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**THE FIELD OF ECOLOGY AS A COMPLEX OF STATUSES AND
SUBJECTIVE POSITIONS**

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Abstract

The field of ecology is a field of social practice in which human activities are aimed at understanding and transformation of living systems and the environment, of the way industry affects them, and of the personal and social relations pertaining to nature. Compared to statuses in other social fields, a status in the field of ecology is a more comprehensive notion, as it determines not only *social* behaviour in problem situations related to ecology, which is the behaviour towards other people, but also *environmental* behaviour, which is the behavior towards nature. Using a mixed method research design this article overviews the field of ecology within the framework of sociological terms as a complex of statuses, or social positions interrelated, or mediated, by means of a system of rights and obligations. In the Russian society, a status in the field of ecology is attainable, since it is acquired due to a free choice and personal efforts, and is under control of the person themselves. The core element of an environmental status is a system of stable attitudes (position) in the field of ecology, which determines its set of behavioral models (role system) in ecology-related problem situations. A position in the field of ecology is a fixed (situationally stable) system of attitudes of a person towards nature and problem situations in the field of ecology, which manifests itself in their behaviour and actions. Given the understanding of a status in the field of ecology, for which stable attitudes of a subject are the core, the field of ecology as a field of social relations can be considered a complex of subjective positions.

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1. Introduction

In the course of gaining a deeper understanding of and transforming the nature and itself, the humankind transitioned from a proto-society, in which social relations were only in their infancy, to the modern society, which is a complex system of human interactions characterized by a multidimensional structure and regulated by various institutions. The social aspect of environmental problems dates back to ancient times, when it shaped the economic order, way of life, and fate of the population (Medvedev, 2001; Gifford, 2014; Sörqvist, 2016). This is why we deem the field of ecology a subject activity domain which determines society development and is a crucial element of social practice embracing all aspects of social life and sustaining the social becoming of the young generation (Cherkashin & Titov, 2017; Graham & White, 2016; Patterson, 2015).

2. Problem Statement

A subject activity domain is defined as a complex of reality fragments (features of objects belonging to material or ideal worlds) acting as the subjects and means of activity, and as conditions external to the activity itself. The field of ecology is a subject activity domain, which is focused on natural objects, and industry and social relations pertaining to nature. By carrying out activities in the field of ecology, people focus their activity on the following three groups of interrelated objects: a. living systems and the environment; b. industry, living systems, and the environment; and c. social relations pertaining to understanding and transformation of nature. It enables us to regard the field of ecology as a field of activity which is integrated in other areas of social practice, including the political, economic, industrial, cultural, legal ones, etc.

Knowledge of the connections between living systems and the environment, of the impact industry and consumption have on them, and of the social relations pertaining to nature in the form of acquired understanding of concepts, laws, principles, and images of phenomena and objects, is a product of a cognitive activity in the field of ecology and a key element of social practice. Individual and collective experience in the field of ecology as a field of social practice, cemented in the form of knowledge, is its condition, means and the most important result. The knowledge, which reflects a particular fragment of reality and is structurally, organizationally and didactically united into an open self-organized system, makes a separate science (Komissarov, 1991).

This definition does not run counter to the methodological tradition of viewing science only or predominantly as a system of knowledge. The integration of environmental knowledge, approaches and values into various areas of social practice stimulated the development of interdisciplinary research embracing many different sciences, which lead to the blurring of the boundaries of ecology as an area of knowledge. Ecology is now known as the entire complex of the relations between the man and the nature and the environment.

Thus, the field of ecology is a field of social practice in which the human activity is focused on understanding and transformation of living systems and the environment, of the impact of industry on living systems and the environment they are found in, and of the personal and social relations pertaining to nature (Bolt, 2017; Schooler, 2017; Titov & Cherkashin, 2016).

3. Research Questions

Carrying out various activities, including the ones related to ecology, people become involved in social interactions, which are crystallized in the forms of social relations leading to the emergence of statuses, or positions of people in a given society.

Are subjective positions personally or socially significant and fixed in rights and obligations that form social relations in the field of ecology? Are statuses in the field of ecology mediated by a system of rights and obligations in other fields of social relations? Is the field of ecology an area of social relations that serve as a condition of the existence and development of a society, and a complex of statuses and subjective positions?

4. Purpose of the Study

To study the field of ecology within the framework of sociological terms as a complex of statuses, or social positions interrelated, or mediated, by means of a system of rights and obligations.

5. Research Methods

A complex of theoretical (studying and analysis of the literature on the subject of research, analysis of pedagogical experience in the field of environmental education, and modelling) and empiric (observation, questionnaires, conversation, and analysis of learning activity results) methods was used.

6. Findings

The above mentioned approach is not applied to the field of ecology in the sociological literature at our disposal, but the aforementioned signs of the becoming of this area of social relations, which ensure citizens' satisfaction of the need for environmental welfare and safety, make its discussion reasonable. To view the field of ecology as a complex of statuses, their existence should be validated.

A status (social or personal) is a system of stable attitudes (position) codified in apposite rights and obligations. Its schematic formula is the following: status = a system of stable attitudes (position) + a system of rights and obligations. A position in the field of ecology is a fixed (situationally stable) system of attitudes of a person towards nature and problem situations in the field of ecology, which manifests itself in their behaviour and actions. Existence of such positions is validated by the types of environmental behaviour discovered by researchers.

Looking into the issue of environmental behaviour with regard to its connection with environmental consciousness, Medvedev and Aldasheva (2001) described several types of environmental behaviour as a conscious, purposeful activity of a person or society affecting environmental (natural) objects.

Depending on the ways and means by which people satisfy their living and social needs, psychologists divide environmental behaviour into two forms: uncompensated consumption (no measures are taken to replenish the source of the goods being consumed) and compensated consumption (the need is satisfied, and the anthropogenic impact is compensated for). The degree of either form is manifested in the behaviour of self-limitation, behaviour of self-improvement, or uncontrolled behavior (Medvedev &

Aldasheva, 2001). Our research calls for the expansion of the range of objects of environmental behaviour by inclusion of social relations pertaining to ecology. This is why it is of special interest for us to consider the division of environmental behaviour into passive and active in the context of the level of environmental idea development in the social environment of a person or group (see table 1).

Table 01. Level of environmental idea development in the social environment of a person or group

| Behavioral Scale | | |
|--------------------------|---|--|
| Active behaviour | | |
| Passivity ↔ action | 6 | Awareness of the fact that the problem, the solution to which the behaviour is aimed at, is an environmental one; the behaviour is based on the belief that a particular action is necessary, and its nature depends on what kind of environmental consciousness a person has: it is either rapacious or science-based |
| | 5 | Conscious abidance by or rejection of all regulatory environmental policies, which is based on a belief |
| | 4 | Support or rejection of any forms of active environmental behaviour, promoted or displayed by others |
| | 3 | Formation of an environmental situation model in some generalized form and of their own attitude towards it; that is, the formation of the opinion and position, if only manifested in the form of compassion or antipathy |
| | 2 | Interest, i.e. Understanding of particular environmental situations; still, this understanding does not lead to any actions |
| | 1 | Complete indifference towards environmental problems and formation of their own routine environmental behaviour based on the standards seen in their social environment, without correlating them with such categories as “beneficial – harmful”, “needed – unneeded”, or “allowed – prohibited.” |
| Passive behaviour | | |

The psychology of the attitude of a person towards nature is discussed in detail in the works by Deryabo and Yasvin. Depending on the nature of interaction with nature, Yasvin (2000) defined the pragmatic, aesthetic, cognitive, practical, protective and ethic types of a subjective attitude towards nature. Each of the attitude types mentioned above can be subjective and objective depending on how natural objects are perceived. The only exceptions are the protective one, which can be only objective, and the ethic one, which implies perception of a natural object only as a subject. Thus, psychological research supports the existence of particular positions in the field of ecology (Heras, 2017). But are subjective positions personally or socially significant and fixed in rights and obligations that form social relations in the field of ecology? The answer to this question can be found by studying social norms in the field of ecology, which determine environmental behaviour, codify positions in the field of ecology, and define them as statuses (Fujitani, McFall, Randler, & Arlinghaus, 2017; Stojanovic et al., 2016).

We will not discuss the existence of habits, customs, traditions, laws and taboos that regulate the rights and obligations of Russian citizens in the field of ecology, highlighting instead a dysfunction of the system of social control on all its levels, with the main element of it being social norms. The one exception is the social control exerted by the state, which implies formal negative sanctions in case of violation of environmental legislation. All this is indicative of the lack of the rights and obligations that formally codify subjective positions in the field of ecology, defining them as statuses.

Viewing a status in the field of ecology as a position held by a person as a representative of a particular social group (profession, gender, nationality, age, faith, and residence) changes the matter (Kravchenko, 2003). For example, living in an environmentally neglected district leads to an ascribed residential status of an environmentally neglected zone dweller or a displaced person with the rights and obligations pertinent to it, whereas active involvement in environmental movements results in an attainable political status of an environmental activist.

A pertinent status is also attained as a result of involvement in professional activities, such as conservational ones, or, conversely, the ones contributing to the devastating impact on nature. An ecologist or a poacher is not merely a professional status, but also a set of rights and obligations towards nature and a particular professional community.

All the statuses mentioned above can be called environmental only conventionally, because individuals become involved in an environmental situation predominantly as holders of residential, political or professional statuses (Methmann & Oels, 2015; Rechkemmer et al., 2016; Bayes 2018). For these statuses to become environmental, it is required of the people comprising a wider social environment to adopt a certain attitude towards the rights and obligations of the status holders, and this environment should not be limited to the professional, political or economical framework. For example, the status of a director of a factory that violates environmental laws will cease to be professional only and bound only by the rights and obligations similar to those of other professionals like him, such as an environmental protection officer or an environmental inspector, as soon as the citizens living in the area being polluted adopt a particular position in the field of ecology, which will be manifested in the actions aimed at achieving their own environmental welfare and safety. By asking a deputy they elected, citizens exercise their right of the voter status holders. In case of legal action, citizens and the factory director will be bound by the legal statuses of plaintiffs and a defendant. All subsequent actions of citizens exercising their position in the field of ecology in a particular problem situation will be determined by a political status of voters or a legal status of plaintiffs. In this case, the status in the field of ecology appears to be sent to the sidelines, as the political or legal statuses become primary. It enables us to surmise that there exist statuses in the field of ecology that are mediated by a system of rights and obligations in other fields of social relations. Its schematic formula is the following: a mediated status in the field of ecology = a system of stable attitudes in the field of ecology + a system of rights and obligations in political, family, economic and other fields. Obviously, exercising rights and obligations in various fields of social life calls for the existence of apposite relations, which we did not include in the formula due to their collaterality and instrumental role. It is worthy of note that everything said above is a hypothesis (and an invitation to join the research), which requires further theoretical development and thorough experimental verification.

Let us summarize our understanding of a status in the field of ecology as the key element of the social structure. Compared to statuses in other areas of society, a status in the field of ecology is a more comprehensive notion, as it determines not only social behaviour in problem situations related to ecology, which is the behaviour towards other people, but also environmental behaviour, which is the behavior towards nature. The fact that the interconnectedness of statuses in the field of ecology is mediated by a system of rights and obligations is the reason behind the term choice: mediated statuses in the field of ecology. In the Russian society, a status in the field of ecology is attainable, since it is acquired due to a

free choice and personal efforts, and is under control of the person themselves. The core element of an environmental status is a system of stable attitudes (position) in the field of ecology, which determines its set of behavioral models (role system) in ecology-related problem situations.

The notion of status is used to codify the relations adopted in the society. Given the understanding of a status in the field of ecology, for which stable attitudes of a subject are the core, the field of ecology as a field of social relations can be considered a complex of subjective positions.

The notion of a “subjective position” is related to the notions of “life stance” and “inner position”, and the notion of a “mature subjective position” is related to the notion of a “proactive life stance” (Lingart, 1970; Bozhovich, 1989). The “inner position” is shaped by what a person’s attitude towards his or her objective position is, based on their experience, capabilities, needs and aspirations. This determines the structure of attitudes of a person towards reality, other people and themselves. Psychologically, a subjective position can be considered as a functional system ensuring a person’s cognitive predication of a sequence of related events in which this person is actively involved. This ability of a person to act proactively is called anticipation. Within the scope of this paper, it can be regarded as an immediate element of a personality’s inclination, and a subjective position can be considered an anticipatory structure. A subjective position is a situationally stable and developing system of a person’s attitudes as a subject of activity focused on the environment (the society and nature) and the self, and having a system of values as its core. A subjective position is a position of a person as a subject of their own development, and, to some extent, the whole society or its particular areas. A mature subjective position is indicative of personal maturity. The notion of a “subjective position in the field of ecology” enables us to reflect in a more comprehensive way the dynamics of the development of the field of ecology as a subsystem of society, in which cognitive and transforming activities of a subject are aimed at social relations and nature. A subjective position implies active and conscious involvement of a subject in the process of social becoming that leaves no room for a passive position of contemplation and waiting, which can be called objective. This approach is in line with the division of environmental behaviour into active and passive (Medvedev & Aldasheva, 2001).

7. Conclusion

To conclude, the field of ecology as a developing area of social relations can be considered a complex of subjective positions reflecting the attitude of individuals towards environmental situations and determining the set of behavioral models of a person in the field of ecology, and statuses codifying subjective positions in the rights and obligations to the society and natural objects.

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