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MENTAL FOUNDATIONS OF CIVIC IDENTITY IN RUSSIA

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Abstract

Modern Russian reality contains a precedent of social eclectism, demonstrating an attempt of civic identity “in a new way” in condition of keeping traditional mental concepts, which makes the prospects of modernization and progressive development of the Russian society problematic. This paper analyzes mental foundations of formation of the Russian civic identity and an attempt is made to determine the degree of influence that mental modes and regulations of life practices of the Russian people exert onto understanding their belonging to the post-Soviet Russian society. An idea is substantiated that features of geographic environment, economic activity, historical forms of governmental arrangement of the Russian life, state of religiosity and folklore imagery have become essential factors determining features of life practices and mentality, which, in their turn influence formation of the Russian civic identity. A contradiction of the modern stage of Russian development has been identified in the fact that the analyzed modes of the Russian mentality correspond to the Eastern type, while precedent phenomenon of civic identity for Russia is the Western type. Reduction in importance of the Eastern type of mentality with simultaneous increase in the civic identity of the Western type may facilitate shifting the situation in accordance with claims of the Russian society for economic, political and socio-cultural modernization. Conclusions drawn during the research expand the object domain of humanities knowledge, promote rethinking the meaning of mentality in the Russian civic identity. The research uses authorial terminology in the context of the topic.

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Keywords: Civic identity, geographic mentality, economic mentality, political mentality, socio-cultural mentality.



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1. Introduction

Throughout their history, Russian people were connected to their state with strong links, but this relation never was a civic attitude typical of the West. This link was and still is specific – partially Statist (typical of subjects), partially anarchist (freethinking), but in any case mentally marked and leaning east. The mode of painful transformation of the contemporary Russian social reality evoked a crisis of civic identity, as consciousness of majority of Russian citizens is unable to adequately perceive a sudden shift to the Western type of ego-identity. At that, preservation of the old identity within the space of the new social reality is ensured with traditionalist mentality. The basic condition to understand how civic identity is being formed in the new Russia is reflection of mental factor as its foundation.

2. Problem Statement

As mentality represents “the spirit of nation” (Humboldt, 1985), scientific explication of real participation of mentality in formation of identity matrices of civic consciousness is deemed naturally important. In the context of social and humanities knowledge there is a cognitive interest in the phenomenon of civic identity. However its actualization necessarily assumes analysis of features and degree of influence that a whole complex of mental modes has onto it, with considerations for specific characteristics of each mode, while previously they have been outside the field of scientific inquiry: geographic mentality, economic mentality, political mentality, socio-cultural mentality.

3. Research Questions

The subject of this research is influence of mental modes – carriers of imagery and meaning of Russian life practices – onto formation of civic identity in Russia.

4. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to determine degree of and consequences from influence that mental modes exert over the process of forming civic identity.

5. Research Methods

Theoretical foundation of the paper are formed by the theory of geographic determinism of Montesquieu (2018), Adler’s (1995) concept of Lifestyle, the “culture is meaningful” concept of Huntington and Harrison (2002), mental programming theory of Hofstede (1983).

Methodological grid of the paper is formed by dialectic method in the aspect of a ratio between the Eastern type of mentality and the Western type of identity. Content and essence of mentality are unfolded with fundamental provisions of geographic determinism, activity theory, and hermeneutic method, which allow explicating mental modes. Principles of implication and systematicity create a foundation for analysis of features of civic identity formation.

6. Findings

Mental modes (geographic mentality, economic mentality, political mentality, socio-cultural mentality) play a role of value-and-meaning gear for specifics of the society. As a deep understanding of the ethnic character may lead to understanding its entire fate (Vysheslavtsev, 1995), studies of social mentality allows fixing and understanding regular dependencies between mental constants of the socio-cultural community and identity positioning of its citizens.

Geographic mentality. Natural and geographic features – continentality, significant extension, monotonous and hard-to-develop landscape, severity and instability of climate – determined uneven rhythm of life practices through the year, which had become permanent and distributed onto the whole complex of moral and manners and behavior models of East Slavs / Russian. Century-long social experience of existence in conditions of a complicated, unpredictable location, developed key mental attitudes of Russians. Among them are Russian self-will, the *carpe diem* principle, crunch time as a norm, disorganization and spontaneity, banking on fate, led to a natural result. Russian soul has been stricken with vastness ... Wide expanse of Russian spaces did not facilitate development of self-discipline and independence in the Russian people – it spread out onto the space (Berdyayev, 1990). A natural result of influence exerted by the geographic mentality onto the civic identity of Russians is indispensability of such qualities as overindulgence, non-compliance with the law, expressiveness, extensivity, uncertainty and carelessness.

Economic mentality. Specific geographic conditions of life of East Slavs / Russians made an impression of cheerlessness and depression onto Russian life (Berdyayev, 1990) and defined priority of a traditional type of economy which is a limiting factor in the way of developing exchange relationships. They include a prolonged period of feudal organization with serf enslavement, estrangement of workers from owning and managing property/land, agrarian capitalism, permanent exploitation from landlord/state, social poverty of the vast majority of population, permanent economic catching-up. In pre-industrial societies, natural environment played a gigantic role in formation of the type of economy, the whole system of life, labor skills... These traditions could not vanish without leaving a trace in national mentality (Shkratan & Karacharovskiy, 2010). Conservation of socio-economic state in the form of communal patriarchal economy gave rise to certain mental priorities still existing in the modern Russian society: servile consciousness of employee, agrarian mindset, adventurism, aspiration to find easy money, lack of initiative and responsibility, “it will do as it is” as a typical attitude to job responsibilities.

Socio-economic reforms that Russia underwent in late 20th-early 21st century corrected the vector of its development, however there were no positive metamorphoses in civic economic identity: new masters are formally associating themselves with entrepreneurs, but the question of transparent/fair business practice and individual economic responsibility is not relevant in the Russian market.

Political mentality. In Russian political space, there is an image of state authority, which is adequate to natural-geographic and socio-economic features, when the people is not that much assigning authorities with certain functions (social contract / partnership), but rather entrust them with people’s destiny (patriarchal submission / allegiance). The history of the Russian society demonstrates domination of authoritarian monarchist form of government in its prince-tsar-emperor and party-power manifestation, prevalence of minister-subject model in management, where the serving subject is in direct and

unquestionable dependence on their master. Authority in today's Russia, with all its differences from monarchic and Bolshevik ones, has features strikingly similar to them... In Russia, there is no society beyond authority, but only people – a faceless, uniform and voiceless ethnic and confessional community (Mezhuev, 2000). In these conditions, an irresponsible and disdainful attitude to subordinates had developed in “landlords”. All the while, servile psychology had been developing in the Russian subjects, including fetish of state authority, socio-political dependence and civic passivity. They entrenched as political mental values, resulting in justification of a cult of charismatic leader and awaiting a miracle from such a leader, that is, Eastern-type Etatism.

For a typical western civic identity, it is typical to acknowledge priority of rule of law and social contract/partnership between the state and the citizen, which has been formally declared in the Russian reality, but is not implemented. For Russians with their Etatist identity, it is typical to have a clear aspiration for paternalism, organizational definitiveness, when there are exact provisions about what and how to do. A situation of indeterminism, when “everything which is not explicitly forbidden by law is allowed”, when freedom of choice and action is encouraged in a combination with personal responsibility of a dedicated citizen irritates or is ignored.

Socio-cultural mentality. The most important social and cultural component of the Russian society are communal sociality, Orthodox faith and folklore. Tradition of single-mindedness, a tightly-knit centuries-old experience of integrated wills and the beginning of common desires (Kholkin, 2005) are hypertrophically reflected into a commune (kolkhoz, brigade). It had become a form of expression of the collectivist type of mentality, a group cohesion with uniformity of views and mutual assistance, the principal cell of the society and a production unit through the most part of the history of Russia. However, communal collectivism also contains a strong negative potential of a conspiracy of silence – such a model of social behavior that gives raise to lack of individual responsibility and increasing social dependence. The Russian people always loved living in the warmth of a collective, in some kind of dissolution in the earth element, at mother's bosom (Berdyayev, 1990).

During its long socio-historical evolution, the Orthodox faith remained indisputable, it did not undergo any kind of “reformation”; it dominates in the spiritual image of the Russian socio-cultural community. The spirit of Orthodoxy have been always defining so much and so deep in the structure of the Russian national creative act (Ilyin, 2012). Serving as a traditional value set of the Russia mentality, Orthodoxy commands commitment to obsession with the fear of God (the “pray and repent” principle), to confessional sacral, thus entrenching socio-ontological infantilism in the Russian way of life. In the history of Russia, following in steps of the upper classes... the lower classes had also adopted Christianity to such a degree, that popular ideal is seen not in a mighty or rich country, but in Holy Russia (Losskiy, 1991). The mental code had been intentionally developed by commune and Orthodox church and included a number of typical positions: economic paradigm, consisting of disdain for “illness of profit-seeking”, distrust in property and rejection of richness (miracle economy); a political paradigm, confirming sameness of the church and the state, associating the ruler with the God's anointed and provider of benefits; a moral paradigm, providing submission, patience, humility, self-rejection, togetherness, justification for conspiracy of silence. The Russian folklore is also a storage and carrier of

unshakable mental preferences following a scheme of a well-known Russian fairy tale *At the Pike's Behest*: miracle economy, magic enthronement of a social outsider, *deus ex machina* result.

Formation of identity focus in the civic "skills of spirit" happened under the influence of socio-cultural mentality. Communal consciousness condemns initiative of individual will and its activity, orienting one's identity towards collective conservatism. The Orthodox religion forms the confessional identity of a person with respect to oneself as the servant of God, substituting settings for energy of intellect, intensive creation of earthly values with the settings for disdain of earthly rationality, humble passivity, expecting patience. The folklore asserts and translates luck, no-effort gains, waiting for a miracle as a strategy of individual life practices and social existence.

It is evident that formative features of Russian civic identity serve as an adequate response to historically formed traditions of mental representations of life in the Russian society.

The mental complex of the Russian ethnicity largely predefines the following.

- economic identity as a principal algorithm of socio-economic passivity, manifesting motivation of personally irresponsible economic behavior of Russians in everyday life and economic activities alike. Russian person overcomes any bourgeois attitude with a great ease of spirit, leaving behind any quotidian life, any normative life (Berdyayev, 1990). Centuries-long domination of collectivized responsibility deprived Russians of the feeling of being the master of one's land, one's business and one's fate. It gave rise to the Russian fracture of consciousness, a socio-economic mentality in which socio-economic experience of the socio-cultural community has been concentrated. The results of this experience / economy facilitated formation of ethical traditions of work, which continue transmitting everyday life and economic impressions of Russians even after the economy type has been changed, continuing their influence onto formation of labor skills, labor psychology and features of labor identity of the most part of the Russian society. Economic mentality limits economic initiatives, prevents economic identity as personal independence. Economic activity of the anonymous collective subject (commune / state) has made people a reproduction means, a tool with the function of a thing, where individual is not a subject of property. Property as a relation is not a relation characteristic of every participant in the production process; it is not a property of an individual worker. Property exists as the property in general. Not being the subject of property, individual is, thus, alienated from both the results of labor and ability to manage them, thereby, existing out of the system of productive and labor relations, which serve as independent, external and overbearing forces. The mental system creates in the person an illusion of community with other people, with the life of community (state), and the person does not note that their economic abilities and rights are controlled by someone else. Rozanov (2001) noted a specifically Russian triad of benefit acquisition: In Russia, all property grew out of either "begged from someone", or "received a gift", or "plundered someone". The share of labor-related property is very small. As a result, a Russian person does not identify themselves as a subject, neither economically, nor socially; they are deficient economically and thus economically self-deficient, identifying and positioning themselves as being expecting some benefits.

- Etatist type of identity, meaning illusory hope for a kind tsar; constant state guardianship and low social activity (manifestations of mass labor heroism and extreme consolidation of society in the face of global threat to the state, e.g., a military threat, are local and short-term phenomena); humble and patient waiting for favorable changes; contemplative dreaminess about a better tomorrow. There are no limits to humble patience of the long-suffering Russian people... Russia is a country of awe-inspiring submission, devoid of understanding personal rights and never protecting personal dignity (Berdyayev, 1990).
- collectivist-conformist (eastern) type of identity, meaning a cohesive unity as a priority of interests of the primary group to which the person belongs (commune, state) over individual preferences. Undoubtedly, mutual assistance and collective work is an unalienable attribute of human social positioning, but it should be understood that being introduced into and later dominating in the mental composition of a person, the setting for priority of collectivism promotes formation of an uninitiative, socially inert type of personality. Nobody wants nor likes ascension; everybody prefers being like everybody else. The person is suppressed everywhere in the organic collective (Berdyayev, 1990).

While the western type of civic identity assumes working together not in a collective, but in a team that if built on a need in the rational organizing principle, providing competitive individualism, personal growth and self-improvement, the Russian mental model of collectivism stipulates emotional and spiritual unity, togetherness with the group and identifying oneself with it. Unquestionable following of traditions of sacred communality, hyperbolized feeling of solidarity and duty (together as one); extensive nature of activities; prevailing socio-centrism; conative aspiration to “be like everybody else” as markers of the collectivist-conformist type of identity. Due to this, the western type of civic identity with its priority of conscious-volition and rational personal initiative is incompatible with the Russian collective mentality. Assurance in personal powers (lone warrior), well-earned pride for practical application of skills and experience are intolerable and condemnable; actualization of one’s talent is linked not to singling oneself out of the group, but with provision of efficient functioning of the system as a whole. “Insufficient development of personal principle in the Russian life” (Berdyayev, 1990) is manifested in actual absorption of individual results with the collective, which demonstrates a striking contrast between the Russian socio-centric identity and the western, anthropocentric one. “Prevailing aspiration in the Russian cultural archetype is an aspiration to “be like everybody else”, while in the Western Europe it is an aspiration to “be a person” (Lubskii, 1995).

Justification of modernizing aspirations of the modern Russian society we link to the notion of quality of social life and personal well-being, which is formed not only of material means and physical health, but, primarily, of psychological well-being, related to a possibility of civic identity of oneself with a socially active person. As individual as an integral being cannot be stripped of their links to life (Adler, 1995) and socio-ontological system of the world, they form their lifestyle/identity on the basis of perceiving things that the society project as social concepts – mental being causative and argumentative with respect to civic identity of a person. The birth of the civic identity happens under the influence of mental experience as a “unique universal” – the civic identity cannot be created artificially, but is formed

following certain laws on certain foundation, which are mentally predetermined and may be grappled in the mental modes.

The initial idea of our research was in determining a degree of and consequences form the influence that mental modes exert onto the formation of civic identity. Undoubtedly, the most important determinant of the civic identity is the value-meaning content of the mentality. Throughout one's life, the person is involved into mastering ever new kinds of social experience. As a result, be it conscious or unconscious, the person concentrates their attention on those especially important to them images-concepts of mentality as in meaningful messages addressed to them with the aim of explicating and mastering socio-ontological nature of existence. The conducted research allowed revealing the nature and mechanism of an doubtless mental influence during the formation of civic identity – individual's search for one's place in the socio-cultural space.

7. Conclusion

The principal results of the study may be formulated as follows

- reference of characterological data on natural-geographic, economic, political and socio-cultural configurations of mentality allows stating validity of it being seen as an essential prerequisite and a condition for formation of civic identity;
- substantiation has been given to a theoretical assumption that originality of the Russian mentality is determined by its belonging to the eastern type, while the civic identity corresponding to the modern stage of development of Russia gravitates toward the western variant; at that, there is not meaningful correspondence between those two types;
- the research allowed coming closer to understanding the meaning of rementalization in the transforming Russian society: a goal-oriented re-orientation of mentality to the western type – priority of initiative, active, responsible, individualist behavior strategy – will allow forming the civic identity of a person that may operate in correspondence with the social reforms being performed.

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