

YOUTH VOLUNTEERING IN MODERN RUSSIAN SOCIETY: FEATURES OF INSTITUTIONALIZATION AND DEVELOPMENT POTENTIAL

VOLUNTARIAMENTO DE JOVENS NA SOCIEDADE RUSSA MODERNA: CARACTERÍSTICAS DO POTENCIAL DE INSTITUCIONALIZAÇÃO E DESENVOLVIMENTO

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Abstract: This work aims to conduct an analysis of youth volunteering institutionalization features in modern Russian society. This research's methodological background is based on the principles of institutional and activity approaches that allow studying the practice of institutionalization, the main problems of functioning, and promising directions of youth volunteering development in modern Russia. It is found that volunteerism or volunteering in Russia is currently being formed as a social institution, and the level of Russian youth involvement in voluntary movement is significantly lower than similar showings of Western European countries. The author identifies social, economic, and psychological factors that hinder the development of youth volunteerism in modern Russian society, related to the low standard of living of a significant part of Russian youth and the high level of distrust to organized forms of charitable and voluntary activities.

Keywords: voluntary movement; supportive measures; Russian youth; volunteer activities; charitable activities.

Resumo: O objetivo deste trabalho é realizar uma análise das características da institucionalização do voluntariado juvenil na sociedade russa moderna. Os antecedentes metodológicos da pesquisa baseiam-se nos princípios de abordagens institucionais e de atividades que permitem estudar a prática da institucionalização, os principais problemas de funcionamento e as direções promissoras do desenvolvimento do voluntariado juvenil na Rússia moderna. Constatou-se que o voluntariado ou voluntariado na Rússia está sendo formado atualmente como uma instituição social e o nível de envolvimento dos jovens russos no movimento voluntário é significativamente menor do que as mostras semelhantes dos países da Europa Ocidental. O autor identifica fatores sociais, econômicos e psicológicos que dificultam o desenvolvimento do voluntariado juvenil na sociedade russa moderna, relacionados ao baixo padrão de vida de uma parte significativa da juventude russa e ao alto nível de desconfiança de formas organizadas de atividades de caridade e voluntárias.

Palavras-chave: Movimento voluntário; medidas de suporte; Juventude russa; atividades voluntárias; atividades de caridade.

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Introduction

Now volunteerism is becoming an integral part of life for many people around the world who unite to solve urgent social problems. M.V. Pevnaya (2016) treats volunteerism as a global social phenomenon in our day, one of the world trends with pronounced national contexts. Being the most active social and demographic group, youth is able to form (in some countries it has already formed) the basis of a large-scale voluntary movement in the future (Sabirova, Zakirova & Kayumova, 2017). Volunteerism provides young people with good prospects and opportunities to express their own initiative in various volunteer projects and programs as a significant social phenomenon (Zakirova, Kayumova & Sabirova, 2017; Kargapoltseva et al., 2019; Usak et al., 2020). Volunteerism or volunteering acts as an effective mechanism for building social relationships and interactions, obtaining new knowledge and skills, and applying moral and spiritual qualities for volunteer activity subjects. Young volunteers can provide the necessary assistance to those who need it, feeling their own significance and usefulness (Kayumova & Vlasova, 2017; Cherdymova et al., 2018; Latysheva et al., 2018).

This context determines the social relevance of the research topic. This issue has a considerable scientific and theoretical relevance. There is a need for a theoretical understanding of volunteering as a social institution, and also to conduct an analysis of domestic youth volunteering institutionalization practice, to review the theoretical framework for the development of specific methods and tools for improving the efficiency of the Russian youth volunteer movement, overcoming barriers to involvement of the younger generation in volunteer work.

Methods

This research's methodological background is based on the principles of institutional and activity approaches that allow us to study the practice of institutionalization, the main problems of functioning, and promising directions for youth volunteering development in modern Russia. We consider youth volunteerism as a social institution that implements a number of general and specific functions, relying on theoretical provisions of structural functionalism by T. Parsons: every social institution (a part of a certain social structure) is organized to fulfill socially significant goals and functions. Suppose we follow the logic of D. North (1997) (a well-known researcher of social institutions). In that case, volunteerism makes it possible to reduce public spending, thereby contributing to income growth, which is an important prerequisite for the institutionalization of volunteerism. As part of the study, there were also used such theoretical methods of scientific knowledge as analysis, synthesis, deduction, induction, and abstraction.

Results and Discussion

The modern period of the voluntary youth movement is characterized by the creation of a legal framework for the functioning and development of various Russian youth voluntary activity areas. The concept of volunteerism was adopted in 1995 by the Federal Law "On Charitable Activities and Volunteering", which defines volunteerism as voluntary activity in the form of non-repayable work and (or) provision of services for the purpose of social support and protection of citizens, promotion of activities in the field of education, science, culture, environmental protection, etc. The text of this law sets out conditions and procedures for carrying out voluntary activities, legal conditions, state powers, and local authorities in the field of volunteerism or volunteering and supportive measures to voluntary activities at various levels of government (Federal Law, 1995). The significance of volunteerism can also be seen in a number of other legal acts, including the Concept of the Long-term Socio-Economic Development of the Russian Federation up to 2020, which defines strategic guidelines for the development of social institutions and social policy such as the promotion of charitable activities by citizens and organizations; the role of non-governmental and non-profit organizations in the provision of social services; the spread of voluntary activity (volunteerism); development of voluntary youth activities; creation of conditions for activities of youth public associations and non-profit

organizations (Order of Government, 2008).

The need for developing youth volunteer movement is noted in “Fundamentals of State Youth Policy of the Russian Federation up to 2025”, which notes the need to involve young people in various areas of voluntary activity (this document defines the concept of youth volunteering, which is treated as voluntary, socially directed and socially useful activities of the young citizens who work and provide services without corresponding monetary or material remuneration, except some cases of possible reimbursement of expenses related to the implementation of voluntary activities (Order of Government, 2014). According to the statistics provided in official documents of RF state authorities, the youth volunteer movement in our country is at a fairly high level of development: for example, according to the report of the Federal Agency for Youth Affairs, in the regions there have been taken effective measures to form a support system for voluntary youth activities, which is treated as a form of social service carried out by the free will of citizens, aimed at selfless provision of socially significant services at the local, national or international level, contributing to personal growth and development of volunteers. In a report, they note that in Russia, the total number of regional institutions working in the field of involving children and young people in voluntary activities is in excess of 4.000 (including the municipal level). These institutions’ activities cover about 3.0 million young people, or 9.6% of the total number of the young people living in Russia (Russian Government, 2018).

According to the Resource of the Vanguard Voluntary Movement Groups for Russian Modernization Project, implemented by The Public Opinion Foundation (FOM) research center, Russian youth belong to the so-called “vanguard of modernization” (Electronic scientific archive of Ural Federal University, 2012). This vanguard represents the most socially active layer of Russian citizens: the age group of twenty to forty years, primarily residents of big cities. Within this layer, there is a request for social activity, including volunteerism, and individuals can meet this request. At the same time, as follows from the FOM experts’ conclusions, voluntary youth movement in our country has not yet thoroughly developed: volunteerism or volunteering is currently “only being formed as a social institution”, we can observe the initial stage of formation. In modern Russia, youth volunteering is not as developed as centuries-old traditions of charity and volunteerism of Western Europe, where many representatives of various social and demographic groups are involved in social practices related to volunteerism (Electronic scientific archive of Ural Federal University, 2012).

In order to identify the features of youth volunteer movement formation and value orientations of its participants in modern Russian society, we shall refer to the results of all-Russian and regional sociological research on the formation and development of youth volunteering in Russia. According to FOM’s sociological research, the total number of Russians who had to work for free for other people’s benefit (at least on an irregular basis) does not exceed a quarter of the entire population. 8% of respondents are very often engaged in this type of activity, 14% - several times, and 2% - once. Most of the volunteers are engaged in volunteer activities on their own, while a certain part of the volunteers is involved in it through various local organizations at work, residence, or within initiative groups. Among the prevailing orientations of this category there are such values as the future of children, doing what they love, freedom and independence. As found by FOM researchers, inhabitants of Moscow, as well as students and young people with higher education, devote a little more time to volunteering than residents of other localities (Electronic scientific archive of Ural Federal University, 2012).

They used mass survey factor analysis when studying the motives for participation in voluntary movement. The participants were asked what does the activity of their initiative group (public organization) gives them. There were revealed four main incentives for volunteer activity: career, expanding of social contacts, self-help motives, and altruistic motives. At the same time, for the majority of people involved in voluntary activities, the motives are described by several factors, while none of the motives has become a unifying one for all of them. Each individual involved in this field gets something different from it. The most common motive for volunteer movement participation is expanding social contacts, typical for young volunteers aged 18 to 30 years. Thus, 69% of volunteers noted that participation in volunteer activities allows them to talk to various interesting people, find friends, favorite activities, and hobbies.

For older age groups these motives are not as significant as for the youth – by older age, the circle of communication is mostly formed and there is no need to expand it; accordingly, such people participate in voluntary activities due to other factors (Electronic scientific archive of Ural Federal University, 2012).

Despite the fact that in modern Russia there is a lot of different volunteer organizations, a significant part of young people has no idea about them: only 28% of young respondents said that they know volunteer organizations of their city (women were more informed than men and the highest level of awareness in this issue is typical for the young people aged between 14 and 17 years). According to the results of MPI “INDSI” survey, the number of young people who regularly participate in volunteer projects is quite small: 2%; 16% participate in volunteer activities from time to time; 15% do not yet have such experience but feel like taking part in the voluntary movement in the future (Volunteering Activities, 2018). In general, the number of young people interested in volunteering, involved in various volunteer practices or feeling like joining this movement in the future is about one-third of the total number of youth representatives (in this group, as already noted, women are predominant over men). However, the majority of young people do not participate and do not plan to participate in voluntary activities. They identify such reasons as lack of sufficient free time (41%), social inactivity, indifference to social problems (24%) and lack of awareness about areas of volunteering (19%). Although most of the respondents (59%) state that they do not plan to participate in volunteer activities, only a fifth (20%) believe that no circumstances can change this decision: significantly more young people (39%) noted their readiness to participate in voluntary activities if people really need help (Kisilenko, 2018).

It is interesting to compare the potential of volunteer movement participation of various youth groups on the basis of experience in volunteering, willingness to volunteer or disinterest in participating in the work of volunteer organizations. On the basis of “Youth Participation in Volunteer Activities: Potential, Problems, Prospects for Development” mass survey data, they can determine the dispositional structure of youth volunteer activity. It is based on the identification of two differentiating features, among which there are attitudes of young people to volunteer activities and their experience of voluntary participation (Volunteer Activity in Perception of Modern Youth, 2018). Orientation (or absence of orientation) to volunteer activity allows designating four groups of young people depending on their attitudes to volunteering: “active volunteers”, “potential volunteers”, “passive volunteers” and “prospective volunteers”. The first group includes so-called “active volunteers” (14.4%): the young people have experience in volunteering and are focused on continuing this activity. Accordingly, they are characterized by a high degree of values and attitudes associated with the voluntary activity (as a kind of self-expression). As for active volunteers’ social and demographic characteristics, there is a noteworthy gender heterogeneity, with a clear dominance of female volunteers (69.4%). Their average age is twenty-one. Students of secondary special and higher educational institutions who live mainly in large cities form a significant part of this group. This circumstance can be explained by the fact that many Russian universities are creating conditions for attracting their students to various volunteer projects (for example, various volunteer centers, volunteer schools, student construction teams, competitions for volunteer projects).

The second group of respondents is so-called “potential volunteers” (33.1%), who have no experience of participating in voluntary activities but express a desire and motivation to volunteering in everyday social practices. However, the considered intentions for some reasons are not implemented in life: it is well known that conscious desires are not always realized in practice, being consistent with our real behavior. Accordingly, the efforts of specialists and organizers of voluntary movements should be aimed at involving potential volunteers in these activities. This group is not characterized by gender asymmetry since men and women are represented in it approximately equally (51.8% of women and 48.2% of men). This group also includes students from higher education institutions and employees of private enterprises (the average age: 22.5 years old).

The third group (4.7%) includes “passive volunteers”: these respondents, despite their experience of participating in voluntary activities, do not plan to volunteer in the future. This

group is characterized by a pronounced gender disparity: most of them are men (more than 64%). In addition, the age group of 20-24 years is widely represented here (57%). The peculiarity of their attitude is that for such people, the value of volunteering as a gratuitous activity has been lost over time. The predominance of men is not accidental: due to gender stereotypes and perceptions at a certain stage of their life, men focus primarily on achieving material well-being, searching for a job that can provide a good income (this is especially true for men who marry and raise their own families). It should be noted that the problems associated with the lack and inability to select a sufficient number of male volunteers are noted in some special studies, including the above-mentioned "Resource of the Vanguard Voluntary Movement Groups for Russian Modernization" FOM study (Electronic scientific archive of Ural Federal University, 2012).

The fourth group is represented by so-called «prospective volunteers» (47.8%): these individuals lack both experience and willingness or desire to engage in voluntary activities. This group is clearly dominated by the older youth subgroup, which includes people over twenty-five years. Given this circumstance, we can say that there are problems associated with the involvement of working youth in volunteer activity. It can be assumed that for this category of young people, the prior values are related to professional activity, career, family and children, excluding the possibility of participation in voluntary projects. In general, it can be stated that currently, about half of young people (47.5%) can be considered to be real and potential volunteers, and the other half, respectively, has no motivation to volunteering. Despite this, theoretically, they can also be involved in a volunteer movement over time, when obstacles or barriers to entering various volunteer communities are removed. There is a need to study these obstacles and identify promising ways to overcome them.

Conclusions

The youth volunteer movement in our country is at the stage of institutional formation, characterized by active involvement in modern Russian society's various social and economic processes. Its formation and development are characterized by certain problems and contradictions caused by historical, social, and cultural prerequisites for Russian volunteer movement formation and the main trends in social functioning, basic social institutions, and state volunteerism policy. The modern period of Russian youth voluntary movement development is characterized by creating a legal framework for volunteerism and developing various youth voluntary activity areas. The official statistical data provided in Russian state authorities' documents suggests that the youth volunteer movement in our country is at a fairly high level of development. At the same time, the materials of sociological research indicate that voluntary youth movement in our country is not yet thoroughly developed: volunteerism or volunteering is currently being formed as a social institution, the level of Russian youth involvement in voluntary movement is significantly lower than similar Western European showings.

The general obstacle in the youth volunteer movement's effective development is the social stereotype about volunteering and the lack of systematic, targeted work (except for certain one-time events). In theory, this work should be aimed at involving youth in volunteer activities through the use of efficient mechanisms.

The degree of volunteerism development depends on the functioning nature of institutional mechanisms that produce and convey volunteerism as a social norm. It is important to include various types of volunteer practices in the education and upbringing of the younger generation: they need a systematic educational policy that includes promotion and popularization of volunteer activities among the young people, volunteer programs for children and adults, educational and social volunteer projects, appropriate clubs and movements in educational institutions and leisure facilities.

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