



Transformation directions of the Russian youth political participation in the non-profit organizations activities and youth self-government bodies

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Abstract. The article examines the activities of non-profit organizations and youth self-government bodies in Russia and how it influences the youth political activity. The work system of civil society institutions, the forms, and directions of their work, various approaches to determining the political needs of Russian youth are presented. Without a transformation of directions and activity approaches, these institutions cannot reach large groups of young people and involve them in political activity. The study examines the possibility of pooling resources, creating joint coordination structures that will bring to a qualitatively new level the possibilities of the youth's political socialization and activity.

Keywords: Non-profit organizations, political participation, protest sentiments, youth self-government

I. INTRODUCTION

Much attention is paid to the issues of youth participation in the political life of Russia, the transformation of approaches and directions for enhancing political participation, especially in terms of sociological approaches. Some authors describe youth as the most important social and electoral resource of society, which can be used by various parties, political leaders, and forces in their interests (Molodchev and Korolyuk, 2015). Others assign young Russians a crucial role in the processes of the Russian state's emergence from a crisis state that undermines the stability of society, violates its structural and territorial integrity (Sokolova, 2011).

At the same time, the scientific literature poorly illuminates the potential of civil society institutions, such as non-profit organizations and youth self-government bodies, both of political socialization of Russian youth, and the transformational potential of protest sentiments into constructive political participation. It is obvious that the system is in its infancy and does not cover significant masses of the target audience, but through the disclosure of potential, the search for new mechanisms and forms of work, it is possible to change the situation, at least in terms of the politically active stratum of the youth community. The skills of youth participation in political life are usually minimal; young people are most easily involved in radical and extremist political organizations (Pastukhova, 2011).

In a certain way, the mobilization of young people was influenced by the coronavirus pandemic in 2020, which united a significant part of the community and again actualized the topic of volunteering among youth. In this case, the political direction rather lost, since such movements did not offer an agenda adequate to the current events and fell into a 'dormant' state. It should be expected that the post-pandemic reality will again actualize the issues of political participation of young people. Growing unemployment among young people, shrinking real incomes, uncertainty about the future, and other factors can also become a catalyst. Whether this will result in an open protest of young people and what social instruments can transform these moods is the subject of this study.

The subject of this study is the potential of non-profit organizations (hereinafter NPO) and youth self-government bodies in Russia.

The study hypothesis is that NPOs and youth self-government bodies can become effective tools for youth participation in political activities at the local, regional, and federal levels. A prerequisite for this is the work direction transformation of such organizations and their joint coordination of activities at different levels of functioning. Young people should be able to build appropriate relations with the state and have ample opportunities to independently influence both youth policy and the state's policy towards youth, as well as gain the necessary experience and opportunities to participate in real political activity within the framework of well-oiled and understandable mechanisms that claim to objectively select and promote representatives of the younger generation. These are the opportunities that the considered institutions of

civic participation can provide. Young people believe that it is public associations and organizations that have the most effective impact on the formation of value orientations (27.8% of the respondents), while the higher indicator is only for state authorities and local governments (30.3%) (Osipova et al., 2018). The survey did not distinguish youth self-government and NPOs, therefore this result can be considered as general, which further actualizes the topic of this study.

II. METHODS

The article uses materials from the federal statistical observation from 2017 to 2019, analyzes and compares survey data, i.e. the All-Russian Center for the Study of Public Opinion, the Public Opinion Foundation, the research of the State University of Management 'Value orientations of modern Russian youth' (Chuev, 2017), Levada Center, the results of the youth research of the Friedrich Ebert Foundation 'Russian' Generation Z: 'attitudes and values' (2019) and others, of young people aged 14 to 30. The study also presents the conclusions and report data 'The civil society state in the Russian Federation', prepared by the Public Chamber of the Russian Federation (from 2017 to 2019) (2019).

As part of the study, an analysis was made of the regulatory legal acts of the Russian Federation on youth and youth policy, legal acts of the constituent entities of the Federation, municipalities, documents of the youth self-government bodies themselves (decisions, regulations, expert opinions, reports, plans, etc.).

To obtain up-to-date empirical material, the monitoring of the websites of NPOs and youth self-government bodies, social networks, websites of public authorities and local self-government bodies, and other resources was carried out, which provides information on their activities, structure, number of participants. The analysis of the literature on the research topic is carried out to identify theoretical approaches to the analysis of the issues of political participation of youth, political socialization, and the role of NPOs and youth self-government in these processes.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The activity specifics of NPOs and youth self-government bodies in Russia

Based on the social and group characteristics of young people, the most important way of their life is self-organization. Self-organization of youth is a spontaneously occurring process of self-regulation through the ordering of self-regulatory relationships, accompanied by the emergence of new structures or transformation of existing ones at the time of their extreme instability (Zubok and Chuprov, 2009, p. 78). Non-profit organizations and youth self-government can be viewed as forms of self-organization, which, to varying degrees of effectiveness, can influence them.

Researchers propose various approaches to defining the essence of youth self-government in Russia. Some present it as a combination of school, student self-government, as well as self-government, carried out through creating special consultative and advisory structures for youth under state and municipal authorities (Yusov, 2013). Others, as forms of organizing the life of youth groups, ensuring the development of their independence in making and implementing decisions to achieve group goals (Rozhkov, 2008). The study author defines youth self-government as an interaction mechanism of institutionally formalized groups of young people aged from 14 to 35 with authorities at the federal, regional, local levels, at an enterprise, in an educational institution, etc.

The system of youth self-government bodies in Russia can be represented by seven basic elements such as student self-government, youth parliaments, governments, self-government of working youth, young deputies, and youth election commissions. These structures are presented in order of increasing the degree of young people involved in their activities.

Since the bodies of youth self-government are formed through competitive procedures (exception: councils of young deputies, where the inclusion takes place upon election in elections at various levels) with usually a fairly high level of competition, we can state the interest of active youth in their activities. The formation procedures take place in different regions in different ways, but the public presentation of their projects, programs, ideas for the development of a particular direction remains a constant feature. Thus, the most active young people fall into these structures, not only having a desire to conduct some kind of activity but also understanding the specific directions of their future work.

Not all youth self-government bodies represent a mechanism of political socialization. First of all, such opportunities are provided by structures working under state and municipal authorities, as well as under representative bodies. As part of their work, young people not only get the opportunity to communicate with leaders of various directions but also to have real influence through joint activities on decisions made, up to the right to initiate legislation in several constituent entities of the Russian Federation, along

with other actors. This is what distinguishes such organizations favorably from NPOs, but, on the other hand, also limits their activities to a more rigid framework.

Bodies of youth self-government are not legal entities, which negates the possibility of financial support for their activities (i.e. grants, subsidies, etc.) from the state. There is also no clear legal fixation of their position in the system of institutions. On the one hand, these are NPOs, on the other hand, these are public institutions with significant distinctive features. At the same time, NPOs act independently, which is legally enshrined, and youth self-government bodies in most cases are formed by the authorities (management of enterprises and organizations) and act approved by them. On the one hand, these facts can restrict 'freedom' and independence of activity, but on the other hand, they give completely different opportunities and influence on real, including political processes.

The youth self-government bodies created under the government are the youth counterparts of those structures that make the most important decisions on the development of the state, including concerning youth.

The NPO's status and organization forms are enshrined in legislation, but despite this concept and the status of 'youth NPOs' remains unclear. Public youth associations mean a community of people, whose age is from 14 to 30, united based on their interests (or hobbies), as well as the implementation of common activities that are aimed at meeting their needs, social formation of all organization members, and protection of young people's rights and freedoms (Rostovskaya and Knyazkova, 2020). Other approaches are also widely presented and determine the name and goals of such NPOs.

In any case, youth NPOs have the status of a legal entity, they have the opportunity to receive all types of state support, support from commercial organizations. NPOs have their material and technical base, create branches on the territory of constituent entities, municipalities and form a large network covering a certain part of the youth audience with common goals and objectives. The resources, the organizational form of an NPO contains a rather powerful potential that promotes the involvement of young people in social practice, but their form has certain limitations within the framework of youth participation in political activity.

Infrastructure of youth representative structures of political participation

According to the Federal Agency for Youth Affairs, in 2019 more than 403 million rubles were allocated from the budget of the constituent entities of the Russian Federation for the direction of 'development of youth self-government', and 42.3 million rubles from local budgets. Members of youth self-government bodies received 92 grants with a funding volume of more than 34.8 million rubles (Federal statistical observation in the field of state youth policy for 2019). These considerable funds were directed not to the activities of youth self-government bodies or the development of infrastructure, but to events that are held on their initiative or with their direct participation. Taking into account the inclusion of student self-government in these indicators and all activities that are held for students (this is about 73% of the total budget), the figure does not seem significant. This direction is the lowest funded among the rest. This amount of funds allows reaching more than 2.3 million young people with events, which is about 8% of the total number of young people in Russia. The number of participants in these bodies within the framework of Rosmolodezh reporting and monitoring the real situation on official websites, pages in social networks show approximately the same indicators: youth self-government at the level of subjects (youth parliaments, governments, election commissions and councils of young deputies, joint student councils) - 448 bodies, whose members are 12.2 thousand young people; youth self-government at the local level - 4365 bodies with a population of 159.5 thousand people; student government 33.4 thousand bodies and more than 1.7 million members; student government 7.1 thousand bodies and more than 792 thousand members. Thus, the number of members of youth self-government bodies in Russia is about 2.7 million people. We find that more than 18% of Russia's youth participate in the activities of youth self-government bodies.

NPOs represent a different mechanism for youth engagement and work principles. Any young person who shares its goals of activity can participate in the work of the NPO. Accordingly, the number of organizations is much higher than that of youth self-government, but the motivation and efficiency of their work sharply decrease over time. Young people come to NPO with a desire to fulfill their personal and social needs, mainly in volunteer and other collective activities. NPOs do not carry any political agenda (except for a small layer of political NPOs), therefore, they cannot independently act as an institution of political socialization.

The total number of NPOs that use various types of state support (that is, actually operating and rather large) is 8,982. The total number of members of such associations is almost 2.5 million people, and more than 5 million young people take part in their activities. Thus, more than 27% of Russian youth are involved in NPO activities. The amount of funds allocated by the state for NPOs differs significantly. At the

regional and local level alone, the amount annually exceeds 1,035 million rubles. From the above data, we can conclude that youth self-government bodies, with total funding two times lower than that of NPOs, involve young people in their activities much more effectively. In general, these two youth institutions make it possible to involve up to 45% of young people in Russia in the youth agenda at the regional and local levels.

The total mass of youth organizations does not reflect the number of young people, one way or another, involved in political activities. The numbers here will be much more modest. Thus, there are only 1688 political youth public associations in the regions of Russia (18% of the total number of youth NPOs), and slightly more than 79 thousand people (3% of the total number of NPOs) participate in their activities. If we consider the bodies of youth self-government, which are at the forefront of political preparation, as mentioned above (that is, exclude pupils, students, and self-government of working youth), then we get the number of such bodies in Russia 3.8 thousand (9% of the total number), and their members are more than 171.8 thousand people (6% of the total number). Thus, we can conclude that the number of youth NPOs, the main purpose of which is the political participation of young people, makes up a much larger share than the same indicator in youth self-government bodies, but the absolute and relative indicators of the number of participants are higher in youth self-government bodies. With a lower number of youth self-government bodies, more youth are represented, that is, they are more numerous.

In the total mass of NPOs and youth self-government bodies, about 5.5 thousand public institutions are directly involved in political activities with a total number of participants 250.8 thousand people (0.9% of the total amount of youth). Combining the capabilities and resources of NPO and youth self-government can become a necessary condition for the development of tools for the political education of young people and their preparation for political activity.

The current state of NPO and youth self-government bodies development in Russia

As the researchers note, young people need to participate in grassroots civic practices, which are not necessarily directly related to politics. It can be environmental projects, animal protection, helping the sick, raising funds for various kinds of charitable projects, participating in search teams, helping victims of violence, and much more (Omelchenko, 2019). The real activity of young people, expressed in behavioral acts and activities, can have different manifestations, forms and be carried out in different spheres of society - social, economic, political, spiritual and cultural (Zinenko et al., 2019). This study examines the political aspect of youth activity.

This is the task that NPOs and youth self-government bodies are solving through their network of institutions in the regions and at the municipal level. These structures are aimed, on the one hand, at the implementation of social projects and youth initiatives, on the other, they act as a form of participation in political activity. The main mechanisms of political activity for NPO can be rallies, processions, pickets, round tables and forums with political topics, training in political leadership, support/protest actions against certain power decisions, etc., which accompany other volunteer and social activities of NPO. Political forms of work are manifested not enough massively, situationally, and therefore cannot attract broad youth masses. More stable and widespread are youth organizations created under political parties, which can add to the existing set of personnel projects, training of activists for party work, their integration, and interaction with members of the party in which they work. These 'youth wings' of political parties are for the most part 'a bench' for parties and are seen as the most active mobilization force and a working tool for replenishing the party ranks with people already prepared for this activity. However, the 'party agenda' to a certain extent limits the possibilities of young people by the scope of tasks, directions, and ideology of the party itself.

In this case, we can say that young people in such organizations mainly act as an object of targeted influence. Its activity is directed, and its activity is limited following the institutional goals (Chuprov and Zubok, 2013). This is one of the reasons that limit the popularity of political NPOs among the youth, and also shortens the period of active activity of a young person in them. As soon as the institutional framework becomes close to representing their political position, young people either move to another organization or even cease their active activities in this direction.

Youth self-government bodies present more opportunities. On their platform, draft decisions are discussed, or decisions that have already been made by the authorities concerning youth, recommendations, and proposals are formed, which are promptly submitted to the authorities for consideration. The personnel potential of such institutions is high (all their members are usually included in a special block of the personnel reserve), many representatives who actively show themselves continue their work in the authorities in the future. Young people gain important experience in working with regulatory documents, study the internal structure of government bodies and the mechanisms of the system, get the opportunity to express themselves and implement their initiatives, and also provide the

necessary contacts for further promotion and experience in communication with officials of various levels.

Such forms of youth organization allow, on the one hand, the state to direct youth activity, on the other hand, to show the possibilities of independent formation of the agenda, including the political one. This is confirmed by studies that reflect the maximum acceptable level of state intervention in the process of 'regulation' of their activity as the creation of an institutional base, conditions for the functioning of youth organizations, but not interference in their activities (this approach is supported by 62% among 18-24 summer ones) (All-Russian Center for the Study of Public Opinion). It is for this that the civil institutions in question are the best suited. Despite a certain attachment of youth self-government bodies to the authorities, however, practice shows the possibility of conducting an independent policy, especially in youth parliamentary structures, the principle of which is based on taking into account the opinions of various strata and groups of youth, including the political overtones.

Transformational potential

The revitalization of the activities of youth representative bodies is important against the background of the growing interest of young people in politics and the need to create organized conditions for the full political participation of young people in the life of the state. Many young Russians are no longer as politically indifferent as they were five years ago, although they are not particularly eager to immerse themselves in politics. In the political sphere, they are mainly attracted by participation in public events and work as volunteers in election campaigns (Petukhov, 2020). The need to create conditions for more active participation of young people in politics is also supported by the fact that, contrary to the clichéd ideas about young people as engines and consumers of change, young people are taking almost the most restrained position regarding changes. That is, the protest potential is directed more towards the need to take into account opinions, present new political opportunities for youth. Quiet resistance rather than open rebellion is typical for today's youth. They do not seek destruction and value calmness, they try to follow the rules.

This fact makes it rather difficult to work with such an audience since it will not just reveal the motives, real moods, and preconditions that can encourage the youth masses to move.

The main function of the 'transformational behavior' of young people is systematic, albeit subtle, change in key social practices, which are exactly the NPOs and youth representative structures. The protest orientations of young people decrease as they grow up (Chuprov and Zubok, 2013), which actualizes the issue of political activity development among young people under 24 or 25 years of age, just through the forms of self-organizing institutions. In general, the number of young people who believe that modern Russian youth is able to contribute to the revival of Russia is constantly growing, as the number, activity, and involvement not only in volunteer activities but also in the activities of NPO and youth self-government bodies are growing (Osipova et al., 2018). The number of young people who have already gone through the 'school' of these civic institutions is also growing and are the bearers of the corresponding values and can already transmit them to subsequent generations.

Neither youth self-government nor NPO can provide youth with the necessary tools for political participation and a sufficient level of political socialization if they are not united. Combining the capabilities and strengths of youth self-government and NPO will create a synergistic effect and will bring these areas to a completely new level.

Youth self-government bodies have close ties with government bodies, a wide representation of young people at various levels, and the authority to make, albeit recommendatory, decisions that influence the implementation of state youth policy and youth policy in general. NPOs accumulate certain resources, have the ability to fix the membership of all who share the statutory goals of their activities, have separate assets, and are more independent in the areas of implementation of the youth agenda.

Currently, the activities of the NPO and the youth self-government do not overlap. The members of these organizations may be the same young people who represent their individual interests. This form of mutual participation did not show its effectiveness and the real representation of NPO members, which from them (in their direction) became members of youth self-government could not be achieved.

The resources pooling of subjects under consideration can be implemented in the creation of joint coordination structures with equal membership of their participants and a single agenda on various issues, but at the same time preserving the independence and individual activities of each incoming organization and youth self-government body. Such a synthesis will allow, on the one hand, to preserve the independence of organizations, on the other hand, to strengthen the possibilities of their influence on young people and significantly expand the scope of activities.

IV. CONCLUSIONS

Changes influence the system of work with youth in Russia and it has also begun its transformation. Social networks began to be actively used, in addition to the usual set of the most popular VKontakte and Instagram, new formats were added on YouTube and Tik-Tok, along with the bloggers, who are popular with the youth. Direct communication through instant messengers began to be used. Dozens of thematic Telegram channels appeared, both with an all-Russian and local agenda. These forced forms of communication, new for the state and society, show their effectiveness in terms of information delivery, the possibility of building a direct dialogue, but they also contain dangers like the complexity of content control, high mobilization capabilities; lack of a single center for the dissemination of information and others. Neither the state nor public institutions have currently learned how to effectively work in the digital environment, making the first uncertain steps in this direction.

Young people, for the first time in the modern history of Russia, and in world practice, were cut off not only from representatives of their own generation but also from the rest of society. The traditional formats of educational work and meaningful leisure do not fit into the new conditions at all. The system began to rebuild, but not as intensively as it is required by today's reality. The number of volunteers is growing, in general, the number of active and willing to be active young people, however, the need is not met by the necessary institutions through which young people can realize these aspirations.

Youth NPOs and youth self-government bodies have the potential to activate the youth community and create conditions for political participation in the life of the country, region, and municipality. Pooling the resources of these public institutions will not only allow reaching a much larger stratum of young people but will also create additional opportunities, provide tools for the primary political socialization of young people, which ultimately can lead to a decrease in protest potential due to the possibility of constructive expression of their position.

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