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**ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS CONDITIONING THE PRACTICE
OF SOCIAL INTERACTION AMONG STUDENTS**

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Abstract

The main hypothesis of the study was the assumption that specific types of social interaction practices are correlated with the level of acceptance of the moral standards (normatives) that form the basis of individual social capital. This hypothesis was tested on the students of three different cities. General sample included 112 students from Moscow (the capital), 79 students from Kaluga (much smaller regional center) and 45 students from Orekhovo-Zuevo (a small town). Participants completed social capital questionnaires (“Trusting relationship”, “Dishonesty legitimization”, “Solidarity”) and a “Social interactions” survey. This survey contains 20 descriptions of typical everyday situations that require some sort of solution or action. For each of the descriptions participants had to rate, on a scale from 0 to 5, the importance of the problem described and the probability of choosing each of five proposed ways of dealing with it. The assumption about the special role of moral standards (normatives) acceptance in shaping the structure of social interaction practices was confirmed. We also show that students living and studying in environments with different socio-cultural resources use different sets of practices of social interaction, which are supported by specific structures of social capital for these environments.

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Keywords: Practices of social interaction, social capital, normative approach, moral peculiarity, socio-cultural conditions.



1. Introduction

Theoretical and methodological issues of studying the differentiation of social behavior models of modern youth acquire special relevance in the conditions of a sharp change in the nature and forms of social relations, the breakdown of habitual stereotypes of life experience, social ideals and the increase of social tension in the modern society (Yurevich, 2015; Guseltseva, 2017).

Being subjects of social relations people constantly interact with each other, performing various actions in everyday life. Specific situations have different situational goals and require different actions. The system of interdependent social actions, the exchange of related actions understood as social interaction present an external condition for interpersonal communication. At the same time, social interaction itself is derived from human relationships and may be changed and constantly developed by subjects of interaction.

Therefore, social interaction is seen as a process, which is constantly influenced by the subjects of interaction who are formed in certain sociocultural conditions. And these conditions are a set of requirements, rules, traditions, customs, directly and indirectly affecting the psyche and behavior of the individual. Under their influence a person creates his own "world views" and also shapes himself and his own ways of dealing with the outward things and other people. The specified requirements of the social and natural environment to the different aspects of the person's mental development were named socio-psychological normatives by K.M. Gurevitch (2008).

Normativity permeates all spheres of a person's life and personality - from his habits and rules (gestures, facial expressions, norms of speech, etc.) to the most complex moral and political forms of relationships. Personality is characterized by a selective attitude towards the norms, and the degree of their appropriation is individual. Conscious or unconscious attitude to the norms, individually expressed desire to follow social and psychological requirements and the associated level of their appropriation is what we call the adoption of normatives, or the normative acceptance (Akimova & Gorbacheva, 2014). The normative acceptance is, from our point of view, the most important feature of a person. This conclusion is based on the following assumptions: 1) normative acceptance, including the attitude to the norms, means that the personality while creating itself selects external requirements to follow; 2) there is always the possibility of personal choice, based on personal preferences, and the personal choice is basically the way of individual realization.

Individuals can use different interaction styles which have developed under the influence of social requirements (normatives). The interaction style is a legitimate way of achieving various goals and solving various tasks and problems. It is possible to single out 2 alternative types of attitude to life and specific social situations, determined by the kind of activity. The first type can be described as the reluctance to get involved, the recognition of one's powerlessness, irritation, self-justification of powerlessness, asociality and unwillingness to enter into any connection with others. Another type includes solidarity, a positive attitude towards others, a desire to work with others and for others, the confidence of solving the problems and the belief in one's success.

A special role in styles of social interaction is assigned to the moral standards (normatives), which are the psychological condition of positive social relations aimed at solving the social problems with the freedom of choice, for example independence in decision-making. The moral standards are related to the problem of regulating human behavior in all directions of social life and in specific social situations. Moral

progress is characterized by the growth of humanity in interpersonal relations, the deepening of the "justice" concept, the growing role of freedom, dignity, honesty, individual rights and, in general, the extension of morality in social life. Moral standards reflect the established traditions and are based on moral (informal) principles and ideals, such as the concepts of good and evil, good and bad, worthy and unworthy. The person's actions and their moral assessments, the level of helping behavior, as well as the characteristic of the interactions with others depends on the degree of moral standards (normatives) acceptance.

The level and nature of interactions between fellow citizens can be considered as one of the indicators of social capital. Social capital can be considered as the main condition that creates social unity and the effective functioning of individuals, their groups and society in general. (Becker, 1993; Coleman, 1988; Lin, 1999; Portes, 1998).

Social capital is a product of positive involvement of the individual in the social environment which should be determined by the existence of mutual trust, honesty and mutual assistance. Social capital is the most important integral socio-psychological characteristic, describing both the society as a whole and the individual person in terms of the above mentioned characteristics. Trust, honesty and solidarity are the most important moral standards, which, at the same time, are regarded as psychological components of social capital. These features reflect the humanistic principles of relations between people and groups. They are a base for social cohesion, absence of contradictions between different social groups, loyalty to the common cause, readiness to reveal common interests and join efforts for the common cause.

Individuals with a high level of social capital are more likely to trust unfamiliar people, help them, cooperate with them, take part in voluntary associations and for example spend time and money on charity. (Kimmelmeier et al., 2006). They are characterized by a friendly and honest attitude to different people. At the same time, the lack of trust, honesty and solidarity violates both the system of private and social relations. The analysis of personality traits that are the basis of social capital from the normative approach standpoint suggests that the acceptance of moral normatives mediates those interpersonal behavior models that individuals choose as representatives of certain social groups (Akimova & Sysoeva, 2014). These norms determine their assessments (significance), as well as passivity of many types of activity, including individual actions and the engagement of other people, that is, the practice of social interaction.

2. Problem Statement

According to Bourdieu, the practice of social interaction is a product of both conscious and unconscious attitude to certain behavioral acts (Bourdieu, 1986, 1998). In other words, they may exist not only in the form of a reflected habit, but also as an unconscious readiness to take certain actions, which is linked with individual selectivity to a certain kind of symbolically encoded social and cultural content.

Based on this understanding, the practice of social interaction will be considered as a certain way of behavior and activity expressed in the individual's habitual actions in the social environment. This practice will be considered also as an assimilated and reproduced individual social interaction feature.

The structure of the social interaction of the individual includes an analysis of external conditions in regards to acceptability of any given practice. This mechanism allows you to identify the situation and evaluate its value for the subject. If the social situation is ordinary and does not require problematization, then its recognition and action occur reflexively, without resorting to an intellectual resource. If it is

problematic, then the individual faces the task of determining the situation and its correlation with the existing social and economic values and / or behavioral norms of social interaction. In other words, the behavior embodied in the practice of social interaction may involve both a small measure of intellectual awareness, based on schemes for solving typical problems, or rely on intellectual reflection, which involves the rejection of the simplified schematic automatism and the search for more rational ways of social thinking and action.

3. Research Questions

An important feature of the practices of social interaction is their cultural and historical character. Since practice is the performance of certain actions in a certain way in specific conditions of the individual's social life, it unfolds in the space of cultural norms, implied by community that establishes and regulates them through rewards and sanctions. The practice of social interaction, in addition to knowledge of the essence of the social life, knowledge systems relevant to specific sociocultural conditions and within the framework of social functioning in local environments, are actualized.

4. Purpose of the Study

Features of the practices of social interaction described above served as a theoretical framework for present study. The idea of our research was to establish whether there are connections between the practices of social interaction and the moral characteristics of students in differing socio-cultural environments.

A research program was proposed that covered three levels of social functioning of the individual in society, which are traditionally referred to as macro-, meso- and micro levels. The macro level includes for instance factors of institutional, socio-cultural order, regulating behavior through customs, traditions, norms, values, laws and rules. This level is specified in the study as a community of young people belonging to the same cultural stratum, namely the students of Central Russia. Meso level generates the specificity of the formation of social capital and its behavioral manifestations, associated with belonging to different social groups. In our study, different regional and vocational-educational groups (students from the universities in the capital, the regional center and the small town and of different subject areas) were taken for comparison. The micro level is based on those factors of the social being of the personality, which are determined by its internal characteristics, and above all by the degree of development and quality of the adoption of moral standards (normatives) that form social capital.

Our main hypothesis was the assumption that specific types of social interaction practices that express the way of initiation, intensity and actualization of social ties with others are correlated with the level of acceptance of the moral standards (normatives) that form the basis of individual social capital, and the nature of this relationship has its own specifics in different sociocultural environments, determining the preferences in assessing the significance of situations, social activity and the forms of its implementation in certain spheres of students' social life in the capital, the regional center and the small town..

5. Research Methods

General sample (N=236) included students from three cities: Moscow (N=112) – the capital and the biggest city, Kaluga (N=79) – a smaller regional center and Orekhovo-Zuevo (N=45) – a small city. All

participants were 18-27 years old ($M=19.6$, $SD=1.3$) with a gender representation of 81% female to 19% male.

Participants completed social capital questionnaires and a survey (diagnostic interview) about social interaction practices. This survey contains 20 descriptions of typical everyday situations that require some sort of solution or action. For each of them participants have to rate scale from 0 to 5 the importance of the problem described and the probability of the proposed ways of action. 0 stands for absolute refusal to act that way, and 5 means that a participant would definitely do that.

There were five types of action proposed for each situation. The first type was “to do nothing” (as manifestation of civil disregard (in the terminology of G. Bloomer (1996)). The second type of activity is associated with the realization of the desire to act alone, individually, without interacting with other people. Thus, the person shows the intention to take personal responsibility. Other options for action reflect the desire to establish different kind of cooperation (both direct contact between people and mediated forms of interaction). There are three possible options for interaction. The first option is to establish horizontal links with others (friends, acquaintances, people who are nearby and have the opportunity to get involved in solving the problem) for a joint activity (“acting as an organizer”). The second option is to establish vertical links (with people having higher status, special powers or duties to deal with the problem situation) (“acting as an initiator”). The third version of practices is manifestation of readiness to join activities organized by other people (“acting as a participant”).

Mean scores for all types of actions by all situations were used as main quantitative parameters.

Also, there were three additional parameters: the total indicator of all types of activity excluding “doing nothing” – “general activity”; the overall score of actions alone and as a participant – “personal activity”; and the overall score of horizontal and vertical interactions – “involvement of others”.

We used the following questionnaires as measures of social capital:

1. “Trusting relationship” which consists of: 1) Positive conceptions of others; 2) Benefits from trusting relationship; 3) Positive conceptions of state and public institutions; 4) Self-trust; and 5) Caution as a result of mistrust.

2. “Dishonesty legitimization” which includes the scales: 1) Deception; 2) Hypocrisy; 3) Perfidy; 4) Falseness and 5) Larceny.

3. “Solidarity” which includes the scales: 1) Love of significant others; 2) Patriotism; 3) Civic consciousness.

6. Findings

Table 01 presents the descriptive statistics of different types of activities for students from different cities and p-values for Mann-Whitney paired tests.

Table 01. Descriptive statistics of “Social interactions” survey indexes of students from Moscow, Kaluga and Orekhovo-Zuyevo.

City	Moscow		Kaluga		Orekhovo-Zuyevo		p-values for Mann-Whitney tests		
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	Moscow vs Kaluga	Moscow vs Orekhovo-Zuyevo	Kaluga vs Orekhovo-Zuyevo
“Social interactions” survey									
Doing nothing	2.197	1.041	1.456	1.108	1.491	1.061	0.0001	0.0001	0.793
Acting by yourself	1.879	0.700	2.240	0.842	1.998	0.724	0.002	0.410	0.070
Acting as an organizer	1.872	0.809	2.271	0.902	2.072	0.750	0.005	0.130	0.301
Acting as an initiator	1.771	0.884	2.463	1.010	2.258	1.042	0.0001	0.0061	0.376
Acting as a participant	2.769	0.919	3.180	1.014	2.958	0.977	0.003	0.187	0.207
General activity	2.073	0.718	2.539	0.821	2.322	0.790	0.0001	0.041	0.170
Personal activity	2.324	0.745	2.711	0.820	2.478	0.783	0.001	0.206	0.129
Involvement of others	1.821	0.783	2.367	0.889	2.165	0.842	0.0001	0.013	0.310

Note: P-values of Mann-Whitney tests are shown. The significant values are in bold.

Students from Moscow have significantly lower scores for all types of activities and significantly higher scores on “doing nothing” scale in comparison with students from Kaluga. Moscow students are in general less active, and faced with a variety of situations that require solutions; they more often show civil disregard and indifference. Moscow students also rated situations used in the survey as significantly less important ($U=2385.5$, $p = 0.0001$).

There are no significant differences between the students of Kaluga and Orekhovo-Zuevo neither on the activities scores nor on importance scores.

In comparison with the students of Orekhovo-Zuevo, Moscow students again are much more likely to show social alienation, less often act as initiators, less likely to involve others in joint actions to solve them and have a lower overall activity index. At the same time, Moscow students do not differ from Orekhovo-Zuevo students in such indicators as individual action and horizontal and vertical links establishment.

Moscow students’ relative passivity in situations requiring intervention and civic participation need an explanation. Interaction with neighbors is an important part of small town life: neighbor ties are included in the contexts of solving everyday tasks and acquire a personalized character. Residents of a small town behave properly because they appreciate public opinion, their behavior is regulated by what could neighbors say or think of it (Park, 2002). Neighborhood is understood broadly and plays an important role in the model of J. Jacobs (2011). The neighbors are those whom people meet in the yard, on the street, do not necessarily know them and say hello, but discern, know by sight. A person in a small town often behaves properly because the possibility of the presence of an observer is inevitable, and the so-called "street view" presents (Jacobs’ expression).

In a big city (with a population over 1 million) on the other hand, it is difficult to have such relationships: it's unlikely to meet familiar person, those one meets are almost impossible to remember. Therefore, their opinion is not significant and does not affect individual behavior.

At the same time, intensity and quality of social interaction cannot be explained solely by the urbanization factor. The fact that Moscow students, while studying in an environment with a high socio-cultural resource, at the same time demonstrate lack of general social activity and are not oriented towards interactions and proactive moves in problem situations, may have prerequisites in the specifics of their socialization processes. It should be emphasized that the information-rich and intellectually developing environment of the Moscow University triggers students' independent thinking and self-determination in the production of social meanings. This, according to Castells (2000), has an impact on reducing the level of trust in traditional social institutions and conductors of social influence. In other words, information organized as an individual resource forces a person to focus not on the other, but on his own "constructed normative order, reducing the role of social values in the regulation of social behavior" (Castells, 2000, P. 54).

In order to assess the extent to which social practices are mediated by the level of acceptance of moral standards, it is necessary to take into account that environmental determinants of social participation and civic responsibility have a more prominent role in small towns, because people interact closely with each other and social activity unfolds in already developed communities mainly through horizontal links - through familiar people (neighbors, friends, colleagues). In small towns the behavior of individuals is less dependent on the acceptance of moral standards, and is more often defined by specific personal relationships. In large and medium-sized cities, the decision-making should be mediated more by the acceptance of moral standards, which are the components of social capital.

Our results confirmed these expectations. Tables 02, 03, 04 show significant correlations between the main indicators of social interaction and the parameters of the moral standards acceptance.

As seen in Tables 02, 03, and 04, the number of correlations between survey scores and the questionnaires differ for students from Moscow (39 significant correlations), Kaluga (33) and Orekhovo-Zuevo (14). These results can be explained by the fact that in small Orekhovo-Zuevo interactions are more often based on personal contacts and direct communication between people. In the same time the big and medium cities are characterized by disunity and lack of coordination of actions, self-justification in powerlessness in an effort to cooperate with others, a lower level of civil responsibility and low aspirations to participate in public life. Therefore, any manifestations of the activity of residents of big and medium-sized cities in problem situations are mediated by the acceptance of moral standards.

Table 02. Spearman’s correlations between “Social interactions” survey scores and “Trusting relationship”, “Dishonesty legitimization”, “Solidarity” questionnaires for **Moscow** students.

Questionnaires	Trusting relationship			Dishonesty legitimization			Solidarity		
	Benefits from trusting relationship	Caution as a result of mistrust	Overall Score	Perfidy	Falseness	Overall Score	Patriotism	Civic consciousness	Overall Score
“Social interactions” survey									
Doing nothing	-0.326	-0.329	-0.351	0.342		0.358	-0.350	-0.283	-0.390
Acting by yourself	0.339						0.325	0.403	0.458
Acting as an organizer	0.309						0.325	0.366	0.404
Acting as an initiator	0.366				-0.303		0.290		0.355
Acting as a participant	0.369				-0.349		0.343	0.332	0.386
General activity	0.366				-0.278		0.384	0.362	0.464
Personal activity	0.385				-0.310		0.369	0.395	0.448
Involvement of others	0.355						0.33	0.328	0.425

Note: Only significant correlations ($p < 0.05$) are shown.

Table 03. Spearman’s correlations between “Social interactions” survey scores and “Trusting relationship”, “Dishonesty legitimization”, “Solidarity” questionnaires for **Kaluga** students.

Questionnaires	Trusting relationship					Dishonesty legitimization				Solidarity	
	Positive conceptions of others	Benefits from trusting relationship	Positive conceptions of state and public	Caution as a result of mistrust	Overall Score	Deception	Perfidy	Falseness	Overall Score	Patriotism	Overall Score
“Social interactions” survey											
Doing nothing	-0.650	-0.371	-0.535	-0.287	-0.596	0.271		0.377	0.340	-0.252	-0.304
Acting by yourself	0.439	0.394	0.370		0.387					0.296	0.292
Acting as an organizer	0.373	0.410	0.295		0.298		0.243			0.242	0.227
Acting as an initiator		0.231									
Acting as a participant											
General activity	0.294	0.298	0.231								
Personal activity	0.311	0.251									
Involvement of others	0.297	0.351	0.275		0.227						

Note: Only significant correlations ($p < 0.05$) are shown.

Table 04. Spearman’s correlations between “Social interactions” survey scores and “Trusting relationship”, “Dishonesty legitimization”, “Solidarity” questionnaires for **Orekhovo-Zuyevo** students.

Questionnaires	Trusting relationship		Dishonesty legitimization		Solidarity		
	Benefits from trusting relationship		Falseness	Overall Score	Patriotism	Civic consciousness	Overall Score
Doing nothing			0.306	0.308			
Acting by yourself						0.402	
Acting as an organizer	0.325					0.448	0.374
Acting as an initiator							
Acting as a participant					0.309	0.344	0.321
General activity	0.298					0.378	
Personal activity						0.387	0.310
Involvement of others						0.341	

Note: Only significant correlations ($p < 0.05$) are shown.

At the same time, the small amount of correlations between social interaction and practices and acceptance of moral standards in the form of individual characteristics constituting social capital in the subsample of students from Orekhovo-Zuyevo can also be explained by the very nature of the practices. According to P. Berger and T. Lukman, any human activity is subject to habitualization, which ensures the reproduction of the social character of human activity with the minimization of efforts from its institutionalization (Berger & Lukman, 1995). A directional translation of models of helping behavior in the educational environment of the university, the personified nature of social contacts and the high density of horizontal links that characterized the socio-cultural resource of students living and studying in Orekhovo-Zuyevo resulted in the discrepancy between the practices of social interaction and the relevant moral standards.

Relation between social practices and moral standards (normatives) acceptance was manifested in the clearest way in the case of normatives of solidarity and trust. The amount of significant correlation in different subsamples shows that in medium and small cities solidarity is less significant as a basis for different types of social activity compared to a city with over a million in population. This can be explained by the fact that due to the disunity and atomization of the environment of young people living in the metropolis, all types of activity and interactions in individuals are mediated primarily by the acceptance of a standard of solidarity. At the same time, it should be noted that the "Love of significant others" scale does not correlate with any types of social interaction practices, and all significant links are revealed with the scales "Patriotism" (love to one's country, identification with it, trusting attitude towards compatriots), "Civic consciousness" (non-indifference to social problems, civic responsibility, the desire to participate in

public life, activity in upholding one's beliefs concerning the individual rights and freedoms), and the overall score for "Solidarity" questionnaire.

As for "Trusting relationship" questionnaire it should be noticed that significant positive correlation of the intensity of using social practices in situations requiring independent action was found mainly with the scale "Benefits from trusting relationship" in all three sub-samples. This indicates a fairly rational and selfish behavior, when the activity aimed at solving problems and helping people depends on the benefits from positive relations with others. Unlike students from Moscow and Orekhovo-Zuevo, in Kaluga the behavior of young people is often mediated not only by selfish considerations, but also by trust to people, which is based on the conviction of their goodwill, loyalty and honesty and manifests itself in the desire to cooperate with them, to help and support them, express interest and sympathy towards them.

The moral standard of dishonesty has a weaker impact on the social interaction practices. We've found the smallest number of significant correlations with this standard. Among Kaluga and Orekhovo-Zuevo students the intensity of avoidance practices (passive behavior) reveals significant positive correlations with the permissibility of lies in relationships and with a general indicator of dishonesty legitimization. Lying is the desire to deceive in words, to report untruth; the main thing in lies is the existence of a goal to transfer the information that does not correspond to reality and to deceive the communication partner. In the Kaluga sub-sample negative, avoiding practices have been associated with adherence to deception. In the Moscow sub-sample passivity positively correlates with the permissibility of perfidy (violation of accepted commitments, words, principles, betrayal) and overall scores of dishonesty legitimization.

Thus, the intensity of negative and avoiding social interactions practices is mediated by the attitude to the deceit and perfidy as to normal features that do not cause condemnation. It can be assumed that such an idea of a person is a kind of justification for one's own unwillingness to do something, including helping people. This assumption is confirmed by the fact that Moscow students have a lower level of dishonesty legitimization associated with the desire to participate in actions to solve problems, establish vertical relations and involve others in solving problems. This means that the more honest Moscow students are the more active they are in solving the problems they face with in different situations.

7. Conclusion

The study results can be summarized as follows:

1) the assumption about the special role of moral standards (normatives) acceptance in shaping the structure of social interaction practices, their stability and variability in specific sociocultural environments was confirmed;

2) new data have been obtained on the relationship between the personality traits characterizing social capital and the specificity of social interaction practices characterized by the nature of activity, the degree of involvement and the content of social contacts;

3) students living and studying in environments with different socio-cultural resources use a different set of practices of social interaction, which are supported by specific structures of social capital for these environments;

4) students from Kaluga and Orekhovo-Zuevo showed a greater degree of rootedness in the society and readiness for helping behavior in comparison with students from Moscow;

5) quantitative and qualitative specificity is found in mediating the social practices by the level of acceptance of moral standards that make up individual social capital; the role of moral standards in the intensity of active interaction modes increases in the environmental conditions of a metropolis capital and a regional center, while in a small town these behavioral characteristics have a personalized character, are based on public opinion and are regulated by direct relations with neighbours..

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