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PRINCIPLES FOR DETERMINING SOCIOCULTURAL
CONSTANTS THAT HAVE POTENTIAL FOR REGIONAL
COMMUNITIES DEVELOPMENT

Babintsev Valentin Pavlovich (a), Gaidukova Galina Nikolaevna (b)*,
Shapoval Zhanna Aleksandrovna (c)
*Corresponding author

- (a) Belgorod National Research University, 85, Pobedy str., Belgorod, Russia, babintsev@bsu.edu.ru
(b) Belgorod National Research University, 85, Pobedy str., Belgorod, Russia, g_gaidukova@bsu.edu.ru
(c) Belgorod National Research University, 85, Pobedy str., Belgorod, Russia, shapoval@bsu.edu.ru

Abstract

The article is devoted to the conceptual substantiation of the principles system for choosing socio-cultural constants, the renovation of which will contribute to the reproduction and development of regional communities. Renovation is viewed as the actualization of a socio-cultural phenomenon in public consciousness and its subsequent transformation into a factor influencing the behavior of large social groups. The research is based on the application of socio-cultural and structural-functional approaches, the theory of social risks, and the theory of social anomie. The selection criteria are formulated in an extremely wide general mass of social attitudes of the principles of choosing socio-cultural constants that have a constructive potential for the regional communities development. Two groups of principles – meaningful and instrumental – are highlighted on the basis of the proposed criteria. The meaningful principles determine the complex of requirements and must be met by socio-cultural constants as an object of renovation: the principle of conformity to the replicated historical context; the principle of value coherence; principle of scientific validity; principle of realism; principle of functionality; and the principle of humanistic orientation. Three types of restrictions arising in the process of choosing a renovated socio-cultural constant, its actualization and dissemination are justified in the paper. They include, first, the limitations due to the semantic ambiguity of the constant content which, as a rule, has significantly changed in the course of historical development; secondly, the restrictions determined by objective conditions of its renovation; thirdly, the limitations specified by the dispositions peculiarities of renovation subjects.

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1. Introduction

The urgent need for the presence of firmly established, recognized by the majority of citizens, socio-cultural landmarks (constants) arises in a globalizing unstable society (often defined as a “postmodern society”) in which the relativity and convention of social realities are postulated. They include value patterns, social norms, sign systems, and behavioral models and become the only reliable basis for social reproduction and development of society comprising the level of local and regional communities. These constants are contained immanently in the historical development of regions, and can be potentially revived and used taking into consideration the specifics of the current situation. This process is the essence of the renovation of socio-cultural constants since it simultaneously characterizes the restoration (revival) of the opportunities inherent in them and the denial of what is not adequate to the humanitarian prospects of evolution. The actualization of the socio-cultural phenomenon in the public consciousness and its subsequent transformation into a factor influencing the behavior of large social groups is considered as a renovation within the framework of the article. The influence limits are determined by the location scale where the renovation process is initiated. The problem is considered in relation to the region which is understood as any constituent entity of the Russian Federation. Therefore, the criterion for assessing the completion degree of the renovation process is the support indicator for the phenomenon “by the majority of the regional community including both the regional elite and the bulk of the population” (Babintsev et al., 2020, p. 440).

2. Problem Statement

The research problem lies in the contradiction between the objective need for the presence of firmly established, recognized by the majority of citizens, socio-cultural landmarks (constants) acting in contemporary conditions of instability and risk as the only reliable basis for social reproduction and development at all levels of self-organization of society, including the of level regional communities, and the lack of a scientifically grounded system of principles for determining such socio-cultural constants.

3. Research Questions

The research subject is a set of fundamental requirements that should be guided by the subjects of social management at the regional level in the process of defining and choosing the renovated socio-cultural constants.

4. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the paper is a conceptual substantiation of the principle systems for choosing socio-cultural constants the renovation of which will contribute to the reproduction and development of regional communities.

5. Research Methods

Socio-cultural approach, that is, a methodology based on systems analysis the essence of which is an attempt to consider society as a unity of culture and sociality formed and transformed by human activity, is applied in the research.

The research is based on the formulated law of transhumanitarian balance in the field of cultural anthropology, according to which, the higher the power of production and combat technologies, the more advanced means of cultural and psychological regulation are required to preserve society.

The article is based on the theory of social risks according to which risk is increasingly becoming a leveling norm of everyday existence in an unstable social environment, as well as the theory of social anomie (a state that is expressed in the value instability of society).

The structural-functional method, which builds principles on the possibility of determining the phenomenon place in a socially structured space and its functional role, is used to substantiate the principles for defining socio-cultural constants that have a constructive potential for the evolution of regional communities.

6. Findings

In the issue context of the choice of socio-cultural constants as objects of renovation, we understand the principle as a specific requirement that must be observed in the implementation of this activity, expressed in the form of a certain scientific position that adequately reflects the significant stable trends in the evolution of social reality. Any of the principles has epistemological content reflecting real ontological connections and relationships. This circumstance introduces an element of subjectivity in the solution of principle problems which requires the formulation of criteria for their identification in an extremely wide general mass of social attitudes. We single out the following criteria:

1. Potential ability of the principle, subject to its observance, is to justify either the necessity and feasibility of renovating the constant, or the sequence of procedures and operations associated with them. Potential ability can be defined by expert assessments which should go “from the opposite”, that is, from the costs analysis that inevitably arise in case of the principle violation.

2. The principle functionality allows the subject of social action to solve problems that logically follow from its needs and interests. In this case, the functionality concept approaches the utility concept.

3. Limited application of the principle expressed in the measure existence within which it “works” for the result of analytics and beyond, and ceases to be required and in demand.

We distinguish two groups of principles – meaningful and instrumental based on the proposed criteria:

1. *Meaningful principles* define a set of requirements to be met by a socio-cultural constant as a renovation object. We consider it appropriate to refer the following principles to them:

- *principle of conformity to the replicated historical context.* The renovated constant must fit into the framework determined by the specifics of the historical consciousness and historical memory of large social groups represented in the regional community. This is fundamentally essential since the “de-objectivation” of the present and the past takes place in contemporary

“postmodern” society. The latter is increasingly viewed as a text that “is deprived of its referential function, namely, the function of reality reflection” (Barkov & Zubkov, 2019). This approach opens up scope for falsification of the historical process which phenomena can be presented as socio-cultural constants and have no relation to the real historical past, but are of interest from the point of view of manipulative influence on the masses. The historical memory of people can include elements of delusion and prejudice which makes it prone to manipulation. That is why the principle emphasizes: the socio-cultural constant subject to renovation must be adequate to the replicated historical context, that is, the context perceived in its entirety of connections and relations making it possible to create a kind of immunity from being carried away by pseudo-historical constructs;

- *principle of value coherence.* According to the principle, the renovated socio-cultural constants should be adequate to the modern values that dominate the mass consciousness. Sorokin emphasized their significance for the determination of social action. He wrote that “every process of meaningful social action consists of three components: 1) thinking, acting and reacting people who are subjects of interaction; 2) meanings, values and norms through which individuals interact being aware and sharing them; 3) open actions and material artifacts as engines or conductors that objectify and socialize intangible meanings, values and norms” (Sorokin, 2013). The renovation of any sociocultural constant means the actualization of quite specific value-semantic complexes in the mass consciousness. The problem is that, first, the uncertainty of consolidating value-semantic attitudes is characteristic of modern Russian society. Second, there is a gap between traditional values and the values offered as ideals in modern society. Zapesotskii (2013) quite reasonably notes that:

The values that humanity has suffered over the millennia of its development lose their meaning: work, honesty, patriotism, respect for elders, love, friendship, service to the law are devoted to ridicule and mockery. Liberal values such as democracy, freedom of speech, equality before the law, respect for the individual, and the right to private property are also abused. (p. 138)

this creates significant barriers to the implementation of the value coherence principle;

- *principle of scientific validity.* The choice of socio-cultural constants as objects of renovation can and should be based on the methodology formed within the framework of various spheres of cognition and transformation of social reality. Science creates the most reliable foundations for it. These grounds lie in the ability of science: a) propose a system of concepts that reveal the content of the socio-cultural constant; b) formulate a set of arguments proving the necessity and expediency of its renovation; c) reflect on the renovation process, define its capabilities and limitations; d) identify the conditions and factors determining the renovation process; e) predict its positive and negative consequences for the regional community, individual groups and citizens; f) propose recommendations aimed at regulating the renovation process. It is quite

obvious that the implementation of the scientific principle requires an appeal to the expert community;

- *principle of realism.* The choice of the renovated constant should take into account three types of restrictions:
 - a) restrictions due to the semantic ambiguity of the constant content which have significantly changed in the course of historical development. An example of an extremely requested fairness constant, considered traditional for Russia, is typical in this respect. In particular, both foreign (Craig, 2018; Daniel et al., 2016; Levin, 2020; Romero, 2020), and domestic researchers (Chernysh, 2015; Danilova, 2018; Mareeva & Tikhonova, 2016) state the multivariate interpretation of the “social justice” concept in modern society and the lack of uniqueness which could designate the relations of large social groups. In conditions of such ambiguity, the renovation subjects must necessarily carry out a demarcation allowing them to discard semantic constructions that do not correspond to their interests and goals;
 - b) restrictions determined by the objective conditions of the constant renovation which can prevent its internalization by wide layers of the population. Thus, during the renovation of the solidarity constant in the Belgorod region, it was concluded that attempts to view the consolidation of society in the spirit of Durkheim’s collectivist ideas are utopian in a situation of high-level social differentiation (Durkheim, 2009);
 - c) restrictions defined by the disposition of the renovation subjects. They are always heterogeneous, pursue their social and group interests and do not always have the capabilities to carry out renovation consistently and purposefully regardless of the barriers that arise;
- *principle of functionality.* The renovation of socio-cultural constants is not just their introduction into the space of regional discourse but their subordination to the solution of specific practical problems. Their structure allows us to identify the functions of sociocultural constants. The main one is the function of regional consolidation which is in demand in society where the life norm is a social disjunction expressed in a situation of “disorder, mismatch and disagreement of integration means accompanied by a weakening of consolidation flows and problematization of the main goal of implementation, namely, social reproduction” (Karmadonov, 2015, p. 10). In the current conditions, a complex of institutionalized socio-cultural constants is able to create a kind of spiritual framework on the basis of which intergroup and interpersonal conventions regarding models of acceptable behavior can be built. The function of regional identification which is the formation of identity by correlating and defining the subject with the socio-cultural models proposed on behalf of the regional community, is directly related to the consolidation function. The function of social communication is a logical consequence of the implementation of the two functions. Experience shows that groups and citizens are easier to engage in constructive dialogue if they adhere to common or similar values. On this basis, a culture of trust is formed, according to Sztompka (1993), it “is based on normative consistency; stability of the social order; transparency; social organization; feeling of comprehensibility of the surrounding world;

accountability of other people and institutions” (p. 34). The function of social mobilization is somewhat problematic but nevertheless probabilistic for socio-cultural constants. The problem is specified by the fact that the constants do not motivate to social activity but the motivation system can be built on their basis. Moreover, socio-cultural constants are capable of realizing the function of symbolic demarcation dividing society into “us” and “them”, and accordingly differentiating behavioral strategies;

- *principle of humanistic orientation*. Spiritual phenomena affirming the ideas of ethnic or religious exclusivity, xenophobia, and criminal ethics are found in a rather diverse historical and cultural tradition of any nation. They may be actualized in the current conditions. That is why the renovated socio-cultural constants must meet the requirements of non-violence against a human person who observes legal and moral norms; respects for human rights and freedoms; achieves interpersonal and institutional harmony through the use of a consensus language of communication; prefers a peaceful resolution of issues.

2. *Instrumental principles* include requirements for building procedures for the renovation process:

- *goal-setting principle*, provides that the renovation of any socio-cultural constant should pursue the achievement of clearly formulated goals which, in turn, meet the requirements of realism (achievability); concreteness (assuming their operationalization in a system of strict concepts); adequacy to the capabilities of the subject and object; quantitative restrictions that do not allow the scattering of resources; balancing goals and taking into account both positive and negative consequences;

- *rational reflection principle*. Reflection is the mind ability to direct and bring it into unity in the process of interaction with the variety of individual things. Sokolov (2012) notes:

- Reflection is, primarily, the ability of a person to assess his or her state, thoughts, actions, as from the outside, to correlate the result of actions with the set goal, to determine the boundaries of own knowledge, the capabilities, to admit the existence of other points of view (p. 30).

- *partnership principle* suggests that the renovation of socio-cultural constants should be the result of concerted actions of the main organized entities within the regional community. These include: government bodies, business, and public associations. The implementation of the partnership principle will require a change in their dispositions in relation to regional development;

- *complicity principle* under which the population is not a passive object of administrative influence but an active participant in the renovation process at all its stages: when determining the renovated constants; when discussing their content in new conditions; when defining the ways of institutionalizing constants; in the course of the mechanism formations that ensure transformation into norms of everyday behavior;

- *information exchange principle* requires the formation of an efficiently working socio-technological model of power-public communications which ensures a constant and constructive dialogue between the actors of the renovation process of socio-cultural constants.

The socio-technological model of communication between the authorities and society should be institutionalized, that is, become one of the social institutions, the rules of group behavior adopted by people. If institutionalization does not take place, the interaction between the authorities and society will develop according to a pessimistic scenario with extremely unfavorable consequences;

- *principle of systemic information and analytical support* provides for high-quality social diagnostics supported at all stages of the renovation process. It involves: conducting a cycle of sociological, political science and marketing research according to a single program with the involvement of various centers and organizations and using both traditional and new methods; professional expert analysis of the obtained outcomes during round tables, forums, discussion platforms;
- *convention principle* creates and develops systems of power-social agreements (conventions) that ensure the legitimization of sociocultural constants, turns them into a system of non-formalized rules of behavior. Since the renovated socio-cultural constants can hardly be fixed in a normative legal norm, their conventional consolidation seems to be the most realistic form and the first stage in the process of transformation into norms of group behavior. The convention can be implemented in the view of a social agreement (contract) concluded between the main actors of the regional space.

7. Conclusion

The development of socio-cultural constants can proceed according to the reproduction scenario which is a continuous recreation of stable socio-cultural landmarks that allow people to build constructive communication strategies correlating (or, at least, do not contradict) the national cultural and historical tradition. The scenario of socio-cultural destruction, that is, the disintegration of the value orientations system, forms and norms of sociocultural organization and regulation of human life seems to be quite probable. The implementation of a destructive scenario can lead to a socio-cultural crisis, the possible consequences of which will be either a cultural and civilizational collapse (negative outcome), or the renovation of socio-cultural constants (a positive opportunity). The proposed and substantiated system of principles can serve as a basis for determining and choosing socio-cultural constants to be renovated and having a constructive potential for the development of regional communities. The development and testing of a perception diagnostics system is required for the region population, as well as a step-by-step algorithm for the renovation of socio-cultural constants which can be used by state and municipal authorities, civil society institutions for the reproduction and development of Russian regions.

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