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**INTERACTIVE RITUALS AND PRACTICES OF  
INTELLECTUALS' PARTICIPATION IN GRASSROOTS  
MOVEMENTS**

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***Abstract***

The article is devoted to the study of the experience of intellectuals' participation in the development of grassroots movements. The purpose of the study is the socio-philosophical analysis of subjective grounds of interaction between intellectuals and social activists (leaders and civil activists as well as participants of civil initiatives) in the following aspects: the analysis of the situation and the dynamics of interaction, the identification of the factors promoting successful collaboration. Particular attention is paid to the development of attitudes (activist habitus) that contributes to the integration of the intellectuals into civil movements' activities. The analysis of theoretical positions on the problem revealed that the situation of direct interaction between intellectuals and civil activists should be considered as the interactive ritual. On the basis of the analysis of specific cases of the intellectuals' integration into grassroots practices, the authors identify the objective conditions of the development of interaction situation, related to its success. The article presents the results of investigations of the intellectuals influence on the following aspects of the civil movements' development: identity formation and dynamics of settings of movements' participants; ensuring the symbolic sphere of grassroots; methods of action, forms of achieving the objectives; resource mobilization and development of movements' organizational capacity.

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**Keywords:** Intellectuals, grassroots, social movements, habits, interactive rituals, emotional energy.



## **1. Introduction**

Evaluating social development, its causes and driving forces is the subject matter of heated discussion among thinkers and public figures. Under conditions of political tension and social instability in the countries of Europe, Central Asia, Latin America and Russia, the problem of the identity of the subject of social changes acquires particular relevance.

Among the challenges of the modern world, the growth of grassroots social activity as well as activation of participation of intellectuals in civil and political movements are of importance. The examples are numerous: the support of civil rights movement in Algeria by French intellectuals, dissident movement in the USSR, the activity of philosopher Subcomandante Marcos in the Zapatista Army of National Liberation in Mexico, the movement of landless workers in Brazil, etc. In modern Russia, the projects of producers of professional ideas, criticizing the political and economic situation in the country and suggesting various scenarios, are in greater demand not so much by the establishment as by the leaders and activists of civil movements. It leads to growing intellectuals' participation in the practices of social self-organization (Baran, 1961; Collins, 2011).

Today researchers throughout the world focus on civil participation. French thinker P. Bourdieu (1998) considered the search of the solution of social problems as a civil duty of intellectuals. His European counterparts R. Aron (2005) and J. Habermas (2006) regarded the development of alternative strategies of social evolution (development) as an important function of producers of professional ideas who act like civil activists. Social practice and criticism as forms of civil participation of intellectuals are dealt with by American professor M. Walzer in his book "the Company of Critics: Social Critic and Political Commitments in the XX Century" (Walzer, 1987). Modern Russian philosophers in turn emphasize "political function" – the ability to express the interests of a particular social group – as a life-purpose orientation of intellectuals (Kurennoy, 2009).

In the meantime, most scholars draw attention not only to the content analysis of the proposed by intellectuals ideas, but also to the factors promoting and hindering their implementation. Particular attention in this respect is attached to the interaction between intellectuals and civil activists since it is one of the essential prerequisites of their further collaboration.

## **2. Problem Statement**

Successful collaboration between intellectuals, leaders and activists of civil activists is basically determined by the context of communicative interaction practices – joint interactive rituals which are characterized by forming patterns of personal ties, activists' values, as well as positive support of such interaction (Collins, 2004).

## **3. Research Questions**

The current study is aimed at answering the following questions:

- 3.1. What are the principal factors promoting successful intellectuals' civil participation?

- 3.2. What is the importance of joint interactive rituals of intellectuals, leaders and civil activists?
- 3.3. What is the influence of intellectuals on new practices of grassroots civil self-organization?

#### **4. Purpose of the Study**

The aim of the study is the socio-philosophical analysis of subjective grounds of interaction between intellectuals and social activists (leaders and civil activists as well as participants of civil initiatives) in the following aspects: the analysis of the situation and the dynamics of interaction, the identification of the factors promoting successful collaboration (Charles, 2005).

#### **5. Research Methods**

The methodological basis of the study is the theory of “interactive rituals” (E. Goffman, R. Collins), the theory of operant conditioning (B.F. Skinner), the concept of habitus and the dynamic concept of mentality (R. Bourdieu, N.S. Rozov) which can evaluate subjective foundations of intellectuals’ participation in the practices of civil self-organization.

#### **6. Findings**

Nowadays many scholars in the sphere of mechanisms of social dynamics focus not on systems and institutions, but on the phenomena of an individual’s daily practices. Polish scholar P. Sztompka thinks that social theory is going through a serious paradigm shift connected with the transition from studying macroprocesses to identifying microsociological foundations of events and phenomena in society. P. Sztompka claims the appearance of “sociology of social existence” within which the subject matter of research is an individual’s behaviour in collective contexts limited, on the one hand, by participants’ potential activity and, on the other, by structural and cultural context (Sztompka, 2008).

In this respect, the potential scientific model of conditions and prerequisites of individual and group actions is the concept of R. Bourdieu’s habitus. It is aimed at overriding antinomies of freedom and determinism, at creating new and mechanical reproduction of initial conditions, of the conscious and the unconscious in human behavior. In the theory of social practice suggested by the French sociologist habitus is defined as a system of structuring prepossessions or as a stable complex of individuals’ various cognitive attitudes: gnostical (frames), axiological (symbols), behavioral (stereotypes of practices and adopted strategies), as well as self-perception attitudes (identities). Their concrete combinations determine the attitude of social subjects to other subjects (people), society, state and life at large (Bourdieu, 1998).

Mechanisms of forming and reinforcing habitus is provided by interactive rituals – emotionally significant interactions in situations “here and now” as a result of which participants’ values, identities and behavioral stereotypes are changed or confirmed. The theory of interactive rituals has much heuristic potential when applied to investigating the role of intellectuals in social practices. For example, in the end of the XIX century, Russian revolutionary Narodnik movement used the practice of “going to the people”. In Soviet Russia and in Poland, the ground for joint interactive rituals of intellectuals and civil activists

was groups of academics and private seminars, while in the mid-1990s it was schools and social forums. The leaders of Mexican Zapatistas met the representatives of Indian settlements where their meetings were held. Thus, the starting point of the investigation of collaboration between intellectuals and civil activists must be the situation of interaction which is essentially an interactive ritual of interaction between them.

American sociologist R. Collins suggested the conceptual program of interactive rituals and specified its ingredients, such as: a group, which is physically assembled of at least two people; their focus on the same object or action, each becoming aware that the other is maintaining the focus; their sharing of a common mood or emotion (Collins, 1998, p.22). R. Collins pointed out that the concept of interactive rituals is similar to the theory of situations which have their laws or development processes. In such case, the microsituation of interaction is not something individual, but “it penetrates through the individual, and its consequences extend outward through social networks to macro- of an arbitrarily large scale” (Collins, 1998, p. 20).

The interaction mechanism means that the circumstances, involving a high degree of concentration of attention to each other, cause the feeling of membership, connected with cognitive symbols and impart individual members with emotional energy making them feel confident, enthusiastic and willing to act the way they consider ethically correct.

Communicating with leaders and civil activists, intellectuals contribute to forming identities, activist behavioural attitudes as well as suggest new forms and methods of achieving the aims of the movement. For instance, it was through media publications and public speeches that Brazilian intellectuals formed the collective identity of landless workers’ movement in Brazil. They also succeeded in identifying them as victims of the authorities’ actions which contributed to growing civil solidarity (Ondetti, 2006). In turn, French intellectuals (F. Joilot-Curie, J.-P. Sartre, et al) included civil rights violations into the general context of the struggle for peace and the liberation of colonies from oppressive imperialist states (Walzer, 1987).

The result of interactive rituals among intellectuals and civil activists is the dynamics of frames – cognitive structures which help understand social reality by presenting it as familiar and commonplace, in Bourdieu’s terms. A vivid example here is the Movement of landless workers and the movement against building a hydro power plant (HPP) in Brazil that in the 1970s collaborated with a group of Catholic intellectuals from “theology of liberation”. According to F.D. Rothman and P.E. Olivier, who studied the attitudes of movement activists against building the HPP, the root of the protest was traditional religious belief that land is vitally important to the poor (Rothman & Olivier, 1999). Intellectuals D. Gomez, D. Pasqualotto and their supporters interpreted the struggle against the HPP, having connected faith and life, faith and politics. They claimed that the Bible says that land is God’s gift and it must be equally accessible to all. The program of political education, run by the Pastoral Land Committee, contributed to growing political awareness, collective will, and transformed beliefs of the movement activists – from fatalistic to activist. In the Brazilian mass media, Catholic intellectuals formed the discourse of “losses” that might be caused by building first dams and then HPP. Speaking in support of landless workers’ movement, they placed greater emphasis on the contradiction of the state policy to Christian values by

addressing the ruling elite, by calling for an agrarian reform in the interests of the workers. In Russian history, it is possible to see the shift of frames in such spheres as Russia/West, state/power, people/liberty.

It must be noted that in the process of collaboration, intellectuals influence the stereotypical practices and strategies of civil activists. The projects they suggest can promote both defusing conflicts and radicalizing their methods of achieving aims. In Mexico, Subcomandante Marcos was one of the ideologues of the armed rising of the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN) on January 1, 1994 in the Indian state of Chiapas. However, later, Marcos became known for directing EZLN activists at non-violent actions to exert pressure on the government so that the latter fulfilled the previously passed agreements.

Intellectuals and their ideas specify the symbols of the movements, as well as their shared principles and values. Successful movements are characterized by the genuine link between the intellectual's name and the name of the movement. Sometimes intellectuals themselves become the symbol of the movement (academician A. Sacharov's name is associated with dissident movement in Russia; Subcomandante Marcos' name – with Zapatista movement).

The participation of intellectuals in the successful practices of citizens' self-organization is not a one-off event; it is, as a rule, a continuous interaction (on a regular basis) that is marked by certain frequency. The intensity of emotions is higher in direct personal contacts; moreover, in such case it is possible to establish a more significant feedback. The first successful interaction is a positive factor; it makes civil activists address intellectuals again and again.

Finally, joint interactive rituals are of importance not only for civil activists. R. Collins pointed out that the world of ideas or intellectual discourse is a large-scale direct and indirect dialog (through the media). The discourse of intellectuals is always competitive. But to become the focus of public attention an intellectual must prove that his ideas are new and significant for society. The ability to send a message directly to an addressee as well as to implement the proposed project, life make intellectuals participate in civil movements. Joint interactive rituals have an effect on the identity and cognitive values of professional producers of ideas; they often become civil activists and movement leaders themselves.

## 7. Conclusion

Successful collaboration between intellectuals and civil activists is essentially determined by forming chains of joint interactive rituals which have positive support and are characterized by establishing relevant feedback and the subsequent addressing of movements' leaders to intellectuals. The study of subjective foundations of the participation of intellectuals in civil movements provides insight into how they influence the formation of activists' habitus. Intellectuals create and support the symbolic component of the movement, group solidarity, as well as the participants' orientation to collective actions.

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