Fatherland [25]. The strategy of Russian state youth policy is also doctrinally focused on “creation of the conditions for the formation of a harmonious, constantly improving, erudite, competitive, caring person with a strong moral core, capable of adapting to changing conditions and receptive to new creative ideas”. The key task in this case is “personal development of patriotic youth with independent thinking, with a creative worldview, professional knowledge, a high culture, including the culture of international communication, responsibility

and the ability to make independent decisions aimed at improving the welfare of the country, people and own family” [25].

However, in terms of the evaluation of the practical effectiveness of the state youth policy, researchers note that the measures taken by the state authorities and public organizations in regard to young people often die on the vine. This is due to the fact that the youth policy in Russia has not yet become a priority in the activities of the state authorities, and therefore its financing is carried out on a residual basis, and most decisions and various programs are declarative or recommendatory in nature. Moreover, the social infrastructure of the youth policy in Russian society is still underdeveloped, which complicates the self-actualization of youth in regional and municipal communities. A drawback of Russian youth policy is also its focus not on the youth of the country as a whole, but only on its individual social groups [5].

In this regard, experts emphasize that the vital problems of Russian youth have not yet occupied their proper place in the current agenda of the Russian government. According to the researchers, “as a result, all categories of youth are at a disadvantage: traditionally and modernly oriented, opposition-minded and trusting in the authorities. This seems to have most dramatic consequences for the relations between youth and the authorities” [26].

The state authorities that implement the state youth policy, for the most part, rely on their own ideas about youth, which, according to researchers, are often erroneous. As a result, the legal framework of the state youth policy is compiled without regard to the interests of young people, and the implementation of the state programs does not inspire confidence and desire to join them among young people. In addition, much of what is being done in this area is being done only formally [5]. Moreover, Russian youth policy is still poorly focused on the involvement of young people in the solution of the problems concerning youth themselves at the regional and municipal levels. This is due to the fact that Russia “lacks effective youth organizations and independent leaders who are not only able to express the interests of youth, but also can resist the temptations of the opening doors of the “elevator”” [26].

In general, the youth policy in Russia is primarily aimed at encouraging the civic-patriotic activity of youth. Therefore, generally, the civil-patriotic practices, demonstrating traditional Russian loyalty to the state, are dominant in the youth community. Such practices in the youth community are mainly formal in nature, since they are organized by the state authorities, political parties or public organizations. At the same time, the informal civil-patriotic practices, initiated from below as part of the “Russian exploratory movement”, as well as the activities of various historical clubs, are popular with young people.

Recently, in the Russian youth policy, there has been an increase in the civic component aimed at creating the institutional conditions for the social self-actualization of youth and the formation of a civic consciousness in the youth community related to the young people’s pursuit of active social actions aimed at the welfare of the Fatherland and social environment.

To some extent, this is due to the growth of the participation of young people in protest rallies, arranged by various organizations, including the opposition-leaning ones, observed recently in Russian society. In such circumstances, the state authorities strive, on the one hand, to take control over the young generation, preventing it from joining the opposition forces, and, on the other hand, they strive to expand the cooperation with nonprofit organizations of social orientation, involving youth in constructive civic practices.

In this regard, given the experience of foreign countries [27, 28], Russian government began to pay special attention to the development of youth volunteerism, which means “voluntary socially oriented and socially useful activities of young citizens, carried out by work performance, service rendering without appropriate monetary or material compensation (except for the cases of possible reimbursement of the expenses associated with the implementation of voluntary (volunteer) activity)” [25]. In the adopted “Concept for the Development of Volunteerism until 2025”, the promotion of volunteer activities in Russia is identified as one of the priority areas of the state youth policy [22].

Currently, about 15% of Russian citizens, a significant part of which are young people, take part in various volunteer projects. Until recently, most of the volunteer projects in Russia were funded by the grants from the RF President and partly at the expense of various nonprofit organizations, involving almost a tenth of Russian youth in volunteering [29]. The state, expanding the cooperation with nonprofit organizations in terms of strengthening the third sector of civil society and creating the conditions for the development of volunteerism, currently allows legislatively nonprofit organizations of a social orientation to participate in the competitions for funding from regional budgets for the implementation of their volunteer projects.

Simultaneously with the development of formal volunteer practices and the participation of youth in the work of various charitable foundations in modern Russian society, the “grass-roots” voluntary movement, which has no clear organizational foundations, is becoming increasingly widespread. This movement includes various communities of civic activists supporting specially created groups on social networks that are engaged in the distribution of social activity of the population in order to help people in need.

Youth civic practices are also associated with the participation of young people in environmental and human rights organizations. However, in this regard, it should be noted that recently in Russian society, a reduction in the number of such organizations has been noted, since they were financed from abroad to a large extent. Moreover, given the extremely low level of environmental awareness of the most part of the population, as well as the representatives of the administrative authorities, environmental organizations often experience pressure from these representatives, expressing the interests of certain social groups, and have no support from the general public and the citizens. The same applies to the activities of human rights organizations that are not affiliated with state authorities, which, due to the specifics of their financing, were forced to declare themselves to be “foreign agents”.

Russian youth also takes part in various situational civic actions of environmental, human rights and anti-corruption orientations. These actions, both legal and unauthorized by the authorities, are mainly of a protest nature, in which a small number of young people take part. However, recently, especially in Moscow and in a number of other large Russian cities, there has been an increase in youth protest activity. This is due to the fact that in the context of a sense of social injustice in Russian society, which is a kind of sensitive point to young Russians, their distrust of the authorities has begun to increase, as well as their willingness to protest (about 13%), accompanied by a high risk attitude and the desire to defend their beliefs to the end.

According to the opinion polls, the main motives for youth to participate in civic practices, particularly in the volunteer movement, along with the altruistic movement (39% of respondents), are such motives as the expansion of social contacts (69%), career motives (59%), as well as protection of their own rights and implementation of their own ideas (30%) [30]. Moreover, the results of sociological studies show that the level of civic activity of young people is significantly higher than the level of civic activity of other age groups in Russian society. For example, practically, no more than 1% of Russians show civic activity, while 13% of young people in one form or another take part in local civic initiatives related to the desire to help people who find themselves in a difficult life situation or improve their living environment, 8% – in environmental or charitable organizations, 7.5% – in the activities of patriotic organizations and national-cultural associations, 3.1% – participate in youth associations. However, the majority of young people (86.2%) do not participate in the work of public organizations and do not show civic initiatives.

The low level of civic activity of Russian youth is caused not only by the statist-paternalistic content of the mental programs of Russians and the insufficient development of civil society institutions in the country, but also by the lack of social capital and civic competence required for active civic participation in various spheres of public life. The lack of social capital and civic competence among young people is largely due to the situation in the Russian education system, which focuses mainly on training the specialists capable of adaptation to the market environment, rather than professionals with a high level of civic consciousness and social responsibility.

The low level of civic engagement of Russian youth is also due to the lack of social trust in modern Russian society, the social disunity of the citizens and their lack of willingness to participate in the joint solution of social problems at the grassroots level, the strongly held views of the population about the impossibility of influencing the social situation and the process of political decision-making, and the fixation of a significant part of it on the issues related to the search for the funds to ensure an acceptable level of life. At the same time, young people explain the low level of their own civic activity, primarily, by “the lack of faith in the effectiveness of joint civic actions” (20.8%), as well as the “lack of time (20.8%) and desire” (16.7%) [30].

## V. CONCLUSION

Within the multidimensional methodological construct of the scientific research, civic consciousness in the youth community can be considered, on the one hand, as the structure of mental programs, determining the youth civic practices, and on the other hand, as the civic practices themselves, representing various repertoires of youth civic participation in solution of socially significant problems.

The peculiarities of the civic consciousness of Russian youth are largely due to the statist-paternalistic content of their mental programs, as well as the dominance of national-state identity in modern Russian society, including among young people. Therefore, civic consciousness as a structure of mental programs of Russian youth is still weakly “linked” to the values of civil society.

At the same time, according to the results of sociological studies, the most part of the youth community, in comparison with other age groups, perceives positively the civic values related to the protection of civil rights and freedoms, demonstrates a critical attitude toward social reality and management practices, emphasizing the importance of opposing the arbitrariness of the authorities and the importance of active participation in social life, upholding personal interests and the manifestation of civic initiatives.

Civil practices in the youth community related to the participation of young people in the solution of socially significant problems are caused not only by their mental programs, but also by the peculiarities of the formation of civil society in Russia “from above” by the state and “from below” on the basis of civic initiatives. Civil practices in the youth community are also determined by the peculiarities of the Russian state youth policy, which is mainly of a state-patriotic nature.

In this regard, in modern Russian society, three types of civic consciousness can be distinguished among young people: 1) official, loyal civic consciousness, characteristic of a statist-paternalistic personality; 2) socially active, responsible civic consciousness, characteristic of a civic personality, moral in its social significance; 3) protest, rebellious civic consciousness, characteristic of a critical, nonconformist personality.

Recently, in the state youth policy, much attention has been paid to the civic and social activity of Russian youth, primarily to its participation in volunteerism. This creates favorable conditions for the development of civic consciousness in the youth community being socially active, competent, responsible for their actions and deeds.

The results of sociological studies show that the main motives for youth participation in the civic practices are such motives as the expansion of social contacts (69%), career motives (59%), altruistic motives (39%), as well as protection of their own rights and implementation of their own ideas (30%).

The results of sociological studies also indicate that 13% of young people in one form or another take part in local civic initiatives related to the desire to help people or to improve their living environment, about 8% participate in the activities of charitable or environmental organizations, over 7% take part in the activities of patriotic organizations and national-cultural associations, 3% – in the work of youth

associations. However, most young people (over 80%) show no civic activity.

The low level of civic activity of Russian youth is not only due to the statist-paternalistic specifics of its mental programs and the underdevelopment of Russian civil society, but also due to the social fragmentation of young Russians, their lack of willingness to participate in a joint solution of the social problems at the grassroots level, and their perceptions of the impossibility of influencing on the social situation and the political decision-making process. At the same time, young people explain the low level of their own civic activity, primarily, by “the lack of faith in the effectiveness of joint civic actions” (20.8%), as well as by the “lack of time (20.8%) and desire” (16.7%).

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