

Consolidation of Local Communities as a Possibility

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Abstract: This study deals with the main possibilities for consolidation of the local communities in Russia. The study is focused on the possibilities of the ideas of “consolidation” and “solidarity” for the government, business and population. The study presents the data of field sociological studies that help to identify the level of public confidence in the local authorities, implementation of the principle of social justice and the level of public satisfaction. The basic reasons for minimization of the consolidation possibilities have been defined: the social differentiation of municipal units and conscious discrediting by many people of such paradigmatic bases of the solidarity concept as fairness and loyalty.

Key words: Consolidation, local communities, possibility, social space, municipal government

INTRODUCTION

The possibility of consolidating various social groups and communities is becoming extremely relevant in the social space of Russia characterized by a combination of external ordering, provided mainly by administrative methods and the internal instability determined by the deficiency in value-semantic systems being shared by the majority of the population. In particular, the local communities which mean the inhabitants of the different municipalities from a rural settlement to an urban district.

Russian sociologists, distinguish, in particular, a few insignificantly related “cultures” (more precisely, subcultures) within the rural settlements: A “culture” of aboriginals living a usual inertia life based on the employment in the public sector and in the management, in local survival businesses and on retirement.

Seasonal “culture” of summer residents and landowners, financially supported mostly at the expense of import from the cities. Relationship between aboriginal and non-residents arises when buying goods produced in private farms of the first. Aboriginal usually have a negative attitude to the houses and estates servicing, however, do not refuse to help “amicably”; “culture” of local withdrawn people and those being employed unreportedly (and their families). It is based on the resources of the withdrawn workers and those being officially unemployed (Kordonskij *et al.*, 2011).

Today, “in many municipalities, local government interacts more effectively with migrants than with the aboriginals. The reasons are obvious: newcomers claiming the joint resources act the way the local cannot they buy

access to resources from their official managers. Ensuring the integration of migrants is one of the aspects of the consolidation of the local community which is closely associated with the question of relations between municipal authorities and the public. Currently, in many municipalities, these relations are characterized by a high level of mutual alienation and distrust. In particular, the “Evaluation of the effectiveness of implementation of the Strategy “Formation of regional solidary society” monitoring, held in September-October 2015 by the Department of Social Technologies, Belgorod State National Research University (n = 1,000 respondents) showed that in Belgorod region the heads of local urban government (municipal district) enjoy confidence of 31.7% and 29.0% do not trust them. Heads of urban (rural) settlement enjoy confidence of 35.6% while 28.5% do not trust them. It is noteworthy that even representative bodies of local self-government enjoy a relatively low level of confidence. Deputies of municipal councils in particular, enjoy confidence of 31.1% while 27.2% do not trust them. Members of Land assemblies enjoy confidence of 19.9 while 23.7% do not trust them.

Thus, the process of solving a wide range of problems of the municipalities from improving the confidence within the local community to enhancing their socio-economic potential and social reproduction becomes harder linked with the problems of consolidation and, in turn, requires a theoretical analysis of this phenomenon and its related idea of solidarity.

The idea of consolidation of the different communities is often initially rejected on the ground of that no unity can be achieved in a highly socially-differentiated society that involves groups not

just with different but often conflicting interests. At the same time, solidarity as the basis of consolidation is considered as an indicator of such unity that, in our opinion is theoretically incorrect.

Of course, the category of “solidarity” have been used in researches and in practical politics to determine the existence of the subjects of social action of a certain amount of general dispositions, making them, according to Max Weber to count “upon certain standards, an expected behavior of the actors and their instrumental rationality” (Weber, 1978). However, this approach leaves open the question of the substantive definition of the community to which the phenomenon of solidarity goes up.

An integral municipal entity has characteristics not identical to those of its constituent diverse elements and is potentially controllable. The main thing here is the relationship and interdependence between the elements that is, between groups and individuals. An integrity here is reflected by the idea of solidarity.

One should consider the fact that there are different types of integrity. “The first one is determined by a single structure of relations between the elements or parts of a whole, the second by the reciprocity of multiple functions performed by the various elements of the system and the third by the presence of the structure-generating element”. In our study, we proceed from that the phenomenon of solidarity in the minds of the municipal inhabitants is able to develop on the basis of the third type. In fact, according to Emile Durkheim, in this case, a so-called organic solidarity based on a labor differentiation develops. At the same time, we believe that “the generating element” of the integrity of municipality, a core factor is a complex of values shared by the citizens.

We rely upon that the values are an essential component of any social system, manifesting itself, according to H. Rickert as an objective meaning which is associated with a real mental act a judgment, going far beyond the boundaries of the direct mental being. Well-being and assessments can be considered in terms of the significance of the associated values that is to find out whether any well-being really deserves such name and whether any assessment is justly made. Determining the integrity of the municipality, the values are reproduced in the solidary consciousness and require special attention during the study.

A. Comte and E. Durkheim referred in their researches to the problems of society consolidation in the context of social labor differentiation. Weber (1978) analyzed it based on the theory of social action. P. Bourdieu in his studies drew attention to the role of symbolic structures in the formation of the phenomenon of solidarity.

In the Russian tradition, the issues of solidarity were studied by Ahiezer (2004) and Gudkov (2007) (having critical attitude to this idea), Zaoostrovcev (2008) and Fedotova (2005). Issues of social justice and social consolidation were studied by international scientists and researchers such as Etzioni (1996), Giddens (1999), Carson (2008), Hirst (2013), Sirianni and Friedland (2001).

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The empirical basis for the analysis of the problem of consolidation of the local community was a sociological monitoring “Assessment of the implementation effectiveness of the Strategy “Formation of the regional society of solidarity”, implemented in the Belgorod region in the period of 2011-2015 by the department of social technologies SRU “BSU”. The monitoring includes an annual survey of 1,000 respondents by multi-stage quota sampling. In addition, we used the materials of the study “Use of civil control technology in local self-government: the essence, implementation mechanisms and social results”, conducted in May-June 2013 in the Belgorod region; it involved survey of people from 3 urban districts and 4 municipalities of the Belgorod region (total 700 residents of municipalities, 400 municipal officials and 30 experts surveyed) as well as research materials of informal practices used in the managerial decision-making at the municipal level during the case study (conducted in the Belgorod region in March-May 2015; total 300 municipal employees and 30 experts surveyed). In both cases, the quota sampling of the regions was used.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Main part: We consider the consolidation of the local community as a process and the result of the affirmation in the minds of the most of its members of a conviction that, despite the differences in social status, living standards and lifestyles, needs, interests and values, all residents of the municipality are interdependent and mutually responsible. This is the basis for the formation of the phenomenon of solidarity which means the personal characteristic of personal consciousness which is based on three inter-related attitudes: firstly, an intention to act in accordance with justice; secondly, the loyalty that is, according to Parsons (1998), “the willingness to respond to a properly “grounded” call made on behalf of the group, or in the name of public interest or need” and thirdly, the voluntary willingness and ability to take responsibility for the own actions in accordance with legal and moral norms.

This view on solidarity makes evident that its achievement neither requires unanimity, nor implies the establishment of overall equality and integration of the municipality inhabitants within a single organization. However, each of the announced position requires to be explained, since we are talking about non-trivial things, specifically interpreted in the framework of the Russian socio-cultural tradition.

At the same time, it is obviously that “a man understands the importance of justice through its lack”. However, a significant number of Russian citizens complains of the deficiency in justice. Our monitoring has shown that in 2015 only 22.0% of respondents were satisfied with the implementation of the principle of social justice. The rest of respondents divided almost equally into those who are not satisfied with it (38.7%) or found it difficult to answer (39.2%). As compared with the year 2014 (36%), the level of satisfaction has fallen sharply.

Various studies have revealed a quite typical contradiction. On the one hand, the justice is still one of the basic values of Russians (among Belgorod citizens, 29.9% of respondents noted its importance in 2014 and 44.2% in 2015). And at the same time, people, especially youth, are losing hope for the possibility of its realization. According to research by T.I. Morozova in 2012, a little more than 4% of young people believed in the triumph of justice.

We believe that the consolidation of the municipality as well as any other community in Russia in the current situation is impossible without establishing within it the relations treated by the citizens as fair. Meanwhile, it is also obvious that the Russian society has no more or less clear convention of understanding of justice. Considering it as a measure that determines the ratio of action and retribution for it, the Russians tolerate different principles, on which basis this measure is formed. Among these are the principles of equality; the values of labor contribution; compliance with the law and compliance with merits.

Empirical studies show that the inconsistency of the approaches to justice leads to discrepancies in what the phenomenon should be considered as a deviation from justice. The key and probably the most annoying to people manifestations of social injustice are a sharp cleavage into the rich and the poor (noted by 38.3% of respondents), the impunity of those having money and clout (36.0%) and a lack of equal opportunities for good job and career (23.9 %). A quite significant role in the devaluation of the principle of social justice is played also by the government 19.8% noted its indifference to the people's opinion, almost the same number 18.3% noted

impossibility for ordinary people to protect their rights and 17.4% noted violation of the principle of “one law for all”. A lack of equal possibility for affordable health care and education is also highly significant (17.8%). Of course, all these problems can be considered as a proof of unfair relations. Equally important is that none of the answers had more than half of the supporters. This clearly shows a lack of consensus about a critical issue.

Since most of residents of the municipal units cannot decide on the essence of justice and do not take the laws for an absolute requirement so in fact, there is no real value-normative basis of consolidation which is significantly reduces its possibility.

Equally difficult problems arise when trying to define the category of “loyalty” and the prospects for establishing loyal relations in modern local communities. In the municipal units such subjects may be represented by family environment, labor association; community as a whole government bodies and social formations, including social networks.

An attempt to give an empirical assessment of the possibility of establishing the loyal relations has revealed the ambiguity of the situation. At the same time, we proceeded from the fact that a prerequisite for loyalty is the satisfaction of the subject of social action with the developing relations with a particular counterparty. Of course, we do not assert that satisfaction with relations with a particular counterparty is automatically converted into loyalty to the latter. But, in any case, it is very difficult to expect loyalty to arise in dissatisfaction.

But, the consolidation of the local community is encumbered at most by clearly expressed alienation between the government and the population which is based on the low level of mutual trust and the lack of satisfaction of citizens with the attitude representatives of local government bodies and officials towards them. The conducted study “The formation of regional society of solidarity” has revealed that 21.4% of respondents were not satisfied with the attitude of government officials and state and municipal officers to them. Only 37.5% were satisfied. The level of public satisfaction with the actions of municipal authorities remains low in general. In 2015, this indicator was 34.8% in the urban (rural) settlements and 33.6% in urban districts and municipal areas.

The disposition of the municipal authorities can currently be defined as administratively-distributive. It allocates resources using mainly the administrative mechanisms and having the ability to provide more or less (depending on the resources of the municipality) comfort conditions. Business dispositions is of egoistic consumer nature. Business is focused on making a profit as a rule,

at any price and on the accumulation and consumption of resources. The disposition of the major part of population (“people”) is of passive-parasitic nature.

It is quite obvious that, the problem of consolidation of the municipality considered in this way becomes the fundamental problem of conversion of public consciousness based on changes of the motivation for social action of the basic status groups. It cannot be solved by implementing only short-term action plans. This requires the development and implementation of long-term and technologically-based strategy of the municipality development. Today, it is possible only in the most general way to formulate the necessary decisions and actions. The major one is the establishment of the principle of absoluteness for all by the researcher of the local space of social norms.

Changes in the government disposition, obviously will be promoted by constant evaluation of officials by the population and the decision-making with regard to their professional careers on the basis of this evaluation; upbringing of the future official with a focus on the development of his reflective thinking. Change of the disposition of the business requires re-distribution of incomes in the public interests through the tax system; assurance of business transparency; creation of conditions promoting the implementation of social projects.

Change of the disposition of the population requires: encouragement of the participation in the industrial and public projects; gradual but consistent release of people from the sphere of influence of media, mainly television and Internet culture which in most cases systemically corrupts people, narrowing their horizon of world perception to the level of such phenomena as money, pleasure, violence and formation of the cultural code of solidarity among children in the education system.

CONCLUSION

The analysis of the problems of possible consolidation of local communities in Russia gives grounds to assert that, despite the presence of the supporters of this idea and the objective conditions for consolidation, it is hardly feasible in the foreseeable future. At the same time, the basic reasons for minimization of the consolidation possibilities are associated not so much with the social differentiation of municipal units as with conscious discrediting by many people of such paradigmatic bases of the solidarity concept as fairness and loyalty. Restoring their

significance is a task, complex both technologically and in terms of worldview. However, the refusal of its decision due entirely clear reference to the lack of experience, deficit of resources and an unfavorable external environment reduces the chances for the formation of the municipal social environment being comfort for people and promotion of the competitiveness of the local communities.

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