

Designing and implementing life strategies of young people in the context of social engineering

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Abstract— Life strategies of young people are stable, typical ways and forms of their life activity, aimed at satisfying needs, achieving goals and vital meanings through the transformation of the external environment and the personality of the subject himself. The features of their design and implementation in modern conditions are, such as a rigid orientation to achieve life success, individualism, internal contradictions, a lack of reflexivity. Despite the fact that the design and implementation of life strategies of young people can be most successfully implemented only through the use of social technologies, modern young people do not have enough skills in social engineering. The increasing level of competence in the field of social and engineering activities, which will contribute to successful life building, presupposes the formation of a complex of abilities in young people. Among these abilities, there is an analysis of the life situation and the identification of life problems; self-esteem; prediction of the evolution of the life situation; definition of life goals, their decomposition; building a model of everyday behavior; protection of their own interests; a search for optimal solutions in case of participation in conflicts.

Keywords— youth, life strategy, social engineering, life-building, life success, youth values.

I. INTRODUCTION

In contemporary Russian society, conscious actions of young people, aimed at the formation and implementation of life strategy, are of growing importance. This is determined by some factors. Firstly, there are increased uncertainties which are associated with the "risk society" [1]. In such a community, errors, made during the life-building, have negative far-reaching consequences for a social actor. Secondly, contemporary Russia is characterized by dysfunctions of social lifts. As a result, the majority of Russians faces a narrow range of opportunities to enhance their status [4, p. 35]. Thus, the willingness and abilities of social actors, to understand adequately and use this opportunity in their life strategy, appear to be of great value. It can only come about by experience and skills of applying social engineering method, associated with "non-strict regulation", and using the algorithm of social technologies implemented. It allows a management actor to use these technologies in a creative way, according to the needs of various social groups [5, p. 94].

However, it is extremely difficult to learn technologies of social engineering due to the challenges, related to the peculiarities of domestic socio-cultural context. Despite some significant westernization of inside socio-cultural space, the larger proportion of the Russian population is not characterized by the focus on a social action type, outside of which social engineering approach becomes meaningless.

II. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The current paper is an attempt to deal with three issues: (a) determining how young people imagine "corridors of opportunities"; (b) considering factors, affecting the implementation of life strategies; (c) defining the approach to the related problems.

The results of the sociological study "Modern youth interests", survey (n = 500) and interview data (n = 30), carried out in the Volgograd region in 2016, present the empirical basis of the study.

The research is based on the concept of life strategy as sustainable, typical ways and forms of human activity aimed at meeting people's needs and achieving life goals by transforming the external environment and the personality of actors.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the results of the study, it is possible to say that the life strategies of the youth have a *rigid orientation to achieve success in life*. At the same time, the concept of success in youth consciousness is syncretic. It is a formula which reflects the indicators of people's well-being and their symbolic meaning for a person and others. In most cases, success in life, understood by young people as clear and specific as possible, is related to achieving goals largely in the microenvironment and assessed from a practical viewpoint. According to the study of 2016, more often, success is associated with happiness (24%) and wealth (22%). Personal freedom (15%) and power (9%), as well as opportunities for abilities (8%), are a rare case.

The life strategies of young people are as *individualistic* as possible (it should be noted, less than 1% of respondents consider community service as success in life). Due to opportunities provided, it almost excludes life-building, aiming at socially cohesive society, outside which, it is

impossible to reproduce the society and resist massive public disjunction.

Young people have *controversial* ideas on acceptable ways to succeed in life [6]. On the one hand, the respondents reject the life model, based on the principle “success at any cost”, signaling about inherent constraints. On the other hand, legal norms may not always be such constraints (28% of respondents allow the violation of norms, depending on specific circumstances), as well as moral obligations (40% of respondents).

Young people more often find it possible to use legal ways within socially approved means. 44% of young people consider knowledge as a condition to succeed in life; 35% - culture and mind; 8% - creative ideas; 23% - sense of purpose; 27% - social activity; 4% - willpower. Nevertheless, the ways, contrary to the principles of morality, are not rejected by young people and, despite condemnation, are widely used. For example, 25% of young people believe that the social status of parents can ensure success, while 19% of respondents are sure that only networking can help to succeed in life.

At last, life strategies are not enough *reflexively thought*. 78% of young people are confident in their capacity to achieve life goals, despite certain barriers related to education, as well as to a lack of sufficient resources.

The given features of life strategies among young people can be explained by a complex of factors. The most significant are, such as:

- the specificity of the youth values in which individualistic values prevail over collective ones. The latter, according to researchers, is significantly devaluated among young people [2, p.132]. The individualistic values encourage youth pragmatism which has an impact on the process of life strategy building;

- the negative reaction to modern society transformation. Our research shows that 68% of young people are not satisfied with the situation in the society. The main causes of their dissatisfaction are, as follows: spreading corruption (28.94%); deception and lie (28.34%); insecure future (23.95%), a sharp division into rich and poor (22.55%). Critical perception of society is one of the main grounds for a refusal to respect community norms. However, young people behavior is rather selective. Rejecting moral and legal obligations, they, nevertheless, tend to accept the consumer ideology, dominant in the reference environment;

- influence of information and communication media on the youth. It provides symbolic content of identification, standards of behavior and identification objects. In its turn, object identification features considerably determine the strategic priorities of actors [7].

The study revealed seven types of objects in different social groups, such as:

- groups, controlling the leading sectors of the economy (bankers, entrepreneurs, and farmers); 19% of young people identify themselves with these groups;

- a group of industrial workers (6% of respondents);

- groups in physical education and sport; they are the identification objects for 19% of young people;

- a group of “state employees” (5% of young people identify themselves with this group);

- groups, including managers (state and municipal civil servants, political figures, enforcement officials) – 21%;

- a group of workers in the fields of science and arts (19% of respondents);

- a criminal group (1% of respondents; it should be noted that not all young people would openly admit this fact).

The behavior standards of young people are determined by the status and lifestyle of these groups. Among these, there are four groups which have the most expressed identification models: (a) political and managerial; (b) market and economic; (c) intellectual and creative; (d) mass culture (it should be noted that a part of respondents has not defined their preferences). Thus, life strategies are designed, taking into account one of these groups. Each model, except the last one, has the right to be implemented in a pluralistic society.

However, the main issue is that the life strategy building does not mean its implementation [8]. Moreover, in an unstable community, the successful implementation of the strategy should be considered as an exception rather than a rule. Any failure requires justification and excuse, in most cases in outside circumstances.

Nevertheless, more often, the causes of failures are inside rather than outside due to the fact that young people lack knowledge and skills in social engineering; especially in the field, dealing with the techniques of life building. The study demonstrates that only 38% of students have experience and skills to design and implement life strategies successfully.

Meanwhile, this knowledge and skills are (a) complex and multi-level; (b) varying with the situation but preserving algorithmically base structure; (c) creatively applied to be efficient.

The social engineering approach to modeling life strategies and their implementation suggests that it should develop a complex of abilities in young people, as follows:

1. Analysis of life situation and identification of life problems. An individual is unable to face challenges with his/her personal knowledge and experience. It requires the ability to distinguish between supposed and actual problems. While the former presents the attempts to realize the real needs and interests, the latter is either the results of inadequate interpretation of a problematic situation or incorrect formulation of a life problem.

2. Self-assessment. It provides concerns and needs of a social object, their matching with capacities and conditions in terms of practicability. Self-assessing is possible in case of self-reflection abilities. On the hand, these abilities appear to be an element of a personality type; on the other hand, they are developed due to the cultural environment. The ability and willingness of a young person to self-reflexivity become a rule only in the social environment

where, according to Archer, “reflexive imperative” is developed [3, pp. 4 - 9].

3. Forecasting the evolution of a life situation. It is possible if an individual has experience and skills in the analysis of social processes. This involves the development of social and technological thinking among young people in the long run. Due to it, they become capable of reflecting on the real world and ways of changing it in the context of social theory.

4. Determining life goals, their decomposition and developing life plans. Goal-setting and life skill developing present considerable difficulties for youth. The high level of social uncertainty, that characterizes the Russian reality, makes the situation worse. Under these conditions, life plans are really no more than a declaration of intention.

5. Building the model of everyday behavior that makes it possible to implement a life strategy. The essential elements for the model are, as follows:

- identifying sequence of measures and activities, aimed at achieving goals, meeting needs and interests;

- justifying everyday activities and operations;

- comparing systematically the results achieved against the results planned, in case it occurs; identifying causes for the emergence of this situation. This requires the skills of logical thinking and the ability to understand the causal effects;

- assessing the results of an individual’s activities and the actions of other people; building interaction;

- evaluating the resources that are needed to achieve goals.

6. Protection of interests if there are risks and threats; it requires abilities:

- determining risks and threats that could arise (could potentially arise) in life strategy implementation;

- defining causes of risks and threats, their sources, consequences for a social object and others;

- assessing the opportunities to prevent risks and threats, which are related to the operated (wholly or in part) variables;

- planning actions to protect an individual’s interests, providing the sequence of interrelated procedures.

7. Finding the best solutions in case of conflict participation. They include the skills as follows:

- analysis of conflict with reference to its variables, such as its causes, conditions, dispute, the problem, the conflict of interests, the object of conflict, participants, their actions, structural factors of the conflict surrounding;

- determining correctly individual interests in conflict, evaluating the possibility of satisfying them;

- developing strategies for success in a conflict; determining its negative and positive impact on a person and others;

- identifying means to influence the parties in conflict, providing an understanding of participants’ motivation and different psycho-types of the individual.

IV. CONCLUSION

Thus, the development of these abilities is a technological problem rather than a humanitarian one. It can be solved by a change in mind by adopting streamlining, systematic sharing of knowledge and enhancing cultural awareness of young people. Social work with the youth should be reoriented at all stages of socialization. However, such a reorientation requires training professionals who possess social and technological competence and the ability to develop it in social objects.

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