

THE IMPACT OF PUBLIC POLICY ON YOUTH ACTIVIST LIFE STRATEGIES IN THE CONDITIONS OF EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES TRANSFORMATION

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ABSTRACT: The purpose of this work is to study directions and barriers to implementation of youth reproductive function in the strategy of equal opportunities as the main indicator of young generation's life activities. Methodological apparatus of research is based on positions of structural-activity, subject-activity, and dispositional approaches. The main conclusions of this study are based on the author's sociological research. The research proves that institutional environment of modern society creates youth expectations in a mixed way. At the level of neo-etacratism, there are state's guarantees and incentives for youth independence. However, there are disproportions between institutions of order and stability that prescribe control over young people's activities and development institutions that stimulate young people's self-activity, forming their responsibility in the process of reproduction of Russian society. The obtained results are aimed at expanding the understanding of content and direction of young people's life strategies. The results can be used in implementation of social support programs and technological innovations in the youth environment, employment, and formation of civic consciousness. The results can be also used to create the applied approaches for studying communicative, professional and mobilization capabilities of various youth groups; social identification of young people in the process of implementing life strategies; the impact of youth equality strategies on improving social and professional competence of young people. The scientific novelty consists in presenting the strategy of equal opportunities for the young people as behavioral practices aimed at achieving life strategies and goals based on equal chances.

Keywords: Youth, life strategies, equal opportunities, state policy.

INTRODUCTION

Youth problems cannot be characterized one-sidedly. A special place among the discussed topics is occupied by behavioral practices of the young people aimed at achieving certain life goals and implementing their life plans. The young people, as well as society as a whole, treat social justice as equality of youth opportunities and starting points on the basis of true abilities, skills, talents and aspirations. Russian society is focused on ideals of social meritocracy, despite the fact that in the past period there has been created a system of social imbalances, so powerful in its effects and influence. The strategies of equal opportunities are treated as an indicative social phenomenon that allows to diagnose social behavior and social moods of young people, their assessment of the future, the corridor of opportunities for intergenerational dialogue, their perception of opportunities provided by society in the current institutional environment and its social portrait, which has specific socio-cultural parameters. The youth, as a group of social reproduction, participate in stabilization and development of social relations, form new economic and social segments, create a system of new values.

Youth strategies have been firmly rooted in sociological discourse since the work of youth sociology founder. At present, there have been published works addressing the problem of youth life strategies autonomization and implementation of equal opportunities as social disposition and related models of life strategies. This aspect determines the focus area. The equal opportunities strategies are investigated in the context of economic socialization. Many authors have also studied the problems of youth in the context of higher education development (Manheim, 2000: Merton, 2006: Parsons, 1999: Becker et al, 1961: Bolster, 1983: Burrell & Morgan, 1979: Gorshkov, 2010). The fundamental basis of this study was an empirical one - a sociological survey, N = 590 representing the young people between 18-30. The representativeness of sociological information is ensured by the model of multi-stage zoned sample with quota selection of observation units (respondents) at the last stage. The results of sociological survey are presented in the form of linear and paired distributions. The methods of mathematical statistics were applied when processing and analysing the survey results, including statistical procedures that allow to typologize respondents by the nature of responses and help to identify significant differences between responses from different respondent groups (Danziger, 1970: Hoy & Rees, 1977).

The provisions of structural-activity, subject-activity, and dispositional approaches were also used in the study. Some additional procedures are associated with the elements of comparative, historical and statistical methods (Ziman, 1994: Chuprov, 2016: Sillaste, 2018: Vodenko et al, 2018: Heffe, 2006).

RESULTS

Institutional Norms and Mechanisms of Youth Equal Opportunities Strategy

The strategies of equal opportunities are considered to be linked to certain institutional resources, in particular, to education system and professional training. Within the framework of the main research goal it is important to determine the consistency, adaptive and stimulating potential for consolidating equal opportunities

strategies of institutional environment in Russian society. We treat the strategies of equal opportunities not only as social distribution mechanisms reflected in priority of consumer intentions, but as social identity of youth. The next step in the research process is to identify the general configuration of institutional environment, measured by the implementation criterion of equal opportunities strategies. We need to determine the extent to which specific state and social institutions reinforce policies of equal opportunities as a behavioral model of young people; identify which regulatory, organizational and mobilization conditions are manifested in implementation of youth equality strategy.

Russian youth behavioral patterns are differentiated by the criterion of chances, models of life success and the horizon of life plans in the context of implementing equal opportunities strategies. In the framework of sociological research we analyzed the institutional conditions and elements for development and realization of equal opportunities. 46.3% of respondents still have a dominant desire for a professional career, which correlates with getting education. However, there is a certain discrepancy: in educational process, the majority of respondents dreaming of high-quality education are aimed at obtaining a diploma and focus their efforts on gaining life experience. As a result, their desire for professional career is not stable, so the young people are not necessarily exposed exclusively to legitimate practices and gradual careers. Up to 31.2% of respondents focus on personal success - that restricts their actions within the framework of legitimate strategies when a professional career does not develop properly or is associated with difficulties, determined by the lack of professional and educational resources (Godino et al, 2019; Peres et al, 2018; Ajallooeian et al, 2015; Zhatkin, 2018).

One in five respondents (22.5%) believes that it is possible to expand opportunities through risk-based practices. This generally confirms the assumption that youth risk-based practices, although not approved as dominant, are treated as an opportunity that makes up for inefficiency of public policy and functioning of social institutions responsible for youth development (Table.1). Specifically, equal opportunity strategies look desirable, but unclaimed in this context. In their daily practices, young Russians use what is achievable; implementation of equal opportunity strategies has a safety net for them, a kind of self-justifying meaning: failure of life plans can be attributed to prevailing external circumstances. This position mitigates the consequences of social frustration, but may cause a risk-based preference for illegal practices.

Thus, in perception of young Russians, institutions of development are poorly identified, with the exception of traditional ones such as education and labor market. In general, their perception correlates with the level of institutional trust. In behavioral models, the Russian youth is aimed at abiding by formal norms, if informal ones can be updated and adapted to the formal ones, increasing the degree of tolerance to a variety of behavioral models in the process of implementing equal opportunities strategies. In implementation of the researching goal, it is important to analyze the activity of young people based on certain social and dispositional attitudes, including the ability to realize personal and group-level life goals; update strategies for equal opportunities in relation to other basic social attitudes. If we take into account that success motivation affects the strategy of equal opportunities and there is a correlation between success and equality of opportunities in Russian society, it is required to determine the hierarchy of activity and motivational attitudes. There is a need to understand how social dispositions create a background of hindering or favoring the strategy of equal opportunities and to what

extent social dispositional attitudes adopted by Russian youth determine the mobilization level for their implementation.

Table 1. Institutional Conditions Required for Realization and Development of Equal Opportunities for Young People (as percentage of the respondents)

Conditions	Elements	%
Effective strategies for equal opportunities	Striving for professional career	46,3
	Focus on personal success	31,2
	Empowerment by illegal (unlawful) practices	22,5
Regulatory innovations	Improving the legal framework for young people	29,3
	Return to the practices of state youth employment regulation	43,4
	Support for youth business and innovative technologies	27,3
Conditions for organizing joint actions of young people	Introduction of social justice idea as equality of opportunities in youth environment	19,8
	Implementation of regional and local projects aimed at realization of youth potential	43,5
	Differentiated work of state institutions with young people based on their interests and abilities	36,6

According to the analysis of behavioral models, the Russian youth focuses on predominance of self-regulation strategies for equal opportunities, expressed in the concept of a fixed attitude to social life, formed at the junction between the needs and conditions of implementation. Behavioral models of youth are a phenomenon of orientations, social attitudes, and personality orientation. Even if in the youth environment there are differences between normative prescriptions (adoption of formal norms) and behavior, it should be noted that activity in this area is regulated by the system of social dispositions of the young people (by reflection of equal opportunities in individual's self-consciousness and social self-portrait). In that case, it is important to determine what values are actualized in young people's positions for implementation of equal opportunities strategies, which have a true, factual meaning in behavior of young Russians.

For young people, it is important how regulatory norms of society turn into regulatory norms of individuals. The questions like "Which group is the young person included in, whether he spends his time on the Internet, participates in social activity or is absorbed in problem of earnings?" become a matter of importance. The majority of young Russians are socialized and guided by regulatory requirements for education and prestigious work, but due to inconsistency of regulatory requirements of institutional system of Russian society, their transformation into value regulators of youth is not observed. As a part of the study, it was found that the circle of activity motivation is narrowed for the strategy of equal opportunities. This phenomenon, which is more often described as introversion of individuals, leads to the fact that self-centered values dominate in the youth environment. That is the hierarchy of young people's life success: good education (67.3 %), close-knit family (50.5%), successful career (44.6%), and the ability to do what you love (30.1%), reliable friends (28.4%). Such a hierarchy indicates a lag between the components of life success, equality of self-expression and self-

realization opportunities when they try to overcome barriers such as transformation of regulatory requirements to social attitudes of youth.

Young people are focused on accepting social justice as equality of opportunities, which means that recognition of social justice is declared in relation to the institutional level and recognized as being implemented in everyday practices. The need to guarantee social justice at the institutional level is transferred to the state. A hierarchy of dispositions with personal meaning is realized at social micro-level when it comes to the dominance of situational and conventional relations applicable to institutional sphere assessment. 40.5% of respondents consider that to be significant, 33.8% - significantly low, 26.1% - insignificant. This paradoxical external position is explained by declaration of equal opportunities at social macro-level and social micro-level instrumentalism.

Young people know that there are certain limitations to adopting attitudes towards equal opportunities at social micro-level. If we analyze the ratio of respondents' opinions, there are three consequences:

The first: for the young respondents, the state, as well as for the older generations, acts as a guarantor and center of institutional system, so the state (state institutions) is responsible for maintaining the system as a whole;

The second: order and stability - there is a higher level of trust than in relation to institutions that deal with youth policy itself;

Third, the state-centric complex means that for almost half of the young people, youth policy of equal opportunity strategies is associated with activities of state institutions and, to a lesser extent, with young people's self-organization structures (public associations).

However, there is a paradox: the faith in young people's ability to solve their problems independently or on the terms of public-private partnership is not legitimized, though state-centrism is a proponent of situational and conventional relations in the context of interaction with youth development institutions. It is obvious that state-centrism reproduces the pattern of constant expectations in relation to the state, which is obliged to provide a legal framework for equality of opportunities. At the personal and group level, young people allow a variety of behavioral patterns, which are of the utmost importance in inadmissibility of state crimes and radicalism. Special attention should be paid to the fact that 35.9% of respondents declare their individualism. Self-reliance is firmly established in youth environment and this attitude acts as a socially fixed one. On the level of higher value dispositions, equality of opportunities is perceived as an extension of individual freedom. The very realization of individuals is understood in this sense, paternalism being assessed as outdated and not peculiar to the younger generation by its differences (Fig. 1).

It can be assumed that "individualists" are predisposed to consider young people differently from older generations as they are characterized by energy, go-aheadism, adaptation to market conditions, and, on the other hand, the final farewell to illusions about state protectionism. The conclusions of sociological research allow to say that understanding of equal opportunities as personal self-determination is young people's modal indicator. This is a consequence of the fact that young Russians understand themselves as self-sufficient and successful citizens who do not use politics as a way of life promotion, and do not expect anything from state interventionism.

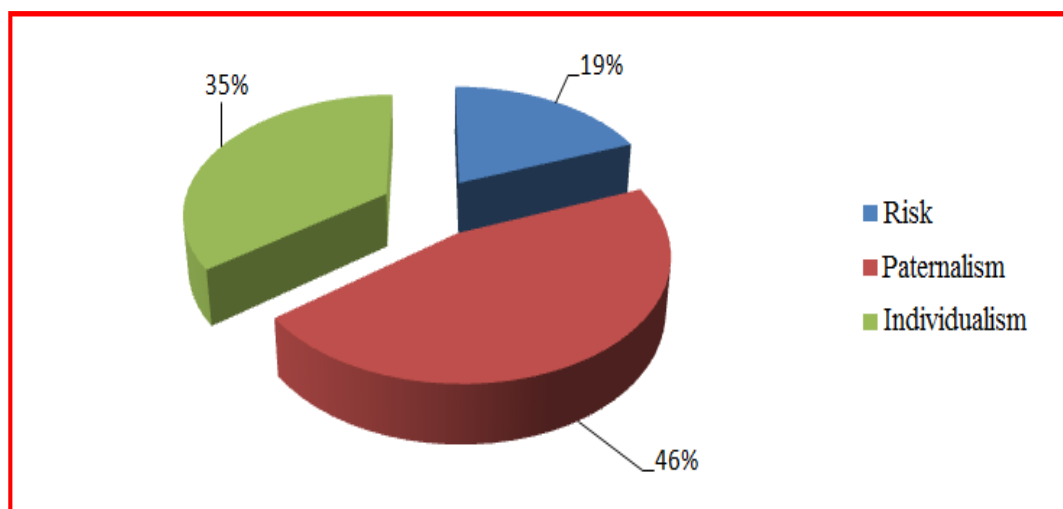


Figure 1. Predominance of Value Orientations among Proponents of Equal Opportunities

At the same time, there is identified another trend - a desire to create a system of contractual relations with the state in institutional system. For this purpose, a state-centered identity is not enough. The values of citizenship as the working ones, have a personal meaning for young people for being far from ideological stereotypes. For young people it is common to share socially-fixed attitudes towards citizenship, but the fact is that one in five feels a weak attachment indicates that transition to socially-fixed attitudes has not been fully completed. That confirms orientation towards citizenship as a way of achieving equality of opportunities. The hierarchy of young Russians social dispositions is dominated by socially fixed attitudes based on individualistic values, recognition of working democracy norms and competition. Focusing on state assistance and displaying a neo-etacracic complex, paternalists can be disappointed and easily moved into a group of anarchists who tend to assert themselves in distancing from institutional system and accepting individualism as the subjective significance of legal behavior: that is what passive groups and anarchists are associated in.

Models of Youth Social Disposition

In the course of study, there is recorded deepening of young people's individualization behavior process; concentration of efforts on social micro-level, which is consistent with priority of life goals and records the distance from the spheres of public and social activity. In public sphere young people's priority is pragmatics and compliance with their life goals. When it comes to participation in youth organizations, young Russians ask not only what role these organizations can play in representing the youth, but what are the conditions and prospects for their individual participation. On the one hand, youth structures act as a means of social mobility in the face of fading upward social mobility and inequality in family capital and informal ties. On the other hand, pragmatics aims at individual choice or inclusion in a "group of loved ones". Specifically, in the current situation, Russian youth does not feel the influence of good corporate ties - only 15% of respondents named corporatism among the values of instrumental activism. This is an indication that young people feel the effect of disciplining influence of corporate norms

and everyone stands for himself at collective level: though being bound not to go beyond the assumed obligations and comply with the corporate framework.

Young people, qualifying themselves as pragmatists, do not want to associate with social dependents, to emphasize that they are able not only to assess and perceive life situations sensibly, but also to be freed from external social care. Respondents demonstrate dissatisfaction with life of professional teams and narrowness of opportunities for self-realization by low-rating corporatism. There is a difficult situation with implementation of equal opportunities strategies, so the position of young people pragmatism is not perceived as a request for formation of effective institutional environment or youth policy that could ensure social and labor rights of young people in their professional activities. Thus, respondents assume that equality of opportunities is achievable if the level of social protection is sufficient to neutralize risks. They assess such equality as a condition for upward social mobility based on significant social claims.

In this case, from the point of view of young people, public policy potentially contributes to the growth of equality of opportunity strategies, but without any hopes associated with "happy future" of equal opportunities strategies. Thus, young people evaluate the implemented state youth policy positively, but taking into account certain shortcomings (51.5 %) (Fig. 2).

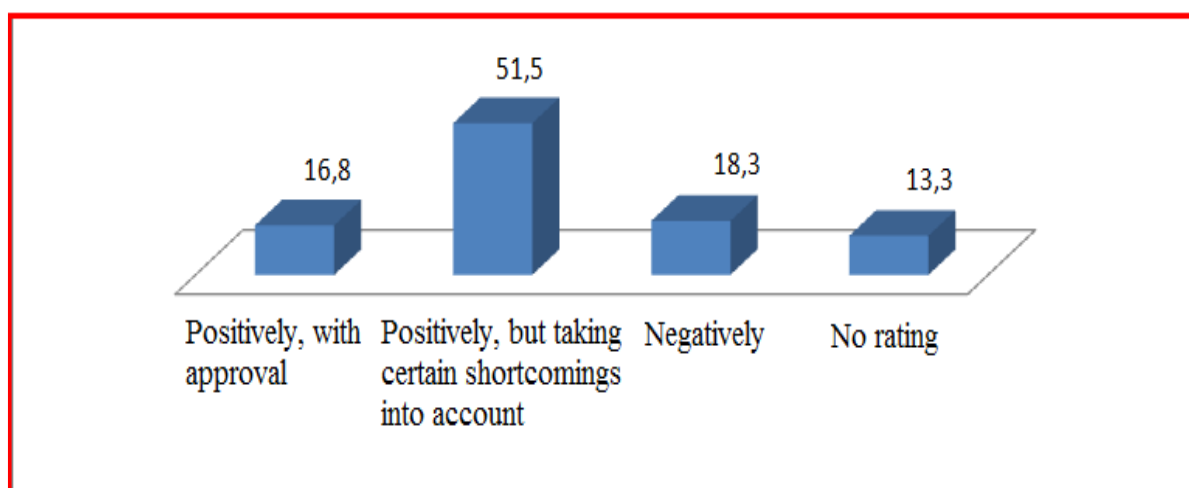


Figure 2. Respondents' Assessment of State Youth Policy Implementation Effectiveness for Realization of Youth Opportunities (as a percentage of the number of respondents).

One more important point should be emphasized - there are two areas of youth policy. The first - working with the socially gifted and promising ones, the second - working with socially unprotected people. The majority of young people who are treated as inert, philistine, focused on their personal interests and capable of independent adaptation strategies are excluded from attention of youth policy. As a part of the main goal of the study, our attention is focused on equal opportunity strategies as behavioral practices based on a certain dispositional matrix. So, the strategy of equal opportunities is characterized by differentiation in terms of dispositional settings hierarchy. The Russian youth is focused on socially fixed attitudes - there both causes for optimism and complexity. A cause for optimism is that most of the young Russians are aware of citizenship value and intend to influence the situation in the country as citizens (Table. 2). The complexity is determined by the fact that focusing their efforts on social micro-level, the civic identity of young people, though being important condition for social

reproduction, becomes multivariate: its quality determines the quality of social practices in conditions of social changes. At the same time, there may be deviations in young people's socialization that prevent reproduction of value-normative basis for young people's civil identity.

Table 2. Influence of Axiological Grounds on Equal Opportunity Strategies (as a percentage of the number of respondents).

Values	Level of influence	% of the number of respondents
Value of citizenship	Little influence	28,6
	Strengthens desire for equal opportunities	49,6
	Causes social optimism	21,7
Value of labor	Has no influence	10,7
	Slight influence	24,7
	Defining attention	68
Influence of values on instrumental activism	Pragmatics	31,7
	Corporativism	15
	Individual success	53,2

Paradoxical and contradictory civil attitudes of young people are confirmed in the current situation: the young Russians, assessing their life satisfactorily as a whole (42%), show low civic activity, which is associated with rejection of participation in youth official structures. This explanation is also confirmed by the fact that satisfied young Russians, proud of measures to revive the power of Russia, raise the question that this should not be associated with a drop in the living standards of population and life's hardships. Only 9% of young people hold a different, sacrificial position. This is the evidence of demonstrative patriotism: the young people, as well as society as a whole, are not ready to support these measures. For the Russian youth, it is important that strategies for equal opportunities are deactualized in these conditions: mandatory restriction has the message of self-restriction, including rejection of life plans. In general, we can state that young Russians typically consider pragmatism depending on conventional relations between them and the state.

In conclusion, we analyzed the main directions and barriers that prevent realization of equal opportunities. Thus, in the opinion of youth, the main barriers and obstacles in implementation of such a strategy are lack of jobs (47,3%), inability to get education (37,4%) and the lack of effective state social youth policy system (30,2 %) (Table 3). Of course, material well-being is a factor of individual's social well-being and of his satisfaction or dissatisfaction as well. Extreme poverty gives rise to frustration, aggression, anger and isolation. On the other hand, desire for material well-being, as a modal characteristic has a blocking effect on young people's desire for self-determination and unleashing cognitive professional resource. Assessing directions of equal opportunities strategy implementation in understanding of young people, it should be noted that they are not hungry for a storm or significant social changes (Table 4).

Table 3. Obstacles to Implementation of Equal Opportunities Strategy

Options	% of the number of respondents
Lack of job security programs for University graduates	47,3
Lack of opportunity to get a good education	37,4
Lack of effective state social youth policy system	30,1
Lack of influential relatives and acquaintances who would help in implementation of life plans	19,3
Difficult financial situation	15,9

Table 4. Directions for Implementing Equality of Opportunities (youth opinion) (as a percentage of the number of respondents).

Directions	In the whole array
Ensuring equal access to education	53,2
Legal equality	44,5
Implementation of an effective youth policy in the sphere of state support	52,3
Access to good jobs	55,4
Access to realization of personal potential and talent	36,4
Ensuring equal access to health care	29,4

Young people are waiting for real actions both in the field of youth policy and in expanding the corridor of opportunities in order "to keep up with the Joneses". They want to find their place in the sphere of professional self-determination - the most convenient one that corresponds to their abilities and life plans. Thus, everyday life dominates the mood of young people, reducing the external level of equal opportunities (as an ideal) and its terminal status. This position forms a practical interest in youth equal opportunities strategies and links with specific life plans but it does not lead to dominance of fundamental values. Thus, we can say that young Russians proceed from instrumental activism, which describes equality of opportunities as a model of success, to social meritocracy, dominated by focus on value of self-realization.

CONCLUSION

The main conclusions of the study are as follows: the conceptual meaning of equal opportunities strategy is associated with education as a social elevator and with the equality of young people as citizens. There are some contradictions related to the fact that the strategies of equal opportunities can have an influence on traditional mechanisms of social reproduction and development of youth. In conditions of youth heterogeneity, an increase of its social uncertainty acquires new perspectives. The institutional environment, as a corridor of opportunities for implementation of youth equality strategies, contains a regulatory framework for legal equality but is not aimed at overcoming barriers of social inequality and arrangement of starting conditions for young people's self-determination. In this context, a weak attachment to institutional resources leads the youth to concentration on social micro-level through implementation of personal and group interests.

Behavioral models of young people, as the most dominant ones, are associated with legitimate, situational and risk-based practices.

Young people are guided by situational and conventional relations; they adopt institutional prescriptions depending on personal capabilities, individual and group experience. They also use mixed practices that contain legal mechanisms and, at the same time, include switching to mechanisms for achieving success. That is manifested in loss of the main orientation of educational strategies, readiness to change of profession and the risk of violating the law. Considering equality of opportunities in the range of achievable goals, young people focus on family life and consumption but do not focus on the future, which is inherent in fundamental social dispositions. In this sense, instrumental activism stabilizes the well-being of youth environment and extinguishes protest moods, though becoming a barrier to social self-realization of youth.

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