



Communicative Bases of Reproduction of Environmental Consciousness of Modern Youth (Case-Study of the Republic of Tatarstan)

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Abstract

Environmental problems are more on the current agenda of the world community and individual countries, which indicates the intensification of management measures to resolve them. Measures directly taken by the authorities to improve the environmental friendliness are aimed mainly at greening the everyday practices of the population, and above all, young people, who are the central engine of all social changes. Under these conditions, a deep study of the environmental consciousness of young people is necessary - the value attitude of young people to the environment, structuring their activities and reproducing communicatively in the course of consumption of information about environmental problems. The article presents an overview of the research of Russian and foreign authors on the topic of reproduction of the environmental awareness of youth, as well as the results of a 2017 study among students of the Republic of Tatarstan. Based on a comparative analysis of the data of the author's research and earlier studies in the Russian regions, the dynamics of the environmental consciousness of Russian students is traced. It is concluded that the factors of mass informing and awareness of young people about the state of the environment in the process of forming environmental concerns of young people and the environmental behaviour practices they implement are highly significant.

Keywords: Environmental consciousness, Environmental awareness, Environmental information, Communication, environmental practices, Youth

1 Introduction

The unsolved nature of most environmental problems in the modern world determines the observed intensification of environmental policy measures in terms of minimizing the ecological footprint and improving the quality of the environment. However, as practice shows, successes in this field are not so great, thus, there is a need for a deeply scientific understanding of the issue.

The emergence of environmental problems is a direct consequence of human activity, motivated by a certain value series, woven into the outline of the corresponding worldview. Thus, it is fair to believe that urgent environmental problems are brought to life by a low level of environmental culture, formed on the basis of low environmental awareness. In this connection, the focus of specialists' attention is shifting today to measures to prevent environmental problems by increasing the level of environmental awareness of the population, and above all, young people, who are the key bearers of potentially

positive social changes.

The environmental consciousness of young people, as a value attitude to the environment, designing their activities, is a complex phenomenon, the structure of which includes awareness of environmental problems, concern about them and attitudes to action in their context. Under these conditions, the key to understanding the reproduction of the ecological consciousness of young people and the environmental practices they implement should be the process of communication on environmental issues.

2 Methods

The article provides an overview of foreign and Russian studies of the environmental awareness of youth, as well as the results of a sociological study among students of the Republic of Tatarstan. The methodology of the author's research was built on the idea of the procedural nature and communicative nature of the social information exchange, reproduced in the form of a spiral. The environmental consciousness of young people is a social process of reproducing the value attitude of young people to the environment in everyday behavior, consisting in the exchange of information about it. Central analytical units of

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the study: environmental awareness, environmental concern, participation in environmental practices. Methods: questionnaire survey (quota sample, $n = 400$), informal interview (16 conversations).

3 Results and Discussion

The environmental crisis of the early 1970s, related to the awareness among the world community of the limited nature of natural resources, caused an increase in environmental concern and an increase in interest in environmental issues. The Western public consciousness of that period affirmed the idea of a responsible attitude of people to nature, which is strongly associated with the protection of the environment and the implementation of environmental behavior. The results of sociological studies show that even today “beliefs about a lack of resources can have the greatest impact on people's behavior and responsibility” (1). The 1970s saw the rapid growth in the number of environmental movements and organizations in many countries of the world. The next wave of public interest in environmental issues and, as a result, the growth of environmental concerns, the formation of environmental awareness, was observed in the early 1990s and was associated with two events: firstly, with a wide celebration around the world of the 20th anniversary of Earth Day and, secondly, with the United Nations International Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro in 1992 and the world community discussing the ideas of “sustainable development”. Western researchers note that the media played an important role in both the first and second cases, which covered in detail the course of events (1).

According to Western scientists, the greening of consciousness is primarily associated with the formation of certain environmental orientations in people, as well as with the development of a sense of personal responsibility for the state of the environment (2-4). Only in this case we can talk about launching the process of transforming activity settings into environmental practices and behavior, as the main goal of the formation of environmental culture. Hence the interest of researchers in the study of environmental values and attitudes, their formation, especially among young people.

Researchers have noted a decrease in environmental concerns among young people, their limited knowledge of climate change, green technologies, and eco-management. As for the sense of responsibility, the general point of view, based on data from numerous studies in Western Europe and the USA, is as follows: “youth over the past 30 years believed that the government has a greater responsibility for the environment than they personally” (1). However, a sense of personal responsibility in nature conservation can be developed (5).

In general, researchers consider that young people cannot be more environmentally conscious than adults. If only because they do not yet have sufficient knowledge and social experience, since they are still students. In addition, due to their non-self-reliant social status, young people can only implement certain elements of self-preservation and environmental behavior. In our opinion, it is the youth who first of all applies the conclusion of R. Dunlap that people

do not always act in accordance with their views and values related to the environment, and therefore public opinion is not always an accurate indicator of environmental actions (6). Thus, Western scholars suggest a gap in the environmental consciousness and behavior of young people, the latter demonstrates a more “dramatic model” in which environmental behavior does not always correspond to trends in attitudes and beliefs.

Domestic researchers, this gap is also recorded empirically. For example, according to a survey of Kazan student youth conducted in 2010 by P.O. Ermolaeva, young Kazan citizens are highly concerned about environmental problems in their place of residence (84.9%); the most acute problems are air pollution, substandard drinking water, pollution of water bodies, unsanitary conditions and aesthetic unattractiveness of territories (7). We shall note that the respondents reported their closest problems but the least dangerous in the long run. Such a situation, in our opinion, is directly related to the degree of awareness about the nature and consequences of various environmental deviations, in particular, lack of awareness prompts the formation of an inadequate assessment of the severity of the environmental situation and its reproduction only in passive practices of environmental behavior. More than half of the respondents said that they drink purified water (61%) and save electricity (53.2%), another 47% save water, and 30.8% consume environmentally friendly food (7).

Similar results were obtained by a survey of students of the Astrakhan region conducted by E.E. Pashkova in 2011. The majority of respondents (60.3%) responded positively to the possibility of personal participation in events of environmental movements (8), which is due to the high level of environmental concern (83.9%) (8). However, the nature of the preferred actions is rather passive - most students agree to participate in environmental rallies (39.7%) and conduct propaganda activities (28.6%), while work to improve the environmental situation in the region is attractive to less than a third of respondents (28.1%) [8, p. 78]. The situation in the Astrakhan region in 2011 is also, in our opinion, caused by insufficient environmental awareness of young people, as the author of the study points to. Less than 40% of respondents demonstrated their awareness of the nature of the activities of environmental organizations (8).

The results of a student survey in Naberezhnye Chelny and Nizhnekamsk conducted in 2012 by M.Kh. Akhmetova also show a high youth concern about the environmental condition (91%). Respondents have an adequate understanding of the causes of environmental problems, but their participation in environmental practices is minimal. Moreover, it was caused not by the awareness of the need for personal contribution but by civic duty, administrative involvement, professional duties and unwillingness to lag behind others. The reasons for non-participation by students themselves are reduced to a lack of environmental knowledge and low environmental awareness (9). L.Iu. Chuiikova came to an identical conclusion on conducting a study in 2012 among students of geologists and ecologists at Astrakhan State University. According to the author, the latter demonstrate a higher environmental awareness due to an objectively greater professional awareness (10, 14, 15).

More relevant studies, in particular, a survey of student youth in Simferopol conducted by A.V. Boiko in 2016, only strengthen our assumptions. With 98% of respondents who note their positive attitude to nature, more than half of the respondents, experiencing a serious lack of information motivation, do not take part in environmental practices (11-13, 17-20).

Turning to the results of the author's study, first of all, we note that the environmental awareness of the respondents is characterized by average indicators. Despite the fact that, according to respondents, 56.2% of them at least once in their life searched for any kind of environmental information on their own, they rate their environmental awareness by 3 points out of 5 and get more environmental information, they do not seek to increase it (42.7%). Informants of an informal interview characterize their level of environmental awareness in the same way, clarifying that they know little because they are only interested in the environment in the framework of their general development or in relation to their place of residence (*"Informing in our city is mediocre... and I know the same. Although it is possible that people themselves do not want to know. As for me, I would like to know more but about Kazan and the Republic of Tatarstan particularly rather than about the world or the country"*).

The subjective assessment of environmental awareness of the interviewed Tatarstan students proportionally fully coincides with the objective that we received from the test results. The average assessment of their environmental knowledge is 2 points out of 3 possible, which forms the following hierarchy of values in which ecological well-being takes 7th place (20.5%). First of all, respondents worry about economic problems: low salaries and scholarships (59.2%), unemployment (39.2%), increasing prices (28%), economic crisis (23.7%), the crisis of morality and culture (22.2%), and corruption (22%). This situation can be explained by the immediate relation of problems to Tatarstan students. In other words, they care about what they themselves can and are afraid to face (*"The most important thing for me in life?... Well-being. If there is well-being, then you have a job, livelihoods, an opportunity to develop. I want to be on to a good thing"*). Such a somewhat consumer attitude to life forms a corresponding attitude towards nature, the level of concern about the state of which is quite high (90.5%) and is expressed mainly by concern about local environmental problems that concern respondents directly. Among them are low quality of drinking water (61.5%), air (58%) and water bodies pollution (55.7%), landfills (34%), dirty streets, dilapidated buildings (22.5%), decrease in area of green spaces (22.2%), non-natural food products (21%).

The study participants noted a real environmental degradation and expressed their concern about this (76.7%). Despite this, in general, the students surveyed highly rate the degree of favorable environmental conditions in their place of residence (73.5%) and feel protected from environmental risks (46%). Along with this, it is necessary to solve environmental problems, and 66.2% of respondents and about half of interviewers express their desire to contribute to their solution. At the same time, a slightly smaller share positively assesses their strengths - 53.2% of

respondents are sure that they personally can influence the solution of environmental problems, while 39.7% believe that not ordinary people are primarily responsible for the quality of the environment, and city authorities.

This "shifting of responsibility" is reflected in behavioral practices. The most common of them among Tatarstan students are saving water and electricity (45.2% and 38.7%). In general, Tatarstan students have more desire to do something for the environment than real behavioral attitudes. This is, in our opinion, due to the consumer attitude to life and focus on individual economic goals. Thus, the vast majority of informants motivate their reluctance to participate in active practices by the lack of time for them (*"I don't know whether I would like to enter somewhere or not. I like the idea but I don't know whether I would find time for this or not"*).

4 Summary

The resource representation of nature was largely reflected in the environmental consciousness of the student youth of the Republic of Tatarstan, which became the object of the author's study. Environmental problems of the republic are considered by students not so much dangerous as annoying, although, in their opinion, they do not interfere with a prosperous life. In this regard, environmental assistance is perceived in most cases by an altruistic action, which is disadvantageous in terms of time costs. The results obtained in this part correlate with the conclusions made earlier by Russian and foreign authors. Following them, in the current situation, we assume a significant role of the awareness on the nature of environmental problems, on the nature and purpose of everyday activities to help the environment, and, accordingly, the factor of mass information on these issues. The lack of environmental information entails the "failure" of environmental communication - the reproduction of a low level of involvement in environmental practices.

5 Conclusions

The environmental consciousness of modern youth is highly controversial, which is a consequence of the "failure" of environmental communication. Young people are informed about the nature of relationship of human and nature, about its high value and the need for directed environmental activity of every citizen to maintain the state of the environment. Along with this, in relation to the current state of ecology, the severity, diversity and consequences of environmental problems, there is a significant information gap. As a result, the value attitude to the nature of youth includes a deep respect for it and the illusion of a harmonious, almost harmless mutual neighborhood, the nature of which can change, however, in the long term only. The model of environmental behavior laid down by this form of consciousness is based on passive actions of both ends of the spectrum, excluding any active activity. Thus, the use of nature that is active and carries a clear threat is condemned, but its passive forms do not cause such a strong negative reaction. At the same time, passive forms of environmental activity are common that make up the practice of self-preserving behavior, while

active protection of the environment almost does not find support.

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