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Socio-cultural characteristics of the modern youth: some results of the pilot study



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Abstract: The research into the problems of development of the youth as a specific social group that has special needs in socio-cultural terms attracts researchers' attention in different branches of science (psychology, pedagogy, economy, sociology, etc.). This interest is caused by the fact that the youth stage (especially early youth) involves formation of special world perception, understanding of socio-legal, political and cultural events in the state, which becomes a basis for the development of a full-scale picture of the world at the later stages of maturation. The understanding of the mechanisms for initiating young people to socio-cultural values is an important aspect of the strategic plans elaboration in order to develop the country and the region.

The article is devoted to the study of social and cultural characteristics of young generation in the foreign and domestic science. It shows that each stage of the youth problems study has been characterized by different research methods and tools. The image of the youth in modern Russia also has a number of features, presented in the article.

The socio-cultural values of young people in the senior school age are identified in the “pilot” survey with the elements of formal interviews conducted among children attending the Research-and-Educational Center at ISEDT RAS. The article discloses further prospects of this research.

Key words: young people, socio-cultural values, intergenerational relation, political beliefs, socio-professional plans.

Modern Russian society is undergoing profound transformations in all spheres of life, which significantly affect ideological and socio-cultural aspects of identity formation. In conditions of economic and geopolitical instability young generation is most vulnerable. It is a specific social community, which is still developing, forming the value system and professional and personal way of life. In the new socio-economic environment young people experience significant changes in their interests, attitudes, values; the social goals largely determine the future of the society. Today's youth, the first generation of the post-Soviet time, will have to solve many important problems in various spheres of life. These solutions will influence the country's

development and the life of future generations. In this regard, it is highly important to study value orientations, life priorities and professional preferences of today's youth.

Socio-cultural values act as cultural standards and norms of life in the society, helping people define goodness and beauty [1, pp. 238-242]. In science there are three types of socio-cultural values: decretal, informal and protest (*tab. 1*).

The formation of socio-cultural values occurs in the following layers of social consciousness: the attitude towards culture, religion, history; information culture; political consciousness; the idea about themselves as members of the society; professional self-determination.

Table 1. Classification of socio-cultural values of public life

Type	Contents	Example
1. Decretal	- values that are structurally-defined and controlled by the authorities	- ideological-political attitudes
2. Informal	- values which are directly controlled by the authorities	- moral prescriptions; - cultural and ethnic traditions - professional self-determination
3. Protest	- values that contradict the position of power, but do not interact with it in an open political confrontation	- opposition views - political position

Compiled by: Lokova M.Yu. *Strukturnaya transformatsiya tsennostnykh orientatsii molodezhi v moderniziruyushchetsya rossiiskom sotsiume (sotsial'no-filosofskii aspekt): dissertatsiya na soiskanie uchenoi stepeni kandidata filosofskikh nauk* [Structural Transformation of Value Orientations of Young People in the Modernizing Russian Society (Socio-Philosophical Aspect): Ph.D. in Philosophy Dissertation]. Moscow: Moskovskii gumanitarnyi universitet, 2007, p. 10.

The comparison of decretal and informal values indicates a conflict between individuals, small and large groups due to contrasting interests [6, p. 10].

The study of the youth problems is new neither in foreign nor domestic science. The American sociologist G. Stanley Hall was the first to mention about the youth's problems in his book "Adolescence" (1904) [22]. The author gave a theoretical understanding of the age group of young people as carriers of the psychophysical properties of adolescence. The adherents of Stanley Hall (E. Spranger, R. Benedict, B. Malinowski and others) considered the youth as a group with special cultural properties and functions [7, p. 80].

In 1943 K. Mannheim, a German sociologist, published the book "Diagnosis of our time" where the youth is considered as an object and subject of the process of continuity and the change of generations. According to Mannheim, young people play a great role in shaping national policy. It is young people who can implement state reforms [9, p. 105].

In the 1960–70s the new direction appeared in the Western science. The researchers used sociological methods to study the youth's problems. It was encouraged by the unprecedented peak of the social activity of young people in Europe and America, the emergence of youth subcultures and extreme left political groups [15, p. 109].

Around the same time, the sociology of the youth began to develop in the USSR.

In the Soviet period the interests and needs, values and social expectations of young people were analyzed in the works of the researchers, such as N.M. Blinov,

B.A. Grushin, S.N. Ikonnikova, I. M. Il'inskii, A.I. Kovaleva, I.S. Kon, V.F. Levicheva, V.T. Lisovskii, M.N. Rutkevich, M.Kh. Titma, V.N. Shubkin.

However, S.V. Polutin emphasized that the first opinion polls conducted among young people in Soviet Russia revealed "exaggeratedly optimistic results, they represented the younger generation as educated according to the ideological dogma of people" [15, p. 109].

At the end of the 20th – the beginning of the 21st century people paid much attention to the structural mutual influence of two transformations – in the Russian society, in general, and among young people, in particular. Many youths' problems were in focus than, such as deviant behavior, drug addiction, alcoholism among young people, socialization of children with special needs, etc.

The national survey conducted by the Russian Independent Institute for the Study of Social and National Problems at the end of 2001 was one of the first such studies. The survey included 833 people. All the respondents were divided into two groups: young people (aged 16–30) and "paternal generation" (aged 41–50) in order to identify intergenerational relation in socio-cultural development of the Russians.

Thus, the research resulted in two key statements: 1) a marked increase in the youth's demands to the older generation and 2) growing needs of young people in the "state changes" associated with the desire to have their own business and become rich and famous. At the same time, the survey showed that these trends were accompanied

with the increased skepticism of young people regarding the implementation of their goals in the socio-professional sphere [17, p. 25].

In 2006 the Swiss Academy for Development (SAD) in cooperation with the Moscow School of Social and Economic Sciences (MSSES) and Levada-Center conducted a national survey of young people aged 15–29. The study included a wide range of social, economic and political aspects of everyday life of the Russian youth: their living conditions, standards and values, samples life orientations and plans for the future. The survey, in particular, showed that young people were skeptical about individual freedoms, fight against corruption and performance of state institutions [3, p. 21].

In 2008 the Laboratory for Political Research at the National Research University Higher School of Economics carried out a sociological survey on the topic “Political consciousness of adolescents: successful students vs street children”. Three hundred teenagers aged 13–18 took part in it.

The following groups were interviewed:

- students attending upper secondary schools in different administrative districts of Moscow;

- “street children” (this group included homeless children; children who did not have parents and homes; children from disadvantaged families, where parents were, as a rule, drinkers or in prison). “Street children” were surveyed at place of their inpatient stay – in shelters, rehabilitation centers, reception centers, hospital department for homeless children [4, p. 72].

The study identified and compared the main values of problem-free and problem adolescents, their ideas about Russia and its future, the image of a national leader, “friends” and “enemies” of Russia.

In 2011 at the commission of the Moscow School of Political Studies Levada-Center conducted a large-scale sociological survey “The youth of Russia”, devoted to the study of young peoples values, their orientation on education and success and attitude to current political processes in Russia. This research included surveys of the youth, 30 focus groups and 14 interviews with teachers and parents in 4 cities of Russia. The results obtained in the course of the project identified three communities of young people: 1) state-national; 2) family and 3) generation [4, p. 19].

The Institute of Sociology of the Russian Academy of Sciences together with the Russian Office of the Friedrich Ebert Foundation carried out a study “The youth of new Russia: life style and value priorities” in March–April, 2007. It was conducted in 12 districts of the Russian Federation, in Moscow and Saint Petersburg by quota sampling in compliance with quotas on gender, age and socio-professional status. According to the available statistical data and the study objectives, the survey included the following socio-professional groups of young people: workers at factories, mines and construction sites; engineering and technical intelligentsia; art and creative intelligentsia; employees of household and intellectual services; permanent officers at the army and the police; entrepreneurs of small and medium businesses; university students

and the rural youth. The intergenerational analysis was a distinguishing feature of this study. The older generation of the same socio-professional groups (except students) was surveyed. The main conclusions of the study revealed a clear dominance of the youth’s orientation on stability and evolutionary development of reforms over revolutionary changes in society (two-thirds over one-third) and the acceptance of the market economy basic principles.

When considering the chronology of the research in the youth’s social life, it should be noted that there have been different approaches to this problem and tools in different historical periods due to progressive development of science and society (*tab. 2*).

In general, the researchers focus on the fact that the values and aspirations of the modern Russian youth are qualitatively different from previous generations. There were the following prerequisites for such transformations:

1. Destruction of the socialist system in Russia. Depreciation of the social, economic and spiritual base of the Soviet era.

2. Adoption of freedom of expression, pluralism in the socio-economic and spiritual sphere.

3. Instability of the market system, fierce competition, market monopolization, people’s need to rely on themselves.

4. Computerization of all aspects of society, technocratization of world-views.

5. Cultural, political, ethnic globalization, generating both civilizational interaction and conflicts.

6. Destruction of clear gender boundaries in the public consciousness, crisis of the family.

7. High rates of development of society and social institutions, constant changes in the economic, political and social life, growth of scientific knowledge [21, p. 70].

These processes in the youth environment resulted in the reduced importance of spiritual, moral and aesthetic values and the increased status of vital, material and hedonistic [21, p. 70].

Today young people pay more attention to education, which importance was undermined in the 1980–90s [3, p. 22].

Table 2. Chronology of the research in the problems of young people in foreign countries and Russia

Stages	Event	Representatives
I. The 1900s – 1950s	Theoretical research into the youth role in society	G. Stanley Hall, E. Springer, R. Benedict, B. Malinowski, K. Mannheim, M. Rokeach
II. The 1960–70s – 2000s	Beginning of the sociological research into social problems of the youth in foreign countries and Russia	N.M. Blinov, B.A. Grushin, S.N. Ikonnikova, I. M. Il'inskii, A.I. Kovaleva, I.S. Kon, V.F. Levicheva, V.T. Lisovskii, M.N. Rutkevich, M.Kh. Titma, V.N. Shubkin
III. 2000 – 2014	In-depth research into socio-cultural attitudes of different categories of young people in the period of social values transformation by means of qualitative methods	M.K. Gorshkov, G.A. Klyucharev, V.A. Kasamara, A.A. Sorokina, A.V. Ryabov, E.V. Kurbangaleeva, L.D. Gudkov

Source: compiled by the authors.

The beginning of the third Millennium witnessed a high rise in the education level of the population in Russia; formally it was the highest in the world. The total share of people with secondary vocational education in Russia exceeds the one in all developed countries, the share of people with higher and postgraduate education lags behind only the USA, Norway and the Netherlands [14].

In Russia in 1990–2012 the number of institutions of higher professional education doubled, the number of university students increased by 2.2 times. According to the 2012 data, the Vologda Oblast ranks 58th among 83 RF subjects, 6th among 10 NWFED regions by the number of young people enrolled in colleges and universities (320 persons per 10 thousand population) [16, pp. 308-309].

The sharply increased attention to higher education among young people is often not associated with professional activities. According to L.D. Gudkov, “the Russian university today is not a church and place to communicate high culture, but a routine establishment to coach students to get a university degree [4, p. 19].

Thus, a third (31%) of the employees at professional education establishments of the Vologda Oblast, surveyed by ISED T RAS in 2013, noted that to get a degree in any field is the main motive for students to enter educational institutions in the region¹.

However, due to the crisis in the socio-economic sphere young people do not have a stable value system; pessimistic, anxious mood is growing among them (*tab. 3*).

There is a rise in the number of young people who believe that the important values are, in fact, unattainable. This leads to the formation of a “down” model of the younger generation, which is characterized by the passive adaptation to any changes in the society or state. Such processes involve an increase in anomie (youth alcoholism, drug abuse, suicide, antisocial behavior, crime, extremism, etc.).

According to the experts, young people are afraid of any changes and try to “escape from reality”. On the one hand, young people are distinguished by the growth of self-reliance, pragmatism, mobility and responsibility for their own life; on the other hand, – by the

Table 3. Distribution of the responses of young people to the question:
“What feeling do you have when thinking about the future?”
(on the materials of all-Russian surveys; in % of the number of respondents)

Answer	Year		
	2001	2006	2011
Calm, confidence	84	59	39
Uncertainty, fear	16	31	46
Difficult to answer	0	9	15

Sources: *Rossiiskaya molodezh': problemy i resheniya* [Russian Youth: Problems and Solutions]. Moscow: Tsentr sotsial'nogo prognozirovaniya, 2005. 648 p.

¹ During the research 147 people were surveyed (of 2900 teachers of Vologda colleges and universities). Of them: 84 employees of higher and 63 – of secondary educational establishments; 34 people hold key positions, 113 people are teachers.

low level of interest in political, economic and cultural life and participation in it. Young people no longer expect much either from the authorities or society. In this regard, the youth of today does not follow the ideals of older generation. Passive survival is gradually becoming a hallmark of adolescence and youth. It results in the gap in intergenerational connection of values [21, p. 75].

The gap with the older generation is also manifested in the loss of cultural, ethnic traditions, the formation of subcultures.

The intergenerational relation issue is of particular importance when studying the socio-cultural determinants of one of the most vulnerable categories of young people – high school students. They are in the period of early adolescence (aged 16–18), preparing for a qualitatively new training activities and acquisition of all civil rights.

High school students are most sensitive to the ongoing social and political changes, as this is the age of the personality formation, development of quality characteristics, expressing its relation to the world (in particular, forecasting their social activity, planning of their future life and self-realization, formation of ideas about the world and about themselves).

Any reforms in the society affect this generation, grown up in the era of freedom, universal pluralism and approval of new political and economic standards. High school students' aspirations are qualitatively different from those of the more mature youth, as there has recently occurred not only a "formation change-over" within the country, but a number of changes of global

character (European countries integration in the European Union, formation of new borders, emergence of global standards of education and health, etc.) [4, p. 12].

The above mentioned specific features determine the research interest in the study of socio-cultural attitudes of senior pupils.

The early youth enshrines basic cultural values to be developed in the future. This is proved by the data of the "pilot" study "Socio-cultural portrait of the youth"², carried out in May 2014 by the Institute of Socio-Economic Development of Territories. The students of the Research-and-Educational Center at the Institute were surveyed. So, the values, selected by the senior pupils as important – health, love, active life, trusted friends and family, are also shared by the older age group – students.

The attitude to history as a cultural formation of national identity can be considered as an important component of the total youth culture. The study showed that the surveyed young people are well aware of historical events, can evaluate the contribution of historical figures to the development of the state. Only 36% of the high school students can not recall the great Russian citizens of the past and present. The most commonly mentioned figures of the past, appreciated by the students, are Joseph Stalin (15%), Yuri Gagarin (13%), Peter the Great (12%). The majority (36%) of pupils consider Vladimir Putin as the great contemporary.

² The "pilot" phase in May 2014 included a continuous survey of high school students (10–11 forms), attending the Research-and-Educational Center at ISEDT RAS. Sixty-one people (16 boys and 45 girls aged 16–18) were surveyed.

The selection of young people in Vologda generally coincides with the opinion of their peers in other RF regions. Thus, the study, conducted by ANPO “Kryshtanovskaya Laboratory” in 2012–2013 (this research included the in-depth survey of young people in 26 cities of Russia), indicated 22 names of the contemporaries, young people want to take after. Primarily, it is Vladimir Putin, Vladimir Zhirinovskiy, Mikhail Prokhorov and Dmitry Medvedev [10].

Despite the prevailed idea that the political identity is not the most important aspect of growing up, the research results have disclosed that the youth in Vologda is interested in politics, always associated with the issue of power. Moreover, political consciousness is gradually becoming an integral part of the senior pupils’ mentality. According to the survey results, 74% of the pupils take interest in the political life of our and foreign countries. According to Levada-Center, in Russia in general the share of the young people, interested in politics, is lower (46%)³.

However, the Vologda pupils’ interest in politics does not put into action (participation in political movements, parties, protests, etc.). The young people just watch the news (TV, news feed in the Internet). Thus, the students get secondary information. Just a few young people are ready to study public administration (reading biographies of political figures, literature of political orientation) and participate in political discussions (4%, respectively).

³ It should be taken into account that students of the Research-and-Educational Center at ISED T RAS are a priori more informed about the political and economic life of the country, as these issues are included in the curriculum.

The senior pupils claim that the country has not solved a number of serious problems yet, such as the state of roads, the need to improve the transport network, the state of environment, corruption and the low level of personal income.

According to more than a third (36%) of the respondents, the presence of these problems is likely to affect the intent of young people to leave Russia in the future. But these problems do not cause pessimism among young people regarding the future prospects of socio-professional activity: 94% of them believe that they have all possibilities for self-realization. Only 5% of the respondents are not optimistic about their own future.

The survey conducted by ISED T RAS confirms that the youth is proud of their country. Only 10% of the respondents do not have a sense of community with compatriots or they are indifferent to this issue. However, the pupils are a bit critical to the manifestation of patriotism as a socio-political phenomenon. The analysis of the respondents’ answers shows that they respect patriotic feelings, but only peaceful and passive forms of their manifestation. The seniors do not sympathize with aggressive and extremist forms. The manifestations of ethnic intolerance, xenophobia observed in the everyday life, the news on TV and the Internet are associated primarily with the negative expressions of patriotism.

The Vologda high school pupils do not only highlight the issues relevant for the country, but adequately perceive the current foreign policy of the Russian Federation. Most respondents (77%) mention that

Table 4. Distribution of answers to the question: “Who would you call Russia’s friends and enemies on the world stage?” (in % of the respondents number)

“Friends”	In %	“Enemies”	In %
China	42.6	USA	72.1
Belarus	39.3	EU (Europe)	23.0
Ukraine	9.8	Japan	6.6
Kazakhstan	9.8	Ukraine	6.6
Japan	6.6	China	3.3
Israel	4.9	Belarus	1.6
Cuba	4.9	Canada	1.6
Germany	3.3	NATO countries	1.6
DPRK	3.3	All countries	1.6
EU countries	1.6		
Finland	1.6		
Mongolia	1.6		
Syria	1.6		

Source: Data of the pilot phase of the study “Socio-cultural portrait of the youth”. Sixty-one people (16 boys and 45 girls aged 16–18) attending classes at the ISEDТ RAS were surveyed.

in the modern political space Russia is surrounded by the states-“friends” and states-“enemies”. The pupils consider China (43%) and Belarus (39%; *tab. 4*) as “friends”. Taking into account the positive experience of diplomatic and good-neighborly relations between these countries and Russia, we can say that the respondents are more or less objective. The young people view the U.S. (72%) and the European Union (23%) as states that have malevolent intentions towards our country, probably due to the actively imposed “Ukrainian” sanctions of the aforementioned states against Russia in May–July 2014.

The Vologda students’ opinions coincide in general with the point of view of their peers

in different regions of the Russian Federation. So, according to the study “Political consciousness of adolescents: successful students vs street children”, almost a half (48%) of Russian pupils called the U.S. as “Russia’s enemy” [4, p. 70].

The senior pupils assess the Ukrainian political collapse negatively. They describe the current situation in this country in terms of “wrong”, “stupidity”, “nonsense”, “illegality”, etc. As for this situation, many young people have anxious feelings associated with “compassion for the civilian population”, on the one hand, and fears that it may occur in Russia, on the other hand (“...I would not like that to happen in our country”). Many pupils mention an

Examples of answers:

M., aged 17: "I think that Ukraine will become part of Russia".

M., aged 16: "I am against. The situation seems crazy".

F., aged 16: "I think that Ukraine is not doing right, and America, supporting it, looks silly".

F., aged 16: "Most of all I feel pity for the Ukrainian population. To kill innocent people is terrible!"

F., aged 16: "I think that the new Ukrainian authorities have acted stupidly and illegally".

F., aged 16: "I do not share the views of the Kyiv authorities supporters. Yanukovich should have broken up this".

F., aged 16: "It is very tragic that people repeat mistakes of the past. God forbid being in such a place".

M., aged 16: "The Nazis have come to power, and Europe encourages it".

M., aged 16: "The Ukrainian authorities are fascists with Yatsenyuk who obey America".

F., aged 16: "What is happening in Ukraine is horrible, and I don't want that to happen in our country".

F., aged 16: "I think that is wrong when citizens of one country fight against each other"

F., aged 16: "I believe that it is consequences of the USSR collapse".

F., aged 17: "It is a political conflict between the United States and Russia on the Ukrainian soil".

F., aged 17: "Senseless military coup".

F., aged 18: "I believe that the conflict can be resolved peacefully".

F., aged 17: "It is a time bomb".

F., aged 18: "It is a pointless war of Western and Eastern Ukraine".

“invisible hand” of the West regarding the Ukrainian events. There are a few judgments of the respondents (in the age and gender structure) on this matter.

According to the survey results, the senior pupils of Vologda schools choose future occupation consciously. According to the survey, only 23% (14 people) have not made a choice yet.

The most popular occupations among schoolchildren are the following:

- economist – 23%;
- programmer – 11%;
- doctor, physician – 11%.

The young people’s interest in medical specialties is a positive trend, as the staffing situation in this sphere is still critical. If in 2006 there were 339 doctors per 10 thousand people, in 2012 the doctors number dropped to 333 people. In 2012 the staffing of health facilities accounted for 86% of the available vacancies [13, p. 5].

Nowadays, Russian pupils are known to have a number of opportunities to exercise their social activity. This is temporary employment, volunteering.

However, the share of volunteers in the Vologda Oblast is not great – 48% of the respondents. According to the survey, only 20% of the young people are ready to work as volunteers. In the Yaroslavl Oblast the share of people willing to participate in the volunteer movement is significantly higher (62%). This situation reveals that the public organizations in this region are passive to inform pupils about volunteering and provision of social guarantees to volunteers.

Thus, summarizing research findings regarding socio-cultural values of high school

pupils, it is possible to identify a number of distinctive features of this phenomenon in the “pilot” group.

So, young people often do not have serious problems regarding their social identity, they have their own vision of their place in modern society.

However, their self-realization as subjects of political and public life is often limited to passive forms. The commitment to historical and cultural roots is an important socio-cultural trait, characteristic of both younger and older age groups of students.

It should be noted that the findings of the “pilot” stage can not be applied to all senior pupils, as the children attending ISEDT RAS are a group of talented pupils that take a more complex course. The main research stage will address the research problems on a broader scale.

In the first quarter of 2015 the scientific research “Socio-cultural portrait of the youth” will include the survey of students of 9th and 11th forms in the Vologda Oblast schools. In the future it is planned to survey students, young people under 30 working at enterprises and organizations of the region in order to identify sustainable intergenerational relation.

At the same time, the received data emphasize the separateness of school age, its importance as a starting point for the formation of social, political, economic and professional mentality of older age groups. In this regard, to understand how the layers of generations’ consciousness “overlay”, what tools can be used in the management of these processes is an ambitious research task for modern science.

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