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The factor of justice in the consolidation of urban communities

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Abstract

The article analyzes the role of the equity factor in the consolidation of urban communities. The consolidation of the population is considered a way to achieve its stability. Social consolidation is discussed as an ambiguous concept that characterizes the process and outcome of an agreement between different communities on the basis of the unity of values and interests and the establishment of relations of mutual trust and solidarity, in order to achieve common goals. The results of the research have shown that justice is not only the dominant value of urban residents but becomes a factor that determines many daily practices of the population. As a conclusion it has empirically confirmed that, if there are significant discrepancies regarding the understanding of social justice by the inhabitants of the city and their lack of conviction in the practical implementation of this principle, consolidation remains only an illusory opportunity. Therefore, the consistent implementation of the principle of justice and the search for social consensus among various segments of the population are strategic priorities for the development of urban communities around the world.

Keywords: social justice; community consolidation; inequality; urban communities; social consensus.

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El factor de justicia en la consolidación de las comunidades urbanas

Resumen

El artículo analiza el papel del factor de equidad en la consolidación de las comunidades urbanas. La consolidación de la población, se considera una vía para alcanzar su estabilidad. Se discute la consolidación social como un concepto ambiguo que caracteriza el proceso y el resultado de un acuerdo entre diferentes comunidades sobre la base de la unidad de valores e intereses y el establecimiento de relaciones de confianza mutua y solidaridad, con el fin de lograr objetivos comunes. Los resultados de la investigación han demostrado que la justicia no es solo el valor dominante de los residentes urbanos, sino que se convierte en un factor que determina muchas prácticas cotidianas de la población. Como conclusión se ha confirmado empíricamente que, siempre que existan discrepancias significativas con respecto a la comprensión de la justicia social por parte de los habitantes de la ciudad y su falta de convicción en la implementación práctica de este principio, la consolidación sigue siendo solo una oportunidad ilusoria. Por lo tanto, la implementación consistente del principio de justicia y la búsqueda del consenso social entre diversos segmentos de la población son prioridades estratégicas para el desarrollo de las comunidades urbanas en todo el mundo.

Palabras clave: justicia social; consolidación comunitaria; desigualdad; comunidades urbanas; consenso social.

Introduction

A distinctive feature of relations in modern Russian society is social disunity, expressed in a decrease in the level of interpersonal and institutional trust, social and economic polarization of society, and violation of the principle of social justice. Political scientist V.V. Uzunov, emphasizes that:

In Russian realities, society is experiencing a strong lack of trust at all levels of social relations, the dynamics of social inequality is becoming a threat to the security of society, the level of interfaith and interethnic tension, significantly differentiating by region, also makes us watch with alarm the processes of disintegration society (Uzunov, 2019: 85).

These negative phenomena enhance the internal instability of society and actualize the problem of consolidating its constituent entities, which, if unresolved, would not ensure both the reproduction of society and its competitiveness in the global world.

Social consolidation is a multi-layered concept made of structural and cognitive components. The structural component is represented by a variety of civil institutions, associations, organizations, and other structures cooperating with each other. The cognitive component is a system of values, traditions, norms, and patterns of behavior common to actors. Both components are organically interconnected.

Recently, researchers have usually focused mainly on the study of the cognitive component, first of all, its value bases. Many contemporary authors mention them to some extent. For example, A.L. Marshak and L.V. Rozhkova emphasize:

In the ongoing disintegration, crisis processes, the structure and hierarchy of the value space is changing, a common set of values and norms is vanishing. The problem of consolidation of society comes to the fore. Values are the meaning and core of culture, and cultural orientations are the most important motivator for the behavior of individuals. Therefore, by examining the dynamics of values and value orientations, one can understand deep cognitive processes and predict the transformation of the behavioral strategies of individuals (Marshak and Rozhkova, 2020: 27).

T.F. Maslova, analyzing the foundations of the modern consolidation of society, notes that “values fix certain states of stability of integrating subjects, the degree of severity and development of these states” and defines several groups of consolidating values: “Cultural and communicative, moral, psychological, social and legal, socio-demographic, socio-economic etc., reflecting the signs of value unity in the context of the dynamism of modern society” (Maslova, 2016: 539).

Sharing this view, we consider consolidation as the process and result of agreement between different social groups and communities on the basis of the unity of values and interests, the establishment of relations of mutual trust, solidarity, in order to achieve common (deliberate and supported by the majority of members of society) goals.

Justice, which is often considered as a key and even universal value of the Russian axiosphere, takes a special place among the values that contribute to social consolidation. As P.A. Borisova considers: “Ideas about social justice regulate the foundations of social order, the practice of both institutional and interpersonal interactions” (Borisova, 2016: 9). According to Iu.G. Volkov: “Social justice is the basic value of the majority of Russians, as current social inequalities, containing a high potential for social conflict, form a stable demand of society for a fair public order” (Volkov, 2021: 14). V.G. Grechikhin emphasizes that: “Russia has traditionally been a country with the especially acute and particularly important demand for social justice” (Grechikhin, 2020: 14-15). E.V. Karchagin notes that: “Justice in its ultimate foundation is an axiological universal, a versatile sociocultural value” (Karchagin, 2015: 31).

Pointing to the importance of the value of justice in the consolidation of society, T.F. Maslova writes that:

Justice represents the basis, frankly speaking, of the legal, organizational, and resource aspects of sustainability, with the relations between the subjects reflecting the equalization of chances in meeting the needs in the main spheres of life: economic, social, political, spiritual. This is what the process of integration and consolidation cannot begin and develop without (Maslova, 2016: 539).

T.V. Dylnova emphasizes that: “being a morally justified measure and a rational criterion for assessing human deeds, social justice serves as a constructive basis for the consolidation and stability of Russian society and a real factor ensuring its progressive development” (Dylnova, 2005: 10).

In our opinion, social justice in society performs several consolidating functions.

1. It creates the preconditions for the formation of relations of trust, which is understood as the expectation of favorable or, in extreme cases, neutral actions on the part of other citizens, groups or organizations. As practice shows, the completer and more consistent are people’s ideas about justice, the higher the level of trust between them is. A.I. Dontsov and E.B. Perelygina write that: “Trust and justice in society are mutually correlated... the strength of trust within society is positively correlated with the degree of consistency of social ideas about justice” (Dontsov and Perelygina, 2019: 244).
2. Consistent implementation of the principle of justice “relieves” the negative psycho-emotional state, which is usually caused by a feeling of unfairness of the situation. This feeling causes a significant number of communication barriers between citizens, which, naturally, hinders their consolidation.
3. The “atmosphere of social justice” contributes to the formation of an attractive image of the “other” as a person who also lives in justice and therefore deserves good neighborly relations. This motivates citizens to interact with each other and practice social solidarity (mutual assistance, mutual support, etc.).

Thus, social justice significantly determines the characteristics and nature of social interactions and contributes to the consolidation of society.

1. Methodology and Methods

Many issues related to the study of the role of the factor of social justice during consolidation in modern domestic and foreign science are controversial. A debatable nature is manifested, first of all, in the mismatch

of opinions regarding the definition of the concept of justice, which is imprinted by the cultural and civilizational context.

As P.A. Borisova reasonably argues, “the ideas of justice in the domestic and Western cultural traditions have opposite origins. The domestic sociocultural mentality is characterized by an internal (moral and ethical) dimension of justice, while the Western one lays emphasis on its external (objectified) dimension, actualized in adherence to legislation and law, as the English-speaking analogue of justice is the word “justice”, derived from the Latin “*jus*” - law” (Borisova, 2016: 8). Noting the multifaceted and versatile nature of the concept of «justice», N.V. Levichev clarifies that “philosophers treat it as a common part of the picture of the world and a moral ideal, while economists consider it the logic of appropriation and distribution of social wealth, and for lawyers it is the conceptual basis of the rule of law” (Levichev, 2017: 9).

The controversy is centered around the search for a balance between the two main approaches to understanding the phenomenon of social justice: rational and irrational.

When considering social justice, we will rely on the concept of irrational intuitionism by Henri Bergson (Bergson, 1998: 32), which presupposes the presence of two types of knowledge, i.e. rational and intuitive, where rational knowledge is static and mechanistic, and intuitive is dynamic and organic. In our opinion, *social justice is a part of intuitive knowledge, which is a way of an individual's intuitive reflection of social reality that fits into his mental and value system*. Here we should mention the P. Boyer's conclusion that: “The concept of justice, partly based on the ideas of John Locke,” is based on “intuitive ideas” (Boyer, 2019: 436).

The relevance and controversial nature of our study stimulates research interest in its analysis in relation to various locations. These undoubtedly include cities. First, they are highly important as administrative-territorial units, where the main internal challenges of the spatial and socio-economic development of Russia are concentrated. More than three quarters of the population of the Russian Federation is urban citizens living in cities and urban-type settlements. Secondly, the urbanized environment is characterized by a significant mutual alienation (Baudrillard, 1997), and therefore there is a demand for the trend towards the integration of the urban environment. It is also stimulated by the transformation of modern cities into complex hybrid socio-biotechnical systems.

To assess the role of the factor of social justice in the process of consolidation of the urban community, we shall consider the 2017-2018 study of a team of authors of Belgorod State National Research University: «Diagnostics of the consolidation potential of the value of justice in the implementation of civil control into local government practice». The

objectives of the study included the determination of the place and role of the value of justice in the minds of the population; analysis of the essence and content of justice; and diagnostics of the main manifestations of injustice citizens usually face.

A series of survey methods was used as the main methods for collecting primary sociological data. To ensure quantitative objective nature of information, a formalized questionnaire survey was carried out on a regional representative sample, considering the sex, age and settlement structure of the population of the Belgorod region. The study involved a survey of N=665 residents of cities in the Belgorod region (Belgorod, Stary Oskol, Gubkin, Stroitel, Korocha). For an in-depth knowledge of the subject of the research, an expert survey was conducted (N=30 respondents).

The analysis of primary sociological data assumed their grouping by the main socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents (gender, age, type of settlement, degree of education, professional status).

2. Results and Discussion

The analysis of the results of the survey showed the idea of justice to be dominant in the set of values of the surveyed citizens. The majority of the respondents (47%) attributed it to the three basic values «most vital for the functioning of society». In terms of importance, justice is slightly inferior to “trust” (49%) and leaves behind “responsibility” (42%).

At the same time, justice heads the list of values, which, as the respondents think, should serve as the basis for the country’s future. It is important to note that all surveyed groups of respondents have a “dream of justice”, regardless of their gender, age, education level, income, or social status. The fact that justice is one of the leaders in the set of values of urban citizens and their ideas about the future is also confirmed by other studies of various sociological centers.

For example, in 2018, during the survey of the Institute of Sociology of the Russian Academy of Sciences the respondents were asked to determine the bases the future of Russia should be built on. The “value of justice” received the greatest support (Well-being is more valuable than greatness, 2018). Explaining the results of the «Social Justice in Russia» study of VTsIOM in 2018, the general director of VTsIOM, Valery Fedorov emphasized that “the fairness of our economic and social structure is one of the most important issues for Russians. Although “all have their justice”, sociological surveys are helping to gradually clarify an actual image of social justice” (Rimskii, 2020).

In addition to the fact that justice is a fairly stable value setting for the majority of urban residents, it also acts as an indicator (“litmus paper”) for their assessment of social relations and practices.

V.L. Rimskii, analyzing the results of «Public demand for justice and its provision by the state» (2019), notes that: “Justice is of high significance in the life of Russians; they constantly evaluate both their and other’s social practices based on its principles and criteria” (Rimskii, 2020: 104).

Thus, justice, indeed, is not just the dominant value of urban residents but its perception through the prism of urban reality becomes a factor that determines many of the everyday practices of the population. As such, justice will undoubtedly influence the attitude towards the consolidation process.

However, there is a need to consider the blurred replication of fairness by respondents. Despite its interpretation as the most important social value, the question of what exactly it represents caused difficulties among the respondents. The respondents consider justice both as a “principle” (20%), and as a “tradition” (20%), as a value (19%) and as a factor in the “survival” of society (18%). This again confirms the irrational, intuitive nature of justice. In this regard, V. Rimskii notes that:

People almost never provide rational arguments to substantiate justice. In specific situations, citizens determine what is fair and what is unfair, intuitively, based on their social experience, different for everyone. Rational arguments sometimes appear when people state their understanding of general principles of justice (Rimskii, 2020: 56).

Uncertainty in the understanding of justice will inevitably show itself in the perception of the consolidation process. To a large extent, it will not be adequately interpreted as a process of achieving social equality, implemented within the legal framework. It is telling that the surveyed urban residents define the main characteristics of a justly organized society by noting equality of rights and freedoms (73%); equality of opportunity to achieve goals (47%); equality of access to social resources (41%); guarantees of social security (41%). At the same time, the respondents believe justice to be identical to legality and even surpass it. This is evidenced by the position of the respondents (56%) that “it is more important that something would comply with the principle of justice than the law”.

In terms of the problem of justice, support for consolidation can be considered as a desire to eliminate the inherent “injustice”, which, in the opinion of city residents, is quite high.

The results of the study have shown a stable conservation of the ideas of urban residents about injustice. 73% of the respondents consider modern society to be unfair, another 22% found it difficult to assess and only 6% of

the respondents are confident in the fairness of the modern social order. Note that later studies on related topics (2019-2020) recorded citizens' perceptions of the injustice of modern Russian society in the range from 61 to 70% (About justice. What is fair and what is not in modern Russian society? 2018). Urban residents most often see injustice in corrupt practices and the absence of their punishment (56%); lack of citizens' equal access to education, health care and other social services, as well as an increase in the cost of living (54%); social inequality (35%).

64% of the respondents have faced injustice personally, 12% of them "constantly", 52% "sometimes". Injustice was expressed, as a rule, in deception or sub-standard state and municipal services (67%), deception in social payments (42%), misconduct on the part of the employer (35%), etc.

A rather clear injustice of urban reality does not "relieve» but creates a psycho-emotional stress unfavorable for communications, minimizing the present and future prospects for consolidation.

It is quite significant that, when assessing the prospects for a more consistent assertion of social justice, the respondents noted the situation "would probably not change" (46%) or "would get even worse" (30%).

An analysis of the motivation of citizens to restore the value of the principle of justice, including through unification with other people, allows us to conclude about a clear discrepancy in the views of urban residents between the regulatory significance of this value and the willingness to fight for it. 38% of the respondents believe "manifestation of injustice is inevitable and the fight against it will not lead to anything", another 57% still believe it necessary to fight against injustice, however, this should be primarily done by state and local authorities (39%), various public institutions (parties, civil society, non-profit organizations, etc.) and only then by the people themselves (9%).

It is noteworthy that with a fairly clear deficit of social justice, as well as provided that more than half of citizens have faced its various manifestations, 52% of the respondents could not answer the question «What measures should be taken to combat injustice?» Only a third of the respondents (31%) are ready to personally contribute to the elimination of injustice by personal efforts, and 26% are ready to unite their efforts to eliminate injustice.

Facing injustice and various restrictions of civil liberties, citizens become atomized, refuse social interactions, often suspecting (often unjustifiably) their counterparties («Others») in being the bearers of unfair practices. According to the data of the Zircon Research Center based on its study, "Measuring the degree of value-based solidarization and the level of public trust in Russian society" (N = 2520), "65% of Russians believe they should be careful in dealing with people. At the same time, only a third of

the population (30%) believe they can trust people. Every tenth resident of the country found it difficult to give an unambiguous answer, which, to a certain extent, forms the potential rather for the group of “cautious” (Value-based solidarization and public trust in Russia, 2018).

The survey results helped us to identify the relationship between fairness, trust, and willingness to cooperate with other people. Thus, the respondents (6%) who believe modern society to justly be more open to trust other people (68%, against 31%), unite with them to solve generally significant problems and tasks (74%, against 26%). These relationships illustrate the potential of the value of justice as a basis for trust and building of trusting communications between citizens. On the contrary, a deficit in equity triggers a deficit in trust.

Conclusions

Based on the results of our research we can conclude about the nature and role of justice in the life of the urban community, as well as its impact on consolidation processes, in particular.

Given the significant differences in the understanding of social justice and the implementation of this principle among the majority of the surveyed urban residents, the consolidation of the urban community remains illusory. Therefore, the assertion of the principle of justice and the search for its social consensus of various strata of the population, which generally does not cause serious objections, is a strategically important task, which should be primarily solved not only by federal and regional authorities, local self-government, but also by civil institutions, and residents themselves.

However, there is a clear discrepancy in the popular mind between the regulatory significance of justice and the willingness to fight for it. This minimizes the opportunities for consolidation. Facing with injustice and various restrictions of civil liberties, citizens become atomized, refuse social interactions, causing the level of interpersonal and institutional trust in their relations to fall.

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