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Socio-cultural mechanisms of local communities formation

5.4.6 Sociology of Culture

Abstract of the dissertation

for the degree of Candidate of Sociological Sciences

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Relevance of the research. In the context of planetary sociocultural transformation, the issue of the self-sufficiency of Russian society and its capacity for self-regulation and self-organization becomes acute. In this light, local communities can be considered as part of a national strategy for forming effective mechanisms for the self-development of Russian society. This fully corresponds to Russia's self-identification as a distinctive state-civilization, whose core value is cultural diversity. In modern conditions of synergistic complexity of society (N.I. Lapin), culture becomes a tool for the development of small territories. The main actor of transformations is the local community, which, through its activity, transforms/improves living conditions in a small territory.

Studying theories of local community formation, we encountered the fact that culture-determined mechanisms of their formation are not fully clarified. The scientific task of the research was to develop a concept of sociocultural mechanisms that allow for the formation of sustainable local communities capable of acting as a subject for the development of the sociocultural space of a region, transforming their own lives and environment around them. The research is based on material obtained by the author during the implementation of the «Cultural Mosaic of Udmurtia» project by the Elena and Gennady Timchenko Charitable Foundation. In 2020, the program became a pilot project and sociological experiment on the formation and involvement of local communities in the development of small territories in Udmurtia. The research represents the author's model of transformation of small territories through cultural means — by activating sociocultural mechanisms and sociocultural activities of local communities.

Object of research: Local communities in the conditions of transforming complex synergistic Russian society.

Subject of research: Sociocultural mechanisms of local community formation, examined on the example of the Republic of Udmurtia.

Aim of the work: Identification of sociocultural mechanisms forming sustainable local communities (using the example of the Udmurt Republic).

Research hypothesis.

The formation of local communities is conditioned by the general property of self-organization of social systems, which are oriented towards historically tested models of consolidated social behavior as attractors for their own self-development. The local community, as an independent social subject, has movable boundaries determined by complex synergistic processes in modern Russian society and historical (cultural, natural environment) features of residence of its inhabitants.

The formation of sustainable communities and their resulting ability to self-development are ensured by deep sociocultural mechanisms, the main of which are:

- tradition, ensuring the continuity of social reproduction;
- cultural memory, ensuring group solidarity based on a sense of ancestral connection and common ethno-cultural kinship (domain);
- «common place» (third place, sacred place, place of memory), providing a sense of rootedness in the natural environment and ancestral land;
- sociocultural trauma, uniting the group through a shared emotional experience of social injustice and the need for cohesion to overcome it.

Their actualization allows for the formation of sustainable local communities in modern conditions.

Research methodology.

Based on the complexity of the research subject, the methodological basis of the dissertation is a combination of general scientific and sociological principles and approaches. The foundation of our research is the anthropo-sociocultural approach developed by N.I. Lapin. The work applies dialectical, system-synergetic, activity-based, cultural-historical, socio-communicative, axiological, and comparative-analytical approaches. Methods from reflexive sociology are used in conjunction with interpretative and hermeneutic methods, as well as structural-functional, institutional, sociocultural, and value analysis. The author's research on

the implementation of the «Cultural Mosaic of Udmurtia» project included sociological expertise of control groups' participation.

Theoretical basis of research

The theory of self-organization of complex dynamic systems (E.N. Knyazeva, S.P. Kurdyumov) allows for considering the local community as an open system capable of self-organization and self-development in a complementary social environment through the activation of sociocultural mechanisms.

Theoretical substantiation of the synergistic complexity of modern Russian society (S.A. Kravchenko, N.I. Lapin) allowed for examining the mechanics of local community formation within the paradigm of interactions between spiritual, natural, and institutional practices.

Axiological theories (V.S. Stepin, R. Inglehart) made it possible to define local communities formed within the framework of the «Cultural Mosaic of Udmurtia» project as sharing traditional values.

The theory of the «trust radius» (F. Fukuyama) allowed for substantiating the correlation between value orientations and an important marker of community identity — trust.

The pattern theory (F. Capra) allows for including historically established models of social behavior in sociocultural mechanisms.

The theory of mentality and value orientations (V.Yu. Khotinets) made it possible to distinguish within sociocultural mechanisms a «system of interconnected representations formed on the basis of cultural values».

In the study of sociocultural mechanisms, we relied on the following theories:

1. **Tradition as the foundation of social reproduction** (A.B. Gofman, A.V. Shchipkov, A.G. Dugin)
2. **Cultural memory** (M. Halbwachs, J. Assmann, A. Assmann, M. Hirsch)

3. **Common place** — «**Third place**» (R. Oldenburg, N.E. Pokrovsky, M.B. Gurov)

4. **Cultural trauma** (J.C. Alexander, R. Eyerman, P. Sztompka, S. Ushakin)

5. **Need as a mechanism of solidarization** based on the works of A. Maslow, R. Inglehart, J. McNight, C. Russell

Research sources:

- Competitive application programs within the regional project «Cultural Mosaic of Udmurtia» (total number — 44)
- Administrative reports on cultural issues in the Udmurt Republic

Empirical base of research:

The empirical base of the research consists of data from the author's sociological study of social activity among participants in the regional project «Cultural Mosaic of Udmurtia» aimed at identifying sociocultural mechanisms of local community formation, specifically:

- Primary documentation of projects implemented within the framework of the regional project «Cultural Mosaic of Udmurtia»: project applications, reports of Stage 1 (2020–2021) and Stage 2 (2021–2022)
- Materials from monitoring visits conducted by the author as a regional expert of the Timchenko Foundation during 2020–2022
- Profiles of «Cultural Mosaic of Udmurtia» project participants on the VKontakte social network
- Data from focus groups and questionnaires of project participants (2024)
- Expert interviews with heads of cultural and national policy sectors of the Udmurt Republic (2024), and experts on working with local communities from Moscow, St. Petersburg, Perm, Samara, Penza, Togliatti, Izhevsk, etc.

The author's research covered 1325 respondents. The sample is representative of the general population of project participants.

Scope of research corresponds to the Passport of specialization 5.4.6

Sociology of culture:

P.1 — Culture and its functions in the system of social interactions. Types of culture.

P.3 — Sociocultural process, its structure, and features in various spheres of life activity.

P.5 — Cultural norm and deviation in societal change. Social construction of cultural norms.

P.8 — Sociocultural regulation and self-regulation in societal life.

P.16 — Modern cultural policy.

Scientific novelty of the research consists in the following:

1. It has been proposed and substantiated to consider the local community under conditions of synergistic complexity of Russian society as a complex dynamic open-type system possessing the potential for self-organization through internal cultural-symbolic and external institutional activation of its historically formed development mechanisms.

2. An author's definition of the concept of sociocultural mechanism has been provided in relation to the local community under conditions of complex Russian synergistic society. It has been proposed to consider the local community as an open social system possessing an internal representation of its ideal stable form (attractor) and mechanisms for maintaining it, while simultaneously being able to respond to external cultural initiatives.

3. A concept of sociocultural mechanisms for local community formation has been developed, taking into account the synergistic unity of socio-spatial, cultural-symbolic, activity-based, value-based, and need-based aspects of social activity. For the first time, a definition of communities formed based on needs has been provided, identifying the foundations for forming need-based (functional) local communities.

4. For the first time, the practice-oriented project «Cultural Mosaic» by the Timchenko Foundation, aimed at forming local communities and first

implemented in the Udmurt Republic, receives theoretical substantiation and is introduced into the scientific discourse of cultural sociology.

5. Sociocultural mechanisms of local community formation are considered for the first time as mental cultural-symbolic support for types of social activity activating empirical referential samples of traditional Udmurt culture as attractors and corresponding forms of social initiation.

6. Conditions have been identified for bringing referential attractor images from the latent space of cultural memory into the field of sociocultural action: the process of replicating patterns of social behavior is triggered in traditional forms of joint community member activity — daily communication, festive, ritual, and traditional actions.

7. It has been proven that community members with formed values corresponding to the content and form of local cultural tradition demonstrate a pronounced tendency towards self-organization and resistance to negative environmental factors.

8. The ambiguity and ambivalence of local community network activity has been revealed: the quantitative success of communities provided with information content in social network accounts results in mediated subjectivity and loss of the sense of tradition as real social activity.

Thesis propositions for defense:

1. The methodology of research on local communities under conditions of synergistic complexity (S.A. Kravchenko) of modern Russian society has been substantiated. Local communities are considered by the author as complex dynamic sociocultural systems of an open type, where social, cultural, natural, and technological elements manifest themselves in organic interconnectedness, integrity, and organization. The foundation for the formation and stability of this type of social system is the synergy of sociocultural mechanisms arising on the basis of a specific cultural tradition, which determines through its continuity the ability of communities to self-organize and reproduce. The condition for the self-organization of a local community is a complex of sociocultural activities that

brings the image of an ideal/desirable way of life from a latent state of cultural memory into the evident social space of everyday life.

2. The concept of a sociocultural mechanism has been clarified, and its essential fundamental characteristic — system justification — has been revealed. Within any social system, it ensures the coordinated interaction of the entire set of sociodynamic processes, social structures, norms, institutions, and behavior patterns. The mechanistic dynamics of local communities is based on the specifics of their «structure», which is defined by the content of cultural tradition, mentally and axiologically delimiting the «internal» and «external» for community members. The social activity of the community is subordinated to preserving this boundary at the deep level of sociocultural interactions.

3. An author's concept of sociocultural mechanisms for local community formation has been presented. The mechanistic foundation for citizens' self-organization into stable social formations at the local level is the image and content of tradition, acting as the basic principle and ideal empirical attractor of the community. Tradition sets the framework for social activity and interactions and can be considered as a system of representations contained in cultural memory: about the essence, structure, and «place» of the community in space — in the territory of residence; about value-normative foundations, beliefs, attitudes regarding interaction conditions within the community, sociocultural regulation marking its boundaries in society; about cultural trauma as jointly experienced consolidating experience of historical survival; about symbolic sacralization of «place» as an encompassing geocultural locus.

4. The scientific discourse of cultural sociology introduces a description of the innovative project «Cultural Mosaic of Udmurtia», containing models for initiating and activating modern forms of grassroots social self-organization. For testing and implementation, the Udmurt Republic became a pilot region in the overall «Cultural Mosaic» program of the Elena and Gennady Timchenko Charitable Foundation and the Government of the Udmurt Republic. The project's mission aims to maintain geosociocultural integrity and spatial development of

Udmurtia — one of the culturally and historically unique Russian regions in the conditions of a transforming Russian society. The model for implementing the mission in a multicultural region includes the formation and inclusion of local communities in social activity.

5. The strategy for implementing the «Cultural Mosaic of Udmurtia» project on the territory of the Udmurt Republic has been substantiated, relying on studying, mastering, and utilizing the unique cultural heritage and traditional values of the Udmurts as a resource for spatial development. To organize individual and joint actions, images of joint social activity based on the traditional value system for bearers of Udmurt culture were activated through cultural initiative competitions. Among the most important values are the image of the «common place», historically established forms of social organization (primarily communal-family and neighborhood), initiation, sacred reverence for nature and place of residence, traditions of festive culture, and experience of overcoming cultural trauma. The mechanisms for forming a local community found embodiment in the project scenario integrated into the living space of its participants.

6. Based on sociological data obtained by the author during project implementation, the author's hypothesis of sociocultural mechanisms for local community formation in the «Cultural Mosaic of Udmurtia» project has been confirmed. The local community forms as a system open to interaction with society as a whole and management initiatives individually. The activity-based forms of community «structure» and «place» within its «internal» and «external» historical boundaries, initiated by project experts, launch the process of community self-organization based on the culturally immanent communal-family and domain principles inherent in Russian society. The choice of environment and social interaction is determined not only by joint residence in a specific territory but primarily by value commonality, spiritual affinity, and similarly understood cultural semantics, which define interaction and mutual influence within the community.

7. The practical effectiveness of the manifestation of sociocultural mechanisms in the dynamics of local community formation has been presented and sociologically confirmed: creation of territorial development projects (tourism projects, improvement projects, business development projects); consolidation of new resources around communities aimed at improving life in their implementation areas. It has been convincingly demonstrated that representatives of local communities with formed values corresponding to the content and form of local cultural tradition show a greater inclination towards expanding types of social activity that improve the quality of life of people in local places of residence. A special type of local communities has been identified — functional communities forming to meet specific needs: communication, security, belonging to society, etc.

8. The ambiguity of socio-network support for the «Cultural Mosaic of Udmurtia» project at the post-project stage has been revealed. Thus, based on the number of subscribers and their network activity, the most successful projects were those provided with diverse information content of community accounts on the VKontakte social network: unique community posts, responses from active residents, reposts from partner groups, photo and video content, etc. However, a negative factor of network communications was also discovered: the subjectivity of the community formed in social networks becomes mediated, and the sense of tradition as direct collective cohesion of the population in joint activities is lost.

Theoretical and practical significance of the research lies in:

- Formulating the scientific problem of forming sustainable local communities as a resource for social consolidation and spatial development in modern Russian society
- Developing a methodology for researching mechanisms of local community formation in a multicultural region
- Developing an author's model for explicating the «Cultural Mosaic» project of the Elena and Gennady Timchenko Charitable Foundation in the territory of the Udmurt Republic

The research results expand the theoretical base for identifying sociocultural mechanisms of local community formation. The study contributes to cultural sociology theories and can be used as a theoretical and methodological foundation for areas of scientific knowledge related to cultural policy issues, sociocultural management, and serve as a basis for researching problems in the value and spiritual spheres of modern Russian society.

From a practical significance perspective, the work has a pronounced advisory nature and can be used by specialists, state managers in the cultural sphere, museum workers, community leaders, cultural entrepreneurs, and specialists in ethnic tourism, which will contribute to strengthening the sociocultural foundations of multicultural regions of the country and their territorial development.

The author conducted approbation of the research results. The dissertation was prepared at the Department of Culturology and Social Communication of the Presidential Academy (Moscow). The research results and theoretical conclusions were presented by the author at scientific conferences and seminars and are used in the author's teaching activities in sociological disciplines.

7 publications totaling 2.7 print sheets have been published on the thesis topic, including articles in publications recommended by the Higher Attestation Commission of the Russian Federation for publishing the main scientific results of dissertations for the degree of Candidate (Doctor) of Sciences.

The structure of the dissertation includes an introduction, three chapters (eight paragraphs in total), conclusion, and list of references. The chosen structure contributes to the most comprehensive disclosure of the topic and allows achieving the goals of the dissertation research and solving the set tasks.