

Peculiarities of urban youth interests' realization in social conflicts

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Abstract. The article is devoted to the problem of urban youth interest's realization in the sphere of social conflicts, which is a critical situation determined on the one hand, by the overall logic of socio-cultural development, and, on the other, by the specifics of youth's participation in the processes of social interaction. According to the research, the conflict is one of the obligatory parts for the social interaction functioning. In relation to youth, it is a condition that ensures its socialization and identification. Based on the interpretation results of questionnaire survey the features of behavioral attitudes of young citizens at the main stages of the genesis conflict were identified: the emergence of an obstacle in the implementation of interest, the reaction to this obstacle, the choice of the conflict type as a way to resolve a difficult life situation, the definition of a behavioral strategy in the conflict and its implementation. The results show that social conflict is considered by youth not only as a means of overcoming obstacles that arise in the implementation of their interests, but also as the way to attract attention to their problems and present personal ideas.

1 Introduction

Social conflicts are necessary elements that involve young people into the process of relationships that have been developed between young people and "adult" communities and young people. These relations are universal and act as necessary moments in the life of young people, regardless of their status and other characteristics. In the course of analyzing social system, conflicts can be considered as social attractors that focus on various, often contradictory, processes occurring at the macro and micro levels of a social organization.

The ordinariness of a social conflict for young people requires the need to define behavioral patterns, which do not only allow them to resolve it with minimal losses, but also give the chance to use the opportunities arising in the course of the conflict interaction for the implementation of specific interests. It is worth noting that conflicts are often initiated by the youth itself and are considered by it as a completely acceptable, if not optimal, taken as the best way of self-realization process.

Of course, the high level of social and subcultural differentiation of youth implies the presence of conflict behavioral features in its individual groups. Therefore, the main idea in

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the research work is to identify the specific features of social conflicts interests' realization peculiar to urban youth – the group which includes most of the young residents in Russia.

2 Literature review

Conceptually, the research is primarily based on the works of the German sociologist G. Simmel, who is often regarded as the founder of conflict study science [1]. According to the author, the central idea was the society itself, which is a natural space for human interaction. G. Simmel emphasizes, the struggle between people and social groups is one of the most important social interaction factor. Following this idea, conflict acts as the result of contradictions between forms and individuals, it is a consequence of the internal aggression of people. The conflict situation, according to G. Simmel, is not intended to solve the contradiction, but to detect it, and appears as a form of life dynamics (“conflict feeds on the energy of life”), without which only simple life in nature is possible. Therefore, culture, life and conflict are inseparable concepts. So, culture and conflict coexist at the expense of each other and cannot be separated.

It is obvious that any social conflict, firstly, can productively be analyzed only in the context of socio-cultural (in the analyzed city) environment, defining a set of imperatives as a part the content; secondly, it should be measured by the ratio of social conjunction and disjunction processes, as their organic (constructive or destructive strength) component. It determines its vector oriented for creating or destroying. But at the same time, thirdly, the conflict is an expression of the subjective dispositions of actors, who are young people destroying imperatives and changing the vector of the conflict.

Nevertheless, up to the 60s of XX century, the prevailed scientific idea was in understanding the society as an equilibrium, and the conflict that violates this equilibrium. Usually it was taken as a social dysfunction. By the early 60s of the XX century, after A. Royce, the majority of scientists analyze the conflict “as the interpretation of heterogeneous societies and understood the conflict as a phenomenon originally set and, therefore, typical for all social interactions” [2].

According to the German sociologist R. Dahrendorf the so-called “conflict model of the society” was developed in the late 50s of the XX century. In his research the author considered conflict to be a natural state of the society, and its absence analyzed as an anomaly. According to R. Dahrendorf the conceptualization of the modern phenomenon of youth conflicts is reflected in the idea that conflict is not only an attribute, but also a source of positive changes in the society. Conflicts are inevitable, universal, and need to be solved [3].

Taking into account these positions, it can be stated that young people in the frames of any social sphere, despite the seemingly hassle-free integration into society, will always be a potentially conflicted group, and perhaps they will even be more conflicted than their counterparts.

Quite banal, but, nevertheless, necessary for the analysis of the research work, is the statement that the positive-functional model of conflict is the part of the culture. This idea was primarily spread after the publication of ideas by L. Coser. According to the author, “conflict is not always dysfunctional for the relationship within which it occurs; often, conflict is necessary to achieve connections within the system”. It contributes to the formation and in the future-preservation of the society identity it is the definition of its borders. The researcher focused on the functional significance of intra-social conflicts. He referred to them as conflicts arising between different groups that contribute to the formation and preservation of their social unity [4].

These conclusions allow us to interpret youth conflicts as primarily (but not always) functionally significant for the society. Interpreting them solely as undesirable and

destructive elements can create significant barriers to social dynamics, preventing the society renewal.

To conceptualize youth conflict, the theoretical developments of recent years are of great interest. Special attention was paid to understanding of social conflict phenomenon as a specific interaction of active social participants [5-8].

Of the particular interest in this regard is the institutional approach to social conflict, which dates back to the works by R. Dahrendorf and L. Coser. In the Russian tradition, it is presented by the research work of A. G. Zdravomyslova, who considered conflict to be a norm of interpersonal relations. In this approach, the study of social conflict involves an analysis of the underlying causes of its occurrence. The choice of means that can be used for regulation, studying the sources of destructive conflicts associated with violence, as well as ways to institutionalize conflicts, understanding mutual transitions at the levels of social organization in the process of conflict deployment, identification of the personal component role – play the key role [9].

In our research work the interpretation of the youth social conflict is to define as a critical (extreme) situation, determined, firstly, by the general logic of the development of socio-cultural sphere, and, secondly, by the specifics of youth participation in the processes of social interaction and having consequences that are significant for the participants. The extreme nature of the conflict is manifested in the fact that it dialectically combines functional and dysfunctional characteristics. Moreover, participants are offered challenges that require the significant strain. A stressful environment of interaction is formed, obviously, there are many risks representing the likelihood of not achieving the goals of the conflicting parties.

3 Methodology

The genesis of youth social conflict is rigidly linked with the process of forming and implementing specific interests of young people as a special socio-demographic group. That is in a state of subjectivity seen ability to make independent decisions, reflecting youth own identity and carrying out autonomous actions in accordance with them, while influencing the behavior of contractors.

In this regard, the problem of analyzing the content and structure of youth interests becomes very important, in the course the participants inevitably face obstacles caused by objective reasons. In many cases, youth conflict is an attempt of a social action to overcome the opposition and resolve the contradictions.

This problem is particularly important for urban youth, a group whose life activity is carried out in specific conditions of the urban environment, which is characterized by a number of features that have a direct impact on the implementation of youth interests in social conflicts. These include the following characteristics:

- high level of subcultural differentiation both in the youth environment and among the “adult” urban population. Acting as special “value-based local world” it is opposed to the basic “mother culture” (for example, “socialist”, “liberal”, “Christian”, etc.). It includes “individual and collective stereotypes of behavior and activity embodied in specific sign-symbolic manifestations, social codes, forms of consciousness and structures of personal identity” [10], youth and “adult” subcultures competition with each other within the urban space [11];

- the intensity of interpersonal and inter-group contacts, which is a natural consequence of the compactness of living. This circumstance is not the cause of conflicts, but it significantly affects the specific features of the course, since it leads to an increase in the number of participants and, consequently, to an increase in the scale of conflict interaction;

- mutual alienation of people. According to the social psychologist S. Milgram, this step is of great importance as urban behavioral standards are characterized by complete disregard

for the needs, interests and requirements of those people who are not considered directly related to the satisfaction of their personal needs [12];

- dynamism of socio-cultural development. Urban metabolism is characterized by a high rate of material, energy and spiritual exchanges due to the concentration of subjects of social action. Also, it is determined by the mass use of technology and technology within the urban space. More than that, the intensity of social contacts allows producing, discussing and implementing innovative artifacts [13]. But one of the consequences of social dynamics is the inevitability of conflicts between the old and the new generations. At the same time, young people usually act as initiators and stimulators of innovative solutions [14];

- syncretism, which is expressed in the close relationship of various spheres of urban life and in the formation of an urbanized social and biotechnical systems of a hybrid nature on this basis. This factor is a network formation turning the city into a network metabolic organism. This organism is literally suspended on networks feeding it with energy and resources coming from outside. The person, who lives in the city, does not only conflict or negotiate, unite or differentiate. A city is a multi-dimensional space that is not limited by the territory, or by the movement of people, information, or goods. It performs a permanent transformation of matter, energy, waste. It should be mentioned, these factors together change the forms of social organization of its life [15].

The research work is based on the empirical sociological research results caeled “Realization of the interests of young people in social conflicts” by A. E. Ushmirsky (made during the period from September till December 2019 using a questionnaire survey among young people aged from 14 till 29 in the Belgorod, Volgograd and Rostov regions, Russia). The sample is quota-based (quota attributes: place of residence, gender, age). The sample population was 1000 respondents, 77.1% of whom live in cities.

4 Results and discussion

The authors’ research position is that the youth conflict is initiated by the youth itself as a result of inability awareness to realize their personal and social group interests due to the presence of obstacles perceived as unsolvable. In the minds of young people, these obstacles are associated (adequately or incorrectly) with the opposition of young people from specific participants, either in the youth environment itself or among older generations. At the same time, the assessment of the scale of obstacles is determined by the characteristics of young people’s lives in an urban environment.

The logic of the genesis of youth conflict can be presented in several stages: the emergence of the obstacles during the implementation of interest – the response to this obstacle, which can either be the result of rational reflection, or having emotional nature, or the combination of both elements – the choice of conflicts as a way of resolving a difficult situation – defining the strategy of behavior in the conflict and its implementation.

In the course of an empirical study, the research shows that older people living in cities are significantly more likely than those whose life activities take place in a non-urban environment to face obstacles in the implementation of their interests. The answers to the question “Do you face obstacles in the course of implementing your interests?” proved that 15% of residents of regional centers and 16% of residents of cities of regional subordination stated that this happens *often*; the answer *rarely* was respectively chosen by 72% and 61% of residents, correspondingly. Young people in towns and rural localities answered the question differently choosing the answers: *often* by 5% and 6% of respondents; *rarely* by 78% and 69%, correspondingly.

The resulting distribution of responses gives, in our opinion, the basis for several conclusions. It should be noted, the vast majority of urban youth does not believe that the process of their interest realization involved constantly overcoming many obstacles. In this

context, it is quite obvious that youth has a predominantly optimistic perception of a social reality. However, it is possible that the optimistic position does not adequately reflect all the complexities of young people process of socialization and their achievement of life success. Young people, most likely, due to the specifics of their age, lack of life experience, they often do not see many difficulties that they will have to face in the course of implementing their interests. It seems paradoxically, despite the potential desire for young people for having lives' innovations, an objective predisposition to creativity is similar to that of the ordinary citizen, marked by "vague optimism". Describing the consciousness of the common man, P. Mills concluded: "the common person is not able to detach himself in order to observe objectively, to judge objectively that will fall within the sphere of his life experience. The life experience is accompanied not by an internal dialogue, which we call reflection, but rather with a kind of unconscious, constantly repeating monologue...it is imbued with a vague optimism that keeps the person up and which is only occasionally disturbed by small and future disappointments" [16].

Secondly, from the point of view of young people, a modern Russian city creates much more obstacles to the realization of youth interests than not urbanized or low-urbanized environment.

Thus, we can say, the explanation of the contradiction is connected with the understanding that the interests of urban youth are of more variety than those of rural youth, they require more significant resource potential, and, therefore, the intensity of communications in the course of their implementation inevitably leads to the appearance of rivals and other conflicts.

Urban youth tries to reflect on the nature of the obstacles that arise in the process of realizing their interests. In regional cities, it most often connects them with pressure from the inner circle, which has other beliefs and interests (45%), contradictions with parents who do not approve of their interests (35%), and a generous attitude towards young people from state agencies, whose competence is to solve issues related to the implementation of their interests (31%). The research showed a slightly different picture in revealing the cities of regional subordination. Here the main obstacle young people believe in are such factors as the organizations' bureaucratization responsible for working with the youth, lack of understanding by the representatives of the interests of the young, the desire to impose on young people's own views, far from real life, limitation of resources and the application of other restrictive measures (40%). According to the research work, 26% of respondents pointed the pressure from their close people having other beliefs and interests, 25% considered contradictions with parents who do not approve of young people interests as the main factor, and 31% stressed the indifference towards young people from government agencies whose competence is to solve issues related to the implementation of their interests.

For the villages the configuration of the main obstacles is as follows: pressure from close people having other beliefs and interests - 44%; opposition to parents who do not approve of interests - 34%; bureaucratization of organizations responsible for working with young people, lack of understanding of the interests of young people, the desire to impose their own views on young people that are far from real life, limiting their resources and applying other restrictive measures - 27%. In rural areas the results were as following: pressure from the immediate environment, having other beliefs and interests - 64%; contradictions with parents, disapproving interests - 30%; inadequate representation in the media of the true interests of young people - 21% (Fig. 1).

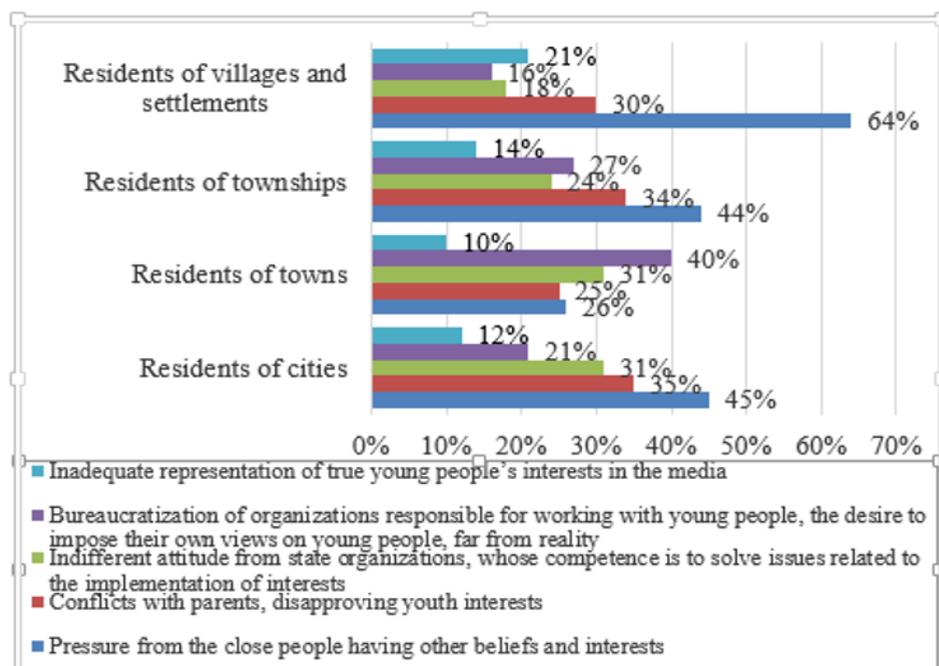


Fig. 1. Distribution of the survey participants' responses to the question “What obstacles do face in the course of implementing your interests?”

Based on the received distribution of responses, it can be argued that the urban area, although to a lesser extent than the rural one, is under pressure from the external environment in the implementation of its interests, which it regards as attempts to impose alien beliefs and interests. Consequently, the nature of obstacles is seen by respondents primarily in the value-semantic sphere. Obstacles are, in fact, interpreted as a consequence of the unwillingness of others to understand young people and accept their attitudes and orientations. And, even though residents of cities of regional subordination (unlike residents of large ones) pay special attention to the non-complementary position of the bureaucracy in relation to them, their claim to it is expressed precisely in the rejection of the desire of officials to impose their own views on young people, far from real life, in limiting their resources and in applying other restrictive measures.

It is worth noting that the specifics of reflecting obstacles arising in the process of realizing the interests of young people already contains the potential for conflict with the “adult” environment. Of course, this is not a generational conflict, which researchers often write about [17], but a clear mutual misunderstanding between them.

Urban youth strives, being as independent as possible, viewing any claim to independence as a basis for opposing contractors.

However, according to the data received, the lack of understanding with older people and external pressure on young people in a large city is still less than in rural areas (a small city, paradoxically, shows a different picture). Among the villagers, 42% associate the presence of conflicts with their elders with the opposite views on life; 55% of respondents associate the desire of the older generation to impose their own rules on the young generation.

Setting a distance from the “adult world” and active opposition, without which the conflict is impossible, it is likely to be minimized due to the inherent characteristics of young

people in the city of psycho-emotional perception of obstacles to their interests. A relatively large number of them, in a conflict situation, either tries to adapt to the situation - 16% in large cities and 11% in small ones, or begins to doubt in the possibility of their implementation - 52% and 38%, correspondingly. Only 30% of respondents in regional centers and 47% in cities of regional subordination choose the answer: "I value my interests and see my goal in their implementation, regardless of obstacles". It should be noted that in urban settlements this figure is 48%; in rural areas it falls to 61%, correspondingly.

The increased pessimism of urban youth can be explained by the representatives who most often point to the presence of obstacles to achieving their interests. Obviously, the modern city creates additional life difficulties for young people, which, with limited resources, leads to the fact that most situations of difficulty are not solved in the course of open confrontation (it is the conflict that provides such an opportunity), it grows into a life problem, which is also characterized as the solution to be postponed for an indefinite time period.

The choice of conflict as a way to realize their own interests is motivated for urban youth by various reasons, which differ markedly from the results of regional centers and small cities. For example, in regional centers, young people most often point out that the conflict can affect the change in attitudes towards young people on the part of the authorities (56%) and opens up opportunities for changing ideas of their interests, as well as for forming new interests (42%). Fewer supporters agreed to answers: the conflict makes it possible to openly declare their interests and draw attention to them (37%), and also creates an opportunity for young people to unite (31%). In small towns, these figures were 26%; 30%; 52% and 36%, correspondingly. In rural areas the answers were as following – 30%; 30%; 61% and 18% correspondingly (Fig. 2).

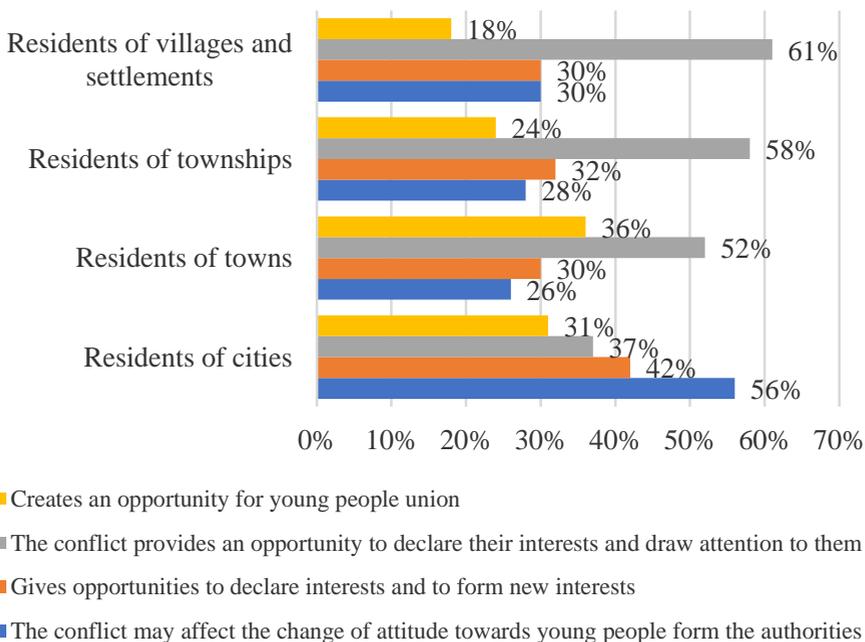


Fig. 2. Distribution of the survey participants' responses to the question "What do you see as the advantages of conflict as a way to realize your own interests?"

The data presented show it can be argued that, at least in large cities, conflict is taken by young people primarily as a way of appealing to the authorities. This is most likely due to two main reasons. Firstly, the preservation of paternalistic attitudes in the youth consciousness, which is formed in the process of education and upbringing and does not disappear even in the conditions of social networking, which involves stimulating self-organization and self-government. It is obvious that the network factor of social action in real life, characterized as “swarm effect” by an American sociologist G. Reinhold, is not sufficiently realized [18]. Secondly, the desire to consider the conflict as a way to attract the attention of the authorities indicates that young people are disillusioned with the opportunities provided by other, less extreme, technologies of influence (elections, mass media). In this regard, young people in small towns and rural areas are likely to consider authority to be more accessible and less likely to use conflict to attract their attention.

It is known that young people can choose different strategies during the conflict. The research showed that young people also differ significantly in this question (see Table 1).

Table 1. Preferred strategies for youth in conflict (in %)

	Avoidance Strategy	Strategy of confrontation	The strategy of concessions	Cooperation strategy	Undecided
Residents of regional centers	50	8	12	15	15
Residents of small towns	33	10	10	14	33
Inhabitant of settlement	22	18	20	24	14
Residents of villages	12	18	15	27	28

Analyzing the information, we can say that, young people in cities (especially in regional centers) often choose a strategy of avoidance conflict strategy, while the share of its supporters is declining in low-urban and non-urban environments. Young people often prefer a strategy of cooperation.

In our view, this is understandable due to two circumstances. First of all, as already noted, young people in large cities are characterized by an exaggeration of the importance of obstacles that arise in the course of implementing their interests, as well as a negative psychological and emotional reaction to their presence. Secondly, high social integration is typical for rural areas and it creates many opportunities for constructive interaction [19]. The urban environment is more disintegrated, and the mutual separation between people is more evident within it, which cannot yet be compensated by attempts to stimulate the development of civil formations.

5 Conclusion

Despite the fact that the results of the study can not be extrapolated to all Russian cities, each of which is characterized by specific living conditions, they allow us to present some general trends in the implementation of young people’s interests in conditions of social conflicts. It is obvious that urban youth is more concerned than rural youth about the scale of obstacles arising in the course of trying to realize their interests. This may be considered as the result of an inadequate perception of social realities, but in any case, such a position requires

attention from state and municipal authorities and civil society institutions. Such specific perception of social reality increases social pessimism and distrust to authorities among young people, making it difficult to have a social dialogue, the relevance of which intensifies significantly in the context of intensive information and communication procedure.

However, despite the fact that modern technical and technological resources create a lot of opportunities for constructive interaction in solving problems of the urban environment, urban youth is not satisfied with the level of mutual understanding between them and older generations.

In conclusion, social conflict is considered by a large part of young people not only as a means of overcoming obstacles that arise in the implementation of their interests, but also as the way to attract attention to their problems and express themselves. However, awareness of all the complexities that arises in the context of conflict encourages young people to focus on a strategy of avoiding conflicts, which does not contribute to the discussion and solution of problems, but usually leads to their preservation.

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