

КОНЦЕПТУАЛИЗАЦИЯ СОЦИАЛЬНОЙ СУБЪЕКТНОСТИ МОЛОДЕЖИ В СОЦИОЛОГИЧЕСКИХ ИССЛЕДОВАНИЯХ СОВЕТСКОГО И ПОСТСОВЕТСКОГО ПЕРИОДОВ

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Аннотация. Представлены результаты сравнительного анализа концептуализации социальной субъектности молодежи в западной, советской и постсоветской социологии. Отмечено, что проблема социальной субъектности известна в социологии в рамках дихотомии структуры и действия, однако значительную часть истории социологи были склонны фокусироваться на детерминистском характере социальных структур в поведении индивида. Исторические события и развитие интегративных теорий в социологии позволили произвести новую оценку взаимозависимости структур и индивидов. В условиях возрастающей динамики социально-экономических и демографических изменений проблема социальной субъектности приобретает особую актуальность для научных сообществ многих стран. В среде молодежи эта проблема осложняется неполноценным социальным и эпистемическим статусом данной социальной группы в системе обыденных и научных представлений. Описано актуальное состояние проблемы социальной субъектности молодежи в западной социологии. Рассмотрены особенности концептуализации этого исследовательского предмета в социологии советского периода, а также произведена попытка установить преемственность современного социологического знания по данной проблеме с корпусом соответствующего социологического знания в западноевропейской и советской традициях.

Ключевые слова: социальная субъектность; дихотомия структуры и действия; социальная субъектность молодежи; социология молодежи; советская социология; конкретные социологические исследования.

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CONCEPTUALISATION OF THE SOCIAL AGENCY OF YOUTH IN SOCIOLOGICAL STUDIES OF THE SOVIET AND POST-SOVIET PERIODS

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Abstract. The article presents the results of a comparative analysis of the conceptualisation of youth social agency in Western, Soviet and post-Soviet sociology. The problem of social agency is known in sociology within the framework of the structure-action dichotomy. However, for a significant part of history, sociologists tended to focus on the deterministic nature of social structures in individual behaviour. A new assessment of the interdependence of structures and individuals became possible due to historical events and the development of integrative theories in sociology. This problem is becoming increasingly important for scientific communities in many countries due to the increasing dynamics of socio-economic and demographic change. In relation to youth, it is complicated by the incomplete social and epistemic status of this social group in the system of both everyday and scientific perceptions. The article reviews the current state of the problem of youth social agency in Western sociology, explores the conceptualisation of this research topic during the Soviet period, and attempts to establish continuity between modern sociological knowledge on this problem produced by post-Soviet sociologists and the body of Western and Soviet sociological knowledge.

Keywords: social agency; dichotomy of structure and action; social agency of youth; sociology of youth; Soviet sociology; concrete sociological research.

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Introduction

Modern researchers and specialists in various fields are becoming increasingly interested in the problem of human agency as the ability to act with intention and will. Its conceptualisation traced back to the problem of human freedom emerged in the Enlightenment period [1, p. 964], which remains unresolved this day. Later, other social sciences and humanities translated this problem to the level of their disciplinary specificity and scientific language. Today, however, the problem of agency has gone beyond the boundaries of purely scientific interest and has become the subject of studies in various fields of human activity: government and corporate policy [2, p. 2], business and economics [3, p. 222], education [4], science [5] and technology [6]. In the near future, interest in this issue is likely to increase due to the acceleration of social change and possible destructuring trends, which imply transformation of the effects of interaction between individuals and social structures [7, p. 105].

The agency of children and adolescents is a special subject of study. For a long time, both scientific and everyday perceptions have been dominated by the view of individuals in these age groups as passive recipients of culture. Although interest in the subject position of children and adolescents can be found in psychology and pedagogy quite early (for example, in the works and ideas of J.-J. Rousseau, D. Dewey and L. N. Tolstoy), sociology

has spent most of its history studying the determinism of social structures, successfully supporting theoretical positions with the results of empirical research [4, p. 120]. The situation began to change actively in the 1990s, when the sociologists A. Prout and E. James proclaimed a new programme in the study of childhood (new social studies of childhood) and formulated its manifesto. They insisted on dissociating social studies of childhood from the previous stage of social thought, according to which children were seen as «analytical derivatives and reflections of more fundamental social processes and patterns» [8, p. 11].

The problem of agency emerged in Soviet sociology closer to the 1980s and was unique given the peculiarities of communist ideology: individual agency was encouraged within the limits of its orientation towards the collective good (for example, within the framework of socialist competition) and suppressed in the opposite case. Even more unique to Soviet sociology was the problem of youth agency, due to the dominance of paternalistic perceptions supported by communist ideology and policy.

The collapse of the USSR and the fall of political regimes in the Eastern bloc countries, as well as the subsequent transformations of socio-economic structures of their, provided many observations of social agency at both the group and individual levels. Those observations

required explanation by social sciences, which have a long history of developing and producing knowledge under specific conditions. Today, these explanations have significant value, which is determined by global

socio-economic trends and the specificities of social structures of post-communist societies, which have different social structures and approach challenges in particular ways.

Conceptualisation of youth social agency in Western sociology

As noted, other social sciences and humanities have approached the philosophical problem of human will and freedom, taking into account their disciplinary specificities and languages. A. Giddens and Ph. W. Sutton note that in sociology it was translated into the problem of structure and action [9, p. 43]. Polish sociologist P. Sztompka, analysing the sociological conceptualisation of the problem of structure and action, demonstrates that it lies at the intersection of the oppositions of structure and action, and of continuity and transformation [10, p. 51].

In sociology, the movement towards different poles of these oppositions was influenced by scientific and historical factors. The first attempts to define the boundaries and status of sociology as a scientific discipline are associated with the names of the Western European sociologists H. Spencer and Au. Comte, who focused on social phenomena such as social structures, social groups, collectives and aggregates of individuals [10, p. 44]. E. Durkheim's ideas about social facts, which have coercive power over individuals, reinforced this intention [10, p. 44]. In the end, the paradigm of structural functionalism, represented by T. Parsons, defined the canon of sociology for several decades. However, in the 1960s it was criticised and sociologists, after a period of theoretical pluralism, started to integrate the two poles of the problem – structure and action.

According to P. Sztompka, the first theoretical solutions to the integration of action and structure were developed in the late 1960s. In particular, the American sociologist W. Buckley introduced the concept of morphogenesis, defining it as «processes which tend to elaborate or change a system's given form, structure or state» [10, p. 58]. Following him, the Israeli-American sociologist A. Etzioni developed similar ideas into a theory of social leadership theory of societal guidance, which sees human society as a macroscopic and permanent social movement engaged in an intensive and perpetual self-transformation, where creative responsiveness of the people takes the central place [10, p. 58].

In the 1970s, French researchers contributed to the search for a solution structure – action problem. A. Tournaine's works aim to reintroduce the actor to history, demonstrating that individuals are capable of making history. Sociologists of organisations M. Crozier and E. Friedberg emphasise the interdependence of actors and systems and draw attention to the role of collective actions, such as negotiations, bargaining, conflicts, and cooperation, in social change [10, p. 59–60].

At the beginning of the 1980s, the ideas of A. Giddens and P. Bourdieu on the problem of structure and agency were under discussion in the sociological community. The quintessence of their solutions was Giddens' concept of structuration and Bourdieu's concept of habitus. Both of them express a similar idea about relationships between structure and agents (individuals), but differ in their assessment of the agent's freedom to act. A. Giddens believes in the agent's reflexive capacity, which can transform structures, while P. Bourdieu emphasises the deterministic power of social structures, which can reproduce themselves even in a human body.

Theories of A. Giddens and P. Bourdieu met and are meeting many debates, ranging from the empirical verification of their claims to methodological issues. M. Archer engaged in a dispute with A. Giddens and highlighted the need to conceptualise the change of agency in the interaction between structure and action, within the framework of the structure – action problem. P. Sztompka refers to this subject as the morphogenesis of agency, providing the quote from M. Archer's work: «...the self-same sequence by which agency brings about social transformation is simultaneously responsible for the systematic transforming of social agency itself... Agency leads to structural and cultural elaboration, but is itself elaborated in the process» [10, p. 65].

Today, the problem of structure and action remains unsolved in sociological theory, and, according to A. Giddens, is unlikely to ever be resolved to everyone's satisfaction [9, p. 47]. This theoretical problem determines the conceptualisation of youth social agency, which is complicated by interdisciplinary issues of psycho-physiological, cultural and economic capacities in its formation.

Contemporary research in sociology aims to redefine the social agency of youth by emphasising the importance of the relations of division of labour and social control in which this group is embedded, rather than relying solely on age as a distinguishing factor [11, p. 323]. Modern empirical research demonstrates that young people's freedom of choice is limited by social structures. For instance, W. Lehmann argues that young people are influenced by structural, institutional, historical, and cultural contexts that shape their perception of their position in the social structure. This perception then leads to further chains of social actions [9, p. 47].

These theses reflect the general principles of the approach developed in the current stage of conceptualisation of youth agency in Western sociology. Firstly, youth is recognised as a significant subject of action.

Second, the actions of the representatives of this non-homogeneous social group are contextualised by the social structures. Thirdly, social agency's morphogenesis depends on the interaction between structural constraints and opportunities and subjective assessments of successful action possibilities [12]. Fourth,

the conceptualisation of social agency strives to take into account the possibilities of an interdisciplinary approach that allows to create a more comprehensive model of social agency that relates to intra- and interpersonal aspects of human interaction at different (micro-macro) levels [12].

Conceptualisation of youth social agency in Soviet sociology

Although the term «agency» gained popularity in the scientific language of sociology of youth in the 1980s [13, p. 152], the study of this concept began much earlier in Soviet sociology. This process was associated with the so-called «concrete sociological research», which reflected the changes in managing an increasingly complex social system during the post-war period of the 1950s. According to L. G. Titarenko and E. A. Zdravomyslova, «concrete sociological research was drafted to provide for the smart governance based on real data rather than on scholastic speculations» [14, p. 44].

Concrete sociological research was a compromise between the state and the new scientific community. Such sociological studies were conducted in various fields (education and work, urban and rural, family and marriage, etc.) and represented one of the levels in the three-part structure of sociological knowledge according to R. Merton's model, which includes general theory, middle range theories and empirical sociology [15, p. 11]. The latter level was represented by concrete sociological research, which provided the transition to the theoretical levels.

Sociological theory was developing based on historical materialism and the ideology of the Soviet state, which denied stratification and any social structures beside the state ones. According to V. A. Yadov, under L. I. Brezhnev's leadership, sociological theory was developed using structural functionalism, a research paradigm criticised in that time in Western sociology but considered more acceptable in Soviet sociology for social planning, managing organisations and preventing uncontrollable change [15, p. 12]. This tendency in sociological theory, reinforced by the principles of systems analysis in the scientific literature, postponed the possibility of theoretical pluralism in the conceptualisation of social agency, the manifestations of which were demonstrated in the result of concrete sociological research.

The issue of social agency was first recognised in the 1960s in research on social mobility and its relationship to educational and occupational pathways. This topic was initially linked to the study of social stratification in Soviet society, but the focus of research was primarily on differences within social classes rather than between them [15, p. 112]. In the mid-1960s, sociologists conducted studies in various regions of the USSR that revealed discrepancies between the actual structural opportunities and needs of the country's economy and

the interests and aspirations of Soviet youth in their educational and vocational choices [15, p. 268].

During this period, interest in youth research in the USSR was fueled by youth protests in Western countries, which prompted the state to understand and utilise mechanisms of social control. However, despite such a request, the sociology of the Soviet period gradually moved from «a simplistic view of youth as an object of social control and education on the part of state institutions to the affirmation of the concept of youth as a special phase of the life cycle with its own interests and its own (albeit incomplete) social status» [15, p. 131].

This perception started to form during the early 1960s with the first large-scale sociological studies. These studies were related to public opinion (B. A. Grushin), artistic culture (L. N. Kogan), labour (V. A. Yadov, A. G. Zdravomyslov), media consumption (V. E. Shlyapentokh, B. M. Firsov), lifestyle (Yu. V. Arutyunyan), educational and professional choices of Soviet youth and other aspects of it, including comparative studies of life paths of different generations (V. N. Shubkin, S. N. Ikonnikova, M. N. Rutkevich, L. Ya. Rubina, V. T. Lisovskii, A. V. Lisovskii, F. R. Filippov, B. C. Uralnis, M. Kh. Titma).

According to M. K. Gorshkov and F. E. Sheregi, in Soviet sociology the tendency to see young people as an active subject of social relations rather than as a passive object of ideological influence was no longer being suppressed [16, p. 34]. Although there was empirical evidence supporting scientific interest and positive attitudes towards the study of social agency, the conceptualisation of this subject was a slow process due to ideological constraints.

V. A. Yadov and L. N. Kogan proposed the most comprehensive solutions for conceptualising social agency within the framework of personality theory. It is important to note that their theoretical positions were derived from empirical studies of young people. In the late 1970s, V. A. Yadov and his colleagues developed a dispositional theory of personality based on studies of the motives and values of employees from design and construction institutes in Leningrad conducted at the beginning of that period. Apparently, the first ideas that prototyped the dispositional concept of personality developed by V. A. Yadov started to develop during earlier studies of young workers at Leningrad enterprises, the results of which were published in the book «The man and his work» (1967).

The dispositional theory of personality aims to explain how personality is structured as a subject of activity. V. A. Yadov suggests that human behaviour is regulated through dispositions, which result from the interaction between needs and situations where those needs can be fulfilled. Dispositions may form hierarchies if they are fixed in the personality structure [17, p. 35].

The hierarchy of these dispositions includes the following attitudes: a) elementary fixed attitudes based on vital needs and the simplest situations; b) social fixed attitudes, which are formed in small groups and relevant social situations based on the evaluation of objects or situations; c) basic social attitudes, which are formed on the basis of more complex social needs of joining a certain domain of activity, which dominants among others (for example, work, leisure, family); d) a system of value orientations to the life goals and the means of achieving these goals, which is formed on the basis of the highest social needs of the individual and in accordance with the general social conditions that provide opportunities for the realisation of certain social and individual values.

The dispositional hierarchy comprises cognitive, emotional, and behavioural components that form relatively independent subsystems within the general dispositional hierarchy, whose main function is the mental regulation of the subject's social activity or behaviour in the social environment.

Conceptualisation of youth social agency in post-Soviet sociology

The 1990s were a challenging period for many countries that became independent after the collapse of the USSR and the fall of communist regimes. This resulted in a decrease in theoretical and empirical studies of youth social agency. But interest in this subject has since returned after the stabilisation of transformation processes. Nevertheless, the analysis of publication activity on the topic of youth social agency shows that this subject is still new for contemporary sociology of post-Soviet countries.

One of the primary focuses of contemporary sociological research on the social agency of young people is proactive action in the educational context. This trend is driven by the recognition of the necessity for increased entrepreneurial activity and proactive behaviour of individuals in a socio-economic environment with growing dynamics. Researchers in this field aim to address the limitations of the methodological agenda of critical theories of education, which view education as a means of challenging the injustices of dominant macrostructures, and studies of agency and resilience, which emphasise the supportive role of structures in overcoming structural barriers [4, p. 126].

According to the researchers of agency in the educational context, the tendencies of destructuring require the search for an alternative theoretical lens, which would allow to determine the prospects of the role of education in creative and evolutionary structural transformations.

The dispositional theory proposed by V. A. Yadov and his colleagues presents an original theoretical solution based on the synthesis of interdisciplinary links between sociological and psychological approaches. This theory is consistent with the social agency theories of A. Giddens, P. Bourdieu, and M. Archer. It fills theoretical gaps and complements existing theories, providing an explanation for intergenerational differences in behaviour and behaviour changes in different socio-economic contexts.

L. N. Kogan is another major figure who tried to reflect the problem of agency in his theoretical research. His main interest was culture, and he framed this problem in the late 1960s using an interdisciplinary approach that drew on cultural and philosophical disciplines, with a focus on the social action of the individual. The central thesis of his theory is that culture is a process of co-creation, and the human person plays both the subject and object roles simultaneously [18]. Later, L. N. Kogan developed the concept of human social forces, which measure the appropriation of social relations by a social subject. These forces are revealed in their transformative activity and indicate their level of social activity [19]. L. N. Kogan argues that human social forces are shaped and developed through practical activity, and have a direct impact on people's social behaviour.

They propose economic theory as a potential alternative. In particular, modern sociologists P. A. Sorokin and I. D. Frumin suggest integrating T. Schulze's concept of the entrepreneurial element of human capital for this purpose. According to this concept, education fosters allocative capacity, i. e. the ability to make active use of one's resources. This ability improves human efficiency in situations of rapid change, uncertainty, and risk. P. A. Sorokin and I. D. Frumin also find the integration of Aks's theory of national entrepreneurial systems into the sociological study of social agency quite productive. This theory places individual agency in the form of entrepreneurial activity at the centre of its conceptual scheme for macroeconomic dynamics. It acknowledges the role of institutions and emphasises the qualitative characteristics of entrepreneurial activity.

P. A. Sorokin and I. D. Frumin suggest that integrating new economic approaches into the sociological tradition can advance agency theory in sociology and economic research. In addition, such a move would allow moving towards the development of specific indicators to measure the capacity for transformative action, which could be applicable to entrepreneurship education research. However, the primary issue is still the novelty of these economic theories, which conflicts with the methodological agenda of the mainstream approaches in sociology for studying educational agency.

The sociologists from the Urals region represent the second major area of research on the social agency of youth. This region is known in Russian sociology for its extensive experience in conducting sociological research in the field of sociology of youth and education. Since 1995, research teams led by E. S. Barazgova, Yu. R. Vishnevskii, G. E. Zborovskii, E. N. Zaborova, L. N. Kogan and others have conducted eight stages of a longitudinal study of student youth in the Sverdlovsk region, which was labelled as a monitoring [20].

The analysis of the monitoring's results and its methodological basis allows us to conclude that social agency in these studies acts as a theoretical lens of research rather than an object. The basis of this optic was formed by Yadov's dispositional theory and Kogan's concepts [21]. The study authors combined the concept of the individual as an active subject, whose activity is influenced by social conditions, with L. N. Kogan's ideas on temporal attitudes that reflect young people's views on the past, present, and future. The synthesis of these ideas,

according to the authors of the study, made it possible to deepen L. N. Kogan's resource-based approach applying to the studies of youth social agency. This approach involves establishing a relationship between the resources, readiness (reserve), and the use (realisation) of these resources by the youth to achieve their own goals [22]. At the same time, the resource approach assumes the possibility of breaks in the chain of this relationship, which allows for a more detailed conceptualisation of the processes of formation and manifestation of social agency.

In contemporary sociological works, there is a reflection of the cultural-sociological approach in the study of social agency that was established in the Soviet period by L. N. Kogan. It is represented by works that focus on the cultural agency of youth, which determines their ability to transform and create cultural practices [22; 23]. However, sociologists of the Soviet and modern periods did not maintain theoretical continuity, as evidenced by modern researchers' reliance on phenomenology and class analysis by P. Bourdieu.

Conclusions

Social agency is a fundamental issue in social sciences and humanities, particularly in sociology where it is often framed as a structure-action dichotomy. In relation to youth, this issue takes on a unique form due to the socio-economic and epistemic status of this social group in society and scientific knowledge. Currently, researchers tend to consider youth not only as a demographic category but also as a distinct social group defined by socio-economic status and possessing a relatively independent capacity to make decisions and take action.

A comparison of the history of conceptualising the youth social agency in Western and Soviet traditions shows that the former progressed more quickly than the latter in identifying theoretical and methodological issues in this area. This disparity can be attributed to ideological factors that placed both internal and external constraints on Soviet sociology. Moving away from the primacy of structure over action, Western sociologists proposed solutions to problems related to the role of social action in this dichotomy. However, these proposals have not yet fully satisfied the scientific community. Soviet sociologists did not have the opportunity to work freely on this problem. However, they were able to identify it and offer authentic theoretical solutions that address the problem of youth agency along the same lines as in Western sociology related to the youth as an active subject and morphogenesis of agency as a result of the interaction of social structures and the actions of individuals.

The peculiarities of sociology development in the USSR determined the state of the problem of social agency of youth, which is characterised by the novelty of its formulation and the fragmentation of its solutions in the works of sociologists of post-Soviet countries. There are several major directions in the research of this subject: educational, social and cultural agency of youth. Although Soviet sociologists formalised the theoretical background for the study of social agency, we cannot state that modern sociologists in post-Soviet countries have an unconditional theoretical and methodological continuity. The established directions of youth agency research are characterised by the diversification of scientific approaches, which are represented by the theoretical heritage of Soviet and Western sociology.

The analysis of bibliographic sources on the topic of youth social agency suggests that interest in this subject will increase in many countries. This is due to the growing dynamics of socio-economic, demographic, and political changes that demand rapid decision-making and increased adaptability of individuals and societies in modern life conditions. These trends generate a demand for comparing the theoretical languages of different approaches, which will allow to identify points of integration, opportunities and limitations of these approaches for studying specific aspects of social agency in general, and their application in relation to social agency of the youth.

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