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**FLASH MOB IN THE CONTEXT OF SOCIAL AND CULTURAL  
SPACE**

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*Abstract*

Nowadays many researchers study the problem of social and cultural space. It can not be considered separately from symbolic space. The symbolic space of the society is a great resource for the society management, as the symbol control forms models of people's behavior and organizes the space in general. This can lead to both positive and negative trends in the society.

In this article we have analyzed such a phenomenon of the modern symbolic space as a flash mob and revealed its role and significance in the information and communicative society. We studied people's attitude to flash mob and its influence on their lives on the example of Tyumen region. We all live here and can prove that Tyumen region is a multicultural system with dynamic development and contacts with international partners.

Global technologies determine the functioning of the regional social and cultural space, where the information component is becoming increasingly important. In our study we came to the conclusion that the phenomenon of flash mob is a typical product of information and communication civilization. Flash mob allows people to show their creativity and skills in practically no time, which is important for our fast life.

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## 1. Introduction

Nowadays the problems of our life make us understand the world differently, think about new meanings, and rules. Due to the dynamics of socio-cultural processes and transformations of different spheres of life and our consciousness we have to reconsider a lot of things. Today we can talk about the information civilization, transcultural and humanitarian values that can be united by the prospect of sustainable development in all spheres, correlating it with the concept of the noosphere. If we consider culture to be a way of realizing the man's power, we can assume that the noospheric culture is the result of harmonious interaction and development of Mind and Spirit, Thought and Feeling, Knowledge and Faith.

Civilization and culture are closely related to the concept of "space", and all the three were considered by many scientists. Let us characterize some of the approaches to these issues.

At the end of the 19th century one of the most important ideas was that all spheres of life (even social) are spatial. Originally it was O. Comte who justified the position of three-dimensionality of space and used the notion of social distance. At the beginning of the 20th century Durkheim wrote about social fullness of space-time relations perceived by individuals and groups and that the social organization of the society, built on the principle of division and differentiation, is extrapolated to space and makes it heterogeneous. G. Simmel thought that spatial existence of an individual with others on the basis of accession to certain forms of law, morality and communication was one of the main characteristics of the society (Zborovsky, 1974). In the early 20th century J. Moreno and P. Sorokin (1992) introduced the term "social space". According to J. Moreno, social space is a sphere of psychological interactions in which sympathies and antipathies are bound. A man perceives the differences between the two spaces - physical and social - directly (Gvishiani et al., 1989). Sorokin (1992) defines: "Social space is the population of the Earth; Social position is a set of human connections with all groups of the population; The position of a man in the social universe is determined by establishing these connections; The totality of such groups, as well as the totality of positions within each of them, constitute a system of social coordinates, which makes it possible to determine the social position of any individual (Likhtarnikov, 2017).

Thus, the scientists recognize the existence of qualitatively different in their essence spaces: physical and "real" space.

In the 70's of the 20th century, social scientists G. Zborovsky, V. Chernikov, V. Vinogradsky, A. Loi, etc. addressed to social space research. They focused on the ontological properties of social space, its connection with time and geographical space. The relationship of space with activity is interdependent. "Social space and time are not passive forms of social life, but original, active" regulators "of relations that characterize any sort of serious social action" (Valkovskaya, 1999). At the same time, space turns into an active factor that determines these relations, because it coordinates the mutual arrangement of the object-material and organizational factors of activity, correlates the positions of the acting subjects.

## 2. Problem Statement

Information technologies, scientific and technological progress penetrates all spheres of people's life and influence the global development. The informatization of our society is constantly growing. The development of Internet helps form a global information space, or the so called "information and communication civilization". In general, globalization changes our attitude to life, our personalities and emotions, our relationship with other people, as it makes us more open and more tolerant. But at the same time we stay individualistic, which means that traditions and customs do not influence our lives (Kononova, 2004). Speaking about global civilization, we can say that it is characterized by high speed of life and internal freedom of a person, democratization of the society and growth of cities, cross-cultural communication and loneliness of an individual.

The problem of social and cultural space, which has an interdisciplinary nature, is explored by various scientific schools. So, it seems possible to understand "conditions and forms of life activity of the social object of education" (Zabolotnaya, 2003). There is no doubt that the space-time environment of vital activity plays an important role in culture functioning and developing. This is clearly traced by the example of the formation of Tyumen region. In accordance with the concept of D. Forrester, the region model can be defined in the form of three blocks or subsystems interconnected with each other: the population, production, and environment. The process of formation of the regional socio-cultural and socio-economic space is characterized by the achievements in various fields, awareness of its own uniqueness as a region in terms of socio-cultural and socio-economic purposefulness in development to ensure the normal functioning of the regional society.

## 3. Research Questions

Information has always played an important role in the society. A lot of scientists believe that the future of the society depends on the development of its information component. The founders of this approach, A. Touraine, J. Habermas and A. Toffler, suggest three main stages of the society development: the agrarian society, the industrial society, and the postindustrial society. According to these scientists, each listed stage is characterized by its specific type of ownership, communication, production organization, and technology. Communication is the main element of the stage. Thus, in the agrarian society communication is performed orally, in the industrial society communication acquires a written character, in the postindustrial or information society people use different information technologies and Internet for their communication (Plugar, Kononova, Goreva, & Siteva, 2015).

Studying the modern society, we should speak about a huge resource of its control and management – the so called symbolic space. Symbols characterize all the components of the surrounding world, so values and needs also have a symbolic expression. Symbols are images of values and needs, but needs and values, like any other abstract concepts, do not have their own form. Therefore, they have to borrow it from other objects. This instability and ambiguity of the symbolic expression of certain values lead to negative consequences - the manipulation of people's consciousness and behavior.

The founder of symbolic interactionism, J.G. Mead, believes that man is mastering his world through the symbolic values on the basis of which there is communication between people. Thanks to

significant symbols that have a common meaning for all people, thinking arises, and language is considered to be a system of such symbols and a developed form of communication (Clarke, 1970). Collective experience of the society accumulates in the language. The language is the carrier of intersubjective knowledge and it provides us with the interpretation of situations that we are experiencing.

The modern society is characterized by the influence of mass media and information means of communication on young people. In this regard, it seems possible to analyze such a phenomenon of modern symbolic space as a flash mob (from English flash mob - instant pandemonium). Here it is logical to speak about the concept of cultural dramatizations, which was introduced by LG. Ionina. This author defines cultural dramatizations as "the process of identifying individuals in a new cultural form .... The process ends with the formation of social interest, beginning with the subject and behavioral presentation. This process is the opposite to the process of the emergence of a cultural form and is defined as the process of its staging or cultural staging "(Ionin, 1996). It is possible to present the following classification of cultural dramatizations: political (party forums and congresses); Youth (various sessions, concerts); Stylized (Cossacks in the modern era), confessional (Hare Krishnas), etc.

The so-called flash mob phenomenon can be interpreted as a cultural dramatization in the form of information and communication performance. The most important need of a person is striving for self-realization in his life. Being an active subject of the free development in the system of social relations, a personality needs to use his abilities (Plugar, Kononova, Goreva, & Siteva, 2015). The flash mob corresponds to the structure of the concept of "cultural dramatization" and contains the entire set of elements inherent in it - these are external evidence of identification (assimilation of behavioral code and clothing symbols, development of linguistic competence, development of spaces in which the selected cultural form is presented) (Clarke, 1970).

Conducting our research we tried to answer the following questions:

- Is symbolic space a really important management mechanism?
- Can it form the models of people's behavior?
- Does it lead to positive or negative trends of the society?
- What role does a flash mob play in the modern society?

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

The purpose of our study is to determine the category of "space" (social, socio-cultural, informational), to reveal the role of such a phenomenon as a flash mob and to determine its significance in the system of cultural dramatization in the information and communicative civilization.

Naturally, we can draw parallels between the flash mob and what was before it. Flash mob echoes the culture of performances of the 60s and happenings of the 80s of the 20th century. However, if the performance can be regarded as a democratized theater, and happenings as even more democratized, the flash mob is too democratic in the relation to these phenomena. Therefore, being in essence the embodiment of the author's death ideas, the independent life of the text, the pulsating ethics, it turned to be unnecessary for the artistic elite. Flash mob is a culture for the square. This is the embodiment of Bakhtin's ideas about "carnival culture", "carnival energy." However, in the flash mob the collective perception is absent. Even the instructions for mobs do not recommend communicating with other

participants before, during, or after the performance. People taking part in flash mob should do their work and disappear. However, the main difference between flash mob and performances and happenings is that flash mob doesn't have any sense. It does not focus on anything, does not carry any message. It just exists. It is a movement, a word, and a human action. Only the absence of sense and the ability to act help flash mob not to become absurd and this is a distinguishing feature of it " (Ionin, 1996).

## 5. Research Methods

During our research we analyzed the literature about this phenomenon, which is scarce. Thus, in his article "Flash mob – a joke" as a cultural and life strategy" I.V. Golubovich" asks: " Can you really believe in the spontaneity of the `flash-mob?" It is quite obvious, especially in the context of the theories of "manipulation by mass consciousness " that somebody manages such arbitrariness and imaginary spontaneity. Perhaps, it is done by invisible "puppeteers" from the computer virtual world. They select the material for the performance carefully. Then this material is placed on the corresponding Internet page and inspires people to act. It is also obvious, that political technologies make the so called "smart crowd" get accustomed to participating in flash mobs and therefore to a certain life style. Using this life strategy, people can be organized to achieve less innocent and more political goals. For example, in 2009 a turbulent gathering of thousands of teenagers in the city centre of Philadelphia was called a flash mob by the local press. The participants were violent. "Their actions thrust street-side spectators into 'a sudden vortex', a performative encounter that 'shatters the security of comprehension and is experienced as turbulence". In the following year four more violent flash mobs erupted in the city. Without understanding their aggression the participants disrupted the tightly laced social and spatial conventions of the contemporary city. Thus, we should say that violent and non-violent flash mobbing is structurally similar and has a history.

Crowd actions remarkably similar to flash mobs took place in Philadelphia, Baltimore and New York as early as the Revolutionary War, unsettling the presumption that flash mobs are a new species of performance uniquely enabled by digital technology. (Ducomb, Benman, 2014).

Using the examples of the past and present, we investigate flash mob in the dynamics of the urban space. We argue that the relations between the participants of flash mobs, spectators and targets of their influence are constantly being modified, even though "the new group formations emergent within a crowd are often simultaneously concealed by the crowd's turbulent instability"(Ducomb, Benman, 2014).

It is interesting to note, that only 8 moderators manage flash mobs in Russian Internet space (they place the information about the events, conduct Internet conferences and forums on certain topics). They are invisible, and they are led by even more invisible people and this chain can be revealed further"(Golubovich, 2004).

To study the phenomenon of flash mob and people's attitude to it we have chosen Tyumen region (the largest region in the Russian Federation, its area is 1435.2 thousand square kilometers). Tyumen region is characterized by a big share of oil and gas production (65% of all-Russian oil and 92% of gas are produced here). There are about 500 oil and gas fields in the region, the most unique of which are Samotlor (oil) and Urengoy (gas) reserves. Besides, Tyumen region is rich in peat reserves, fish, furs,

game, mushrooms and berries, it has huge forest resources. All these things are very important for the development of our region, but there are no doubts, that the main value of our region is people.

Such unique environment of Tyumen has led to formation and functioning of a unique regional culture as a part of world culture in general. The social and cultural space of the region comprises natural factors, history, population groups, activities, types of property, quality of life, traditions, mentality, culture, media, education.

The current stage of the development of Tyumen oil and gas complex is characterized by the following trends. First, the conditions of life in the north have changed - they have become more comfortable in spite of the extreme climate and environment. Secondly, the modern means of the production have become more technologically sophisticated, more effective, requiring a skilled employee - both a manager and a worker. Concerning this, the role of professional training in higher education has become even more important. Thirdly, economic transformations in Russia made it possible to use foreign experience both in organizing exploration, extraction and processing the resources of Tyumen region, and proved the necessity for international contacts to obtain the most effective results.

## **6. Findings**

Tyumen region is a multicultural system with dynamic development and contacts with international partners. It is characterized by its own national and ethnic features, language and customs (Zabolotnaya, 2003), but global technologies also determine the functioning of the regional social and cultural space, where the information component is becoming increasingly important.

There are a lot of events in our region that attract young people, who are becoming more and more active in their opinion and feelings expression. They think about the activities they are involved in and they are aware of the role of their activity in the life of the whole region. They participate in flash mobs, as they like gathering together. But more often they take them consciously and the flash mobs acquire sense and meaning.

As an illustration of this we can speak about the flash mob in Tyumen, that had a sense, was educationally oriented and had social and cultural significance. Last summer the students and teachers of Tyumen State Institute of Culture organized a flash mob in the frame of "Book dust" week ("Book dust" week is a week during which everybody can return books to the library without any penalty even if they borrowed them long time ago).

In this flash mob the undergraduates of the Institute lined up in front of the library in the form of a "book", each of them was with a book in his hand. The purpose of the action was to inspire the younger generation to read books and study humanitarian subjects. This flash mob is a vivid illustration of the fact that when people tend to achieve good goals they choose to incorporate the symbolic space into social and cultural space and consider the values of the noospheric culture to be important.

## **7. Conclusion**

Thus, nowadays the phenomenon of flash mob represents itself quite vividly as a cultural dramatization. To explain its popularity and mass character we tried to understand its meaning and

cultural value. We came to the conclusion that this phenomenon is a typical product of information and communication civilization, which has a high speed of development. Flash mob allows people to show their creativity and skills in practically no time, which is important for our fast life.

Possibility of being a part of a "smart crowd" without losing a personal freedom helps people get rid of inner complexes, and understand that our society is open to the development and interaction with other cultures.

The symbolic space of the society is a great resource for the society management, as the symbol control forms of people's behavior models and organizes the space in general. This can lead to both positive and negative trends in the society.

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