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DESTRUCTIVE PRACTICES OF YOUTH COMMUNITIES IN THE CONTEXT OF YOUTH POLICIES (REGIONAL PERSPECTIVE)

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Abstract

The authors discuss the emergence of destructive socio-political practices in the youth communities of the Krasnodar Region, Russia, and make recommendations to reduce their negative impact at the regional level in terms of the youth policy. The study lays in conceptual frames of life strategies of youth (developed by Yu. A. Zub and V. I. Chuprov), of the humanistic concept of youth (I. M. Ilinsky), and the ladder of participation of the youth (R. Hart). The paper represents the comprehensive study conducted in two stages resulting in revelation and characterization of youth communities. The groups are characterized according to their life strategies of self-determination typical for different semantic cultures coexisting in the youth environment of Russia. In the communities of young people revealed in the study, the two major types of sociopolitical behavior and attitudes are emphasized: openly and directly destructive forms of public behavior, and indirectly destructive behavior limiting the potential of development and application of young people in the implementation of young people in the level of actual participation of young people in the implementation of the youth policies together with older generations for the joint solutions will contribute to minimizing risks of destructive practices and the development of the constructive potential of the youth.

Keywords: young people; youth politics; social profiles of youth; destructive practices; conflicts; Krasnodar region.

Introduction

In Russia, as in many other countries, the potential and problems associated with youth participation in the public political agenda constantly increase. The younger generation participating in the political process joining various groups and organizations (including marginal ones), and in different forms (including conflict behavior), might serve as a leading social group with its essential impact on the development of society if being included in the implementation of large projects associated with the state and civil society institutions. Stimulation of social and civil activity of young people through synchronization of their needs with priorities of social and youth policies might help wider involve youth in constructive public activities jointly with other age groups but within their specific needs and potential.

At the same time, there are risks and threats to society associated with conflicting potential and destructive models of youth public activism. The youth environment is traditionally considered to be a space of in-group and intergroup conflicts determined by the growth and socialization of young people. Traditional

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opportunities for young people to participate in the public life of the society, combined with narrowing space of their conventional practices, often leads either to expanding protest component of political participation or to a latent passive-conformal style of behavior of the younger generation. The social-political conduct of youth imitates the visual side of public participation without its functional impact and content. The need to involve young people in public policy development and implementation includes policy tools mobilizing their positive conflict potential and minimizing destructive practices of young people.

In the paper, we discuss the role of state and non-state institutions in mobilizing the potential of youth as main actors of policy initiatives through their involvement in publicly tangible projects. The empirical component of the study includes the data of the comprehensive research study conducted in 2021 in the Krasnodar Region of Russia.

Conceptual approaches to the problem and its current state

Conflicts in the youth environment, and public policies toward decreasing the destructive role of conflicts among youth through the integration of young people in constructive social practices, are interconnected but considered to be separate and specific research topics.

Several publications are devoted to conflict studies and conflict management linked to the youth environment. In English language literature, these issues are considered mainly in broader terms of conflict resolution and peacebuilding models and initiatives involving young people (Sommers, 2006; Barber, 2014). The sociological tradition of conflict studies in the youth environment in Russia is widely known as based on the "Risk Society" theory developed by Ulrich Beck (Beck, 2000). In frames of this direction, the forms and representation of conflict behavior among youth, and conflict management are studied (Cherkasova, 2006; Chuprov, Zubok, 2009). The recent study summarizing the international and domestic academic approaches to the issue conducted in Russia is to be mentioned (Ushamirsky, Ushamirskaya, Babintsev, 2021).

In frames of political science and political sociology, the studies on public participation issues are focused on forms and determinants of political participation of youth (Avtsinova,2015; Franz, 2019), including conflict models of youth activities (O'Brien, Selboe, Hayward, 2018) and radical forms of protesting behavior (Smyslova,2017; Bečević, Dahlstedt, 2021). Both traditional (offline) and virtual (online) forms of protest activities of youth (Atanesyan, 2019; Bareev, Kachurina, 2019) are in the scope of the prospective studies. Online platforms such as social network sites and virtual communication technologies are viewed as determining factors and instruments used in terms of public (protest) participation of youth (Brodovskaia, Khuang, 2019; Kiriukhina, 2014). Another framework of studies includes looking at political participation of youth through institutional structures and developing policies necessary for the elimination of destructive youth activities (Revisiting youth political..., 2005; Saud, Ida, Mashud, 2020).

In the paper, we consider destructive social practices of youth in terms of structural functionalism and conflict studies (Allan, 2007: 211–241) as actions directly or indirectly damaging the system of social relations. In particular, destructive social practices disrupt social connections, stimulate tension and hostility, directly or indirectly violate social/legal rules, deviate from socially valuable activities, demonstrate escapism, etc. The destructive civil activism of young people might stem from social injustice and inequality. Through instrumentalization of socio-political tension young activists try to oppose the current state of affairs and transform them in a wishful way, using collective and individual discourses, open protests, resistance, extremism, both explicitly indispensable but latently approved in the society (Loginova, Shcheblanova, 2019: 104).

Zubok and Chuprov (Zubok, Chuprov, 2019; Zubok, 2020) identify social profiles and life strategies of Russian youth, defining the constructive and destructive potential of youth activities. According to them, in the active phase of self-determination young people "follow own ideas about a successful and happy life, and validate those ways and methods which would in their opinion lead to achieving their goals" (Zubok, Chuprov, 2019: 6). The profile characteristics of youth communities are defined through semantic cultural types of innovative, hedonistic, and adaptive personalities (Zubok, 2020: 174–176).

The humanistic concept of youth developed by Ilinsky (Ilinskii, 2001) formulates the criteria for determining the subjectivity of young people in the multi-level system of youth policy. According to this concept, the assessment of the status of young people and of the mechanisms used by youth to establish their position in modern society is carried out through the processes of self-identification, self-awareness, and implementation of their interests in everyday life and via appropriate youth policies. Accordingly, youth policies are assessed as effective if considering youth as a valuable resource to be further developed (Roth, Brooks-Gunn, 2003) and addressing their subjective perceptions and specific needs (Lerner, 2017) through the establishment and application of functional and supportive institutional forms and conditions (Social state..., 2020).

As an analytical framework for studying youth participation in public problem-solving, Roger Hart's Ladder of Young People's Participation concept is applied here (Hart, 2008; Hart, 1997). The model represents eight forms of youth involvement in public initiatives, constructed according to the gradual increase of the inclusion of young people in joint solutions with adults. The model allows comparing and synchronizing the initiatives of public involvement which have been developed by groups of youth themselves, with those produces from the top in frames of youth policies. In turn, this makes it possible to develop instruments and mechanisms for minimizing destructive participation, transforming it into constructive behavior in a conflict. It is also important to provide various formats for youth involvement which the model allows, covering representatives of different age subgroups and their behavioral types in the age cohort of youth.

The empirical component

The Krasnodar region of Russia is complex due to its multicultural characteristics, and interesting as a research case. It is characterized by peculiar geographic location and comparatively high socioeconomic indicators. Young people constitute almost one-third of the total population of the region (27%). The subgroups of the youth in the region vary by their geographic, socioeconomic, sociocultural, and other parameters.

The methodology applied in terms of the empirical component of the study have politicalpsychological and sociological backgrounds; it combines quantitative, quantitative methods and projective techniques of data collection, analysis, and interpretation. At the first stage of the fieldwork (June-July 2021), we conducted fourteen focus-group interviews with young people. Focus-group interviews carried out in the regional municipalities with typical socio-economic and socio-cultural characteristics¹, included the Northern economic zone (Kanevskaya district), the Central economic zone (Timashevsky district), the Eastern economic zone (Tikhoretsky district), the Black Sea economic zone (Tuapse district), Krasnodar agglomeration (Krasnodar city), the Foothill economic zone (Belorechensky district), and Sochi agglomeration (city of Sochi). The focus-group discussions included binary comparison; the young participants were asked to compare and assess the role of the major institutional actors involved in youth policy-making in the region (as subjects) and of the excluded actors of the regional municipalities (as objects).

We conducted twelve expert interviews with representatives of the regional institutional structures dealing with youth policy-making and implementation, including administrators supervising education, communication, culture, and sports programs for youth.

At the second stage (November 2021), we conducted an online survey with young people (14–35 years old) of the Krasnodar Region; the randomly selected respondents include 1661 young people, representing all significant sociodemographic subgroups of the general aggregate (sex, age, place of residence - rural or urban, level of education) and reflecting the relevant characteristics of the youth of the Krasnodar Region. The online survey made it possible to differentiate the Kuban youth's evaluations regarding institutional practices of youth policy. In sum, the empirical data collected and analyzed enables identifying and characterizing destructive practices of young people. It helps assess the potential of institutional mechanisms of youth policy that could convert the negative representations into functional and constructive youth activities.

Social Profiles of Youth: Regional Projections

As a result of the qualitative component of the study, we characterize social profiles of young people by four key elements compared on the binary scale: a) according to the social orientation of young people toward own personality (concentrating on own development and self-representation, solving own problems), and toward others (being interested in others and helping others), and b) according to the potential of leadership among youth (activists and followers).

¹ On the strategy of socio-economic development of the Krasnodar Region until 2030. The Law of the Krasnodar Region of December 21, 2018, N 3930-KZ, available at: https://docs.cntd.ru/document/550301926 (accessed: 09.02.2022). (In Russ.)

Based on these characteristics, we divided the regional youth into four ideal types (consumers and converters, leaders and followers) and into mixed hybrid groups combining those characteristics (activists-converters, activists-consumers, followers-converters, and followers-consumers). The representatives of these hybrid groups have the potential for constructive and destructive social and political practices to be further assessed.

We characterize the **consumers**' profile by the need of young people of this category for a high level of income, high quality of life, and a comfortable lifestyle. These needs are more or less inherent for other types of youth too, but the consumers put them as their priority. As participants of the focus-group discussions explain the way of life of their peers, *"Young people are concentrated only on their benefits and put them above all"*. Or: *"a person should take care not only of himself but be a part of a group sharing others' interests. All my friends and acquaintances used to think only about themselves all the time ..."*. Or: *"all young people want to earn a lot, but nobody is going to help others"*.

The high income allows young people fulfilling other significant priorities such as self-development, comfortable leisure, and diverse communication. On their way to economic sustainability, the young people are ready to get engaged in entrepreneurial activities with support from the state, allowing the institutional structures to involve economically active young people in the state projects.

The young people, belonging to the type of a **converter**, are different from consumers because of being socially orientated and interested in problem-solving of other people, communities, and territories. Both categories of consumers and converters are focused on personal economic growth; while consumers tend to use self-development for their self-representation and own needs, converters invest personal success in social, economic, ecological environments through involvement in public activities and supporting innovations. For the converters, self-development and personal sustainability are not only objectives but ways to improve and innovate the community life. Converters work on increasing their competencies and stimulate similar growth in their surrounding: *"This approach creates a kind of confidence in the future. It looks like life orientation with certainty in where to go and what to do next"* (opinion expressed during focus group discussions).

Activists are characterized by an active life position typical for both converters and consumers, and demonstrated by the high level of inclusion in public communications with various social groups, by gaining popularity among youth and becoming either formal or informal leaders in their groups. However, the converters and consumers perceive the potential of activism differently; as for the participants of the focus-group discussions, the difference is in values and goals. For those young people belonging to the type of consumers, leadership means striving for career goals occupation of formal, administrative positions allowing them to influence others horizontally, from top to bottom. For example, consumers would see themselves in leading positions if getting involved in student councils, youth departments, state and non-state organizations. Consumers accommodate available institutional structures dealing with youth affairs to achieve their own goals. They demonstrate public activity *"to get promoted for an administrative position and to use it for having all necessary resources to do sports, have fun, and live comfortably, as well as earn some money"* (opinion expressed during focus group discussions).

Converters perceive leadership as inspiration for positive, innovative changes and achievements: "Real" youth leaders have superior professional and personal competencies and are always ready to take responsibility for their teams, supporting others toward joint achievements. "The real leader inspires others; whenever you apply to him with an initiative, he is always ready to listen and understand, so that if we can do it, we do it by all means. This is a leader-supervisor"(opinions expressed during focus group discussions).

As young participants of the focus-group discussions mentioned, "Nowadays there is a lack of competent leaders. There are a lot of people officially appointed for administrative positions, but in fact, unable to do anything. Many of them are afraid of taking responsibility".

For instance, participants of the focus-group discussions stress the flourishing of "fake leaders" whose main activity is to speak out publicly, make noise using mass communication channels and social media platforms, and play a leadership instead of leading. The modern fake leaders (also "digital leaders") used to gain popularity by drawing public attention to inessential events and objects exaggerating their importance (hyping strategy). They promote demonstrative attitudes of consumerism and even deviant behavior to construct personal media image: "Modern opinion leaders are showmen who simply entertain young people. They are neither innovative nor helpful".

We describe the type of **followers** as those young people whose needs and values are still indefinite, and life position is passive. However, if creating certain conditions for their self-development and self-expression, the followers are ready to get involved in the joint projects and group activities: "*This kind of passive guys always need an example to follow*", "We need real people with their real activities, resources, and results to follow. It is not enough to hear about them, they must be visible so that we could communicate with them and have concrete evidence that they make it work..." "(opinions expressed during focus group discussions).

The empirical data of the online survey demonstrates that the pure types of young people with concrete attitudes toward leadership are met among about twenty percent of the young respondents in Krasnodar Region. Other 80% of the respondents represent hybrid profiles.

The survey results also show that visible forms of active position are rarely accompanied by functional activity. Among 82% of the respondents who confirmed to be ready to help others in their problemsolving, only 32% are ready to take responsibility for others' decisions and joint solutions (fig. 1).

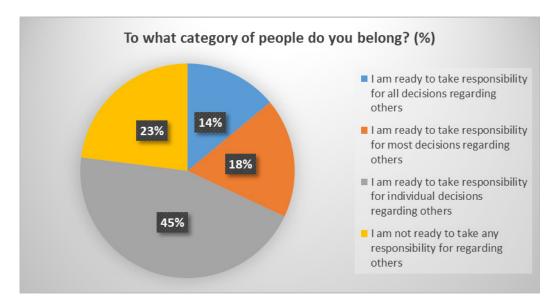
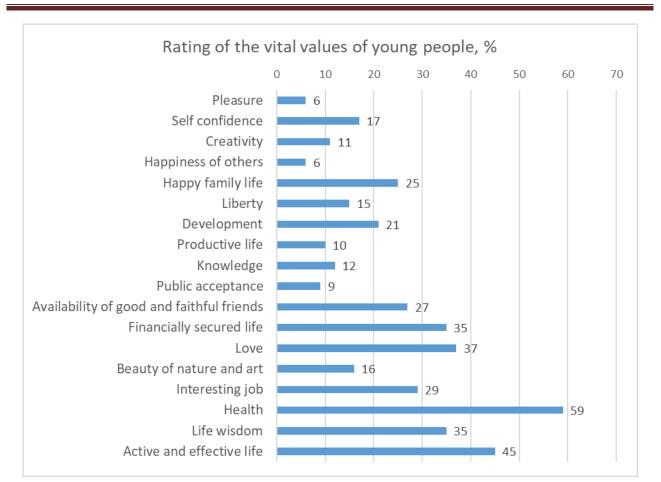


Figure 1. The degree of responsibility of young people for solving problems of others (on the results of the online survey with young people in Krasnodar Region, November 2021, %)

The majority of the respondents (85%) determine their life position as active and involved in affairs with other people, trying to solve others' problems jointly and demonstrating leadership potential; 52% of the young respondents confirm feeling comfortable to follow the leader.

It is important to mention that the differences in the profile characteristics of "consumers" and "converters" identified by the online survey results through indicators of "focused on solving own problems" and "focused on solving problems of others" are determined by exclusively value preferences of young people. Characteristics of the respondents by age, social status, and place of residence had an inessential impact on their responses. A significant characteristic of the modern Kuban youth is their differentiation and fragmentation by their value preferences at all levels (life values, instrumental and political values), noted by participants of focus-group discussions, expert interviews, and the online survey. Healthy life (59%), love (37%), economic sustainability (35%), and interesting job (29%) are among the most important values for young people (fig. 2).



Figur 2. Rating of the vital values of young people (on the results of the online survey with young people in Krasnodar Region, November 2021, %)

The profiles of young people revealed in the study correspond to the life strategies of various semantic cultural types existing in the Russian youth environment (Zubok, Chuprov, 2019: 174–176). For the converters, the innovative environment is most supportive. Novelty, alternative ways of thinking are among the resources of the converters, who might have both constructive and destructive potential. By representing constructive attitudes, converters might focus their attempts on maintaining and protecting socially significant values through innovative and involving approaches, as well as on their moral self-development (Zubok, Chuprov, 2019: 175). The destructive potential of converters might reflect their conflicting attitudes toward the existing system and their attempts to transform it.

The attitudes of hedonistic culture and enjoying life prevail in the profile of consumers, who seek to have pleasure, consume (living a comfortable life, practicing a healthy and wealthy lifestyle), self-realize through new impressive fillings and emotions.

For the followers, an adaptive manner of behavior characterized by conformist adoption of the existing norms and conventional rules is combined with the culture of moral anomie as a refusal of strict regulations by representatives of young people in favor of "flexible" changing rules appearing as new needs arise.

Destructive practices in the regional youth environment

The destructive practices revealed during the study can be divided into two groups: directly destructive actions having an immediate impact on the social environment and provoking conflicts, and indirectly destructive ones although not causing conflicts, but essentially limiting cooperation and potential for dialogue among youth, as well as between young people and other age groups. Both forms of destructive youth practices challenge youth policy implementation.

Among directly destructive actions practiced by youth, the focus-groups participants mentioned:

1) bullying as most frequently happening aggressive behavior, especially in educational institutions; 2) active aggression through participation in radical youth groups practicing physical and verbal violence against immigrants and others;

3) disruptive and conflicting communication with older people (generation conflicts) and addiction to virtual communication;

4) active and violent virtual communication through hate speech, aggressive and provoking posts on social network platforms;

5) marginalization of youth lacking life goals and socially approved life strategies to achieve, deviant behavior in different forms, etc.

These forms of destructive practices create a differential-negative model of behavior in conflicts. They are still localized but tend to spread and get stably reproduced among youth.

Let's consider the most characteristic statements in the focus-group discussions reflecting the direct forms of destructive practices among youth:

• "It is easy sometimes to join a radical group, so that young people being especially energetic, but having no opportunity for active joint activities in their groups, tend to join marginals".

• "Bullying is a serious problem, represented in insult and abuse. Those young people who are closed in themselves and do not participate in group activities are shy or unable to express themselves openly, often become targeted by others' violent actions".

• "When there are no visible and accessible centers dealing with public discussion and inclusive problem-solving regarding political, economic, other current issues in the country, young people feel themselves useless and apply to marginal communities".

• "Most young people make negative things".

• "Unfortunately, our city is almost catching St. Petersburg famous by the spread and use of drugs".

The second group of indirectly negative practices among youth includes passive aggression (refusal to participate in any actions), escapism (distancing from the actual problems in the society), refusal to participate in political, social, ecological projects due to low motivation and narrow thinking focusing on personal material benefits, unwillingness to volunteer or perform a low-paid work, self-censorship in virtual social networks (fear of sanctions), low level of involvement in education and passive interest in self-education. The passive-negative practices develop an integrative-conformal behavior in social conflicts, preferring to let it go as it goes, which is not very typical for youth. Let's consider some examples of such behavior among youth mentioned in the focus-group discussions:

• "Most of the young people are not active probably due to mobile phones flooded everything around".

• "Regarding volunteering, many children refrain from getting involved, asking a question: "What will I get from this?".

• "Young people are not very skilled in self-education".

• "There is another bad but popular habit among young people here, which is to kind of disperse, leave the country for travel, but not return. I rarely meet those who say they will travel and see the world, but come back".

• "The needs of modern youth are mostly limited by wishing to travel, have fun, and earn some money, nothing more".

• "Half of the youth simply does not care".

The study demonstrates that directly destructive practices are most typical for the youth belonging to social types of followers-consumers and activists-converters. Indirectly destructive practices are wider distributed among the majority of followers-converters and followers-consumers. We revealed several factors determining the spread of destructive practices among the regional youth, including paternalistic expectations (the state is obliged to help and take care), restrictions of public conduct associated with the COVID-19 pandemic, etc. A significant role in affecting destructive practices among youth plays the gap between the existing youth policies and the priorities of the constructive inclusion of youth in the public life of the society. Hart's Ladder allows identifying the gap and overcoming it through necessary reforms.

Analysis of the most common youth practices in the Krasnodar Region shows that the younger age group of youth (schoolchildren, students) behave according to the lower stairs of Hart's Ladder, having almost no involvement in the problem-solving regarding socially significant issues. First of all, youth is often used in various public processes without letting them know about the essence of the process so that they are physically present but have no clue about the real aims and effects of their participation. Another case is when representatives of youth are used as "decoration" of various events where young people as a social segment are necessary to be present. Young participants of such events are often attracted by free meals, Tshirts with symbols of the event, but not by the event itself. On the third level of imitation of youth involvement, young people participate in the projects led by adults/supervisors playing almost no functional role. In general, youth practices of the first three types (levels) mostly take the free time of young people involving them in public events and projects only symbolically but having almost no effect on the development of any public role of young people as actors.

The upper layers of Hart's Ladder enable developing youth's involvement in publicly significant projects as actors. On the fourth level, young people are already informed about the purposes of the projects to get involved in, and on the fifth level, young participants are not only aware but also able to consult others on publicly significant issues. The next and upper level of public activity reflects opportunities for youth to initiate public projects and essential changes, although still having not many resources for their implementation. On the seventh layer of Hart's Ladder, there are public projects developed as well as implemented by youth. And, on the highest layer of hierarchy, there are public projects and activities initiated and implemented by young people jointly and in an equal partnership with adults, and becoming independent actors of public policy. These practices are rarely met and are most typical for activists-converters.

Conclusion

Youth is a differentiated socio-demographic group consisting of a variety of communities that have differently represented constructive and destructive potential. On the one hand, this potential is determined by the sociocultural environment in which the strategies of self-representation of young people as well as their social profiles are framed. On the other hand, the forms and representations of public activity of young people depend on the level of congruence between their needs and expectations, and the institutional practices of the youth policy implemented. At the same time, the sociocultural type is a kind of social constant, which determines the nature and outcomes of the reproduction of youth communities, so that the institutional practices of youth policies function as triggers that actualize either constructive or destructive potential of the involvement of young people in socio-political, socio-economic, socio-cultural activities in specific contextual conditions.

Despite the priorities of youth policy declared at the state level of the Russian Federation¹, the existing institutional practices of their implementation still predominantly have dual nature and are focused on either gifted and socially active, or deviant representatives of youth. Implementation of youth policies continues having a form of events instead of addressing real needs of youth and developing ways to solve problems with their direct participation.

Designing a new model of youth policy which would contribute to the development of the constructive potential of young people and the reduction of their destructive practices should be based on several key components. First, the state youth policy should create necessary conditions to make young people active, constructive, highly motivated, and responsible actors of socio-economic, socio-political, and socio-cultural activities and decision-making. decisions, for which it is necessary to be responsible. Secondly, while designing youth policies, it is necessary to take into account the dominant needs of Russian youth (the need for personal and professional development, for self-realization and public recognition, for a high level of income, and a comfortable lifestyle/quality of life). The policies must be complex and provide a step-by-step approach leading young people toward a higher level of their inclusion. In this context, not a separate event or some events, but the trajectory of the development of young man or youth communities through participation in the complex projects and processes must be assured. Thirdly, it is important to develop a core idea on which the public discourse on youth policies will be focused, not only unifying events and actors involved and mostly having a formal sense without essential functions and long-term effects but reconstructing the symbolic space of politics. This in turn will allow not only overcoming the fragmentation and inconsistency of life values and political-cultural view of modern youth, but also creating a necessary basis for sociopolitical stability in the country in the present and future.

¹ The Constitution of the Russian Federation, Article 72 on implementation of youth policies on the levels of the RF and its subjects; the adoption of the Federal Law of December 30, 2020, N 489-FZ "On Youth Policy in the Russian Federation".

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ДЕСТРУКТИВНЫЕ ПРАКТИКИ СООБЩЕСТВ МОЛОДЁЖИ В СИСТЕМЕ МОЛОДЁЖНОЙ ПОЛИТИКИ (РЕГИОНАЛЬНЫЙ РАКУРС)

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Аннотация

Рассматриваются основания возникновения деструктивных социально-политических практик в сообществах молодёжи и возможности минимизации их проявления на региональном уровне с помощью инструментария молодёжной политики. Концептуальными основаниями исследования стали теория жизненных стратегий молодёжи (Ю. А. Зубок, В. И. Чупров), гуманистическая концепции молодежи (И. М. Ильинский), концепция молодёжного участия (Р. Харт). Эмпирическая составляющая статьи основана на данных, полученных в ходе комплексного исследования поведения молодёжи Краснодарского края, проведённого в 2021 г. На первом этапе исследования (июнь-июль 2021 г.) были проведены 14 фокус-групповых интервью с представителями молодежи, а также 9 экспертных сессий с представителями институциональных структур, участвующих в выработке и реализации молодежной политики в регионе. На втором этапе исследования (ноябрь 2021 г.) было проведено онлайн-анкетирование молодежи Краснодарского края с объёмом выборки 1 661 человек. В результате исследования выявлено наличие профильных сообществ молодежи (активисты-преобразователи, активисты-потребители, ведомые-преобразователи, ведомые-потребители). Выделенные авторами профили молодежи соответствуют жизненным стратегиям самоопределения, которые характерны для различных смысловых культурных типов, существующих в российской молодежной среде. В указанных сообществах возможны различные варианты проявления деструктивных социальнополитических практик в публичной сфере. Можно выделить два типа подобных практик: непосредственно деструктивные (оказывающие прямое влияние на поведение молодёжи в потенциально конфликтных ситуациях) и косвенно деструктивные (ограничивающие развитие конструктивного потенциала молодёжи и молодёжной политики). Повышение уровня реального участия молодых людей в практиках молодёжной политики (от имитации – к совместному решению проблем в партнёрстве с представителями старших поколений) будет способствовать минимизации проявлений деструктивных практик и развитию конструктивного потенциала молодёжи.

Ключевые слова: молодёжь; молодёжная политика; социальные профили молодёжи; деструктивные практики; конфликты; регион; Краснодарский край.

Финансовая поддержка

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