

Social Practices of Mobilizing Population Initiatives: Prospects for Hybrid Methodology

Evgeny V. Golovatsky
Kemerovo State University
Department of Social Sciences
Kemerovo, Russia
xomaik@rambler.ru

Elena A. Kranzeeva
Kemerovo State University
Department of Social Sciences
Kemerovo, Russia
elkranzeeva@mail.ru

Anna V. Orlova
Kemerovo State University
Department of Social Sciences
Kemerovo, Russia
anniov@bk.ru

Anna L. Burmakina
Kemerovo State University
Department of Social Sciences
Kemerovo, Russia
anna-sidjakina@rambler.ru

Abstract—In modern conditions of transformation of the social and political interaction forms between the population and the authorities, as well as due to the growing influence of new network practices of social communication in society, the innovative projects growth, it is necessary to turn researcher view to the real sector of social and political initiatives. The study of the local initiatives mobilization, the possibility of their formation and the practical relevance of individual citizen proposals and local communities are of interest. This approach is of particular relevance in conjunction with the “social and political initiatives of the population - local communities - municipal authorities”. Studying the possibilities of mobilizing civil initiatives in the format of a hybrid methodology will allow us to consider hidden local opportunities, analyze prospects, as well as ongoing projects. The traditional and new forms of mobilization participation of the population in solving territorial social problems, in the social and political region development are proposed to consider. A sociological substantiation of the ways, forms, methods and means to increase the community initiatives mobilization of the local population is suggested. Initiative mobilization is possible in three areas: project declaration; meso-level, taking into account the interests of various parties involved in the interaction, and the diffuse option of intensifying social efforts. The possibilities of using the neural networks apparatus in sociological research are a promising direction in the social and political relations study. The article was prepared with the support of the RFBR grant No. 17-33-01108-OGN\18 “Mobilization of the local population initiatives in solving social problems of the territories”.

Keywords—*social mobilization; community initiatives; hybrid methods; sociological studies; local people; municipal government*

I. INTRODUCTION

The participation of the population in the social political interaction in the territory is ensured by the involvement principles of interaction subjects in social practices, updating the forms and methods of interaction, structural and communicative openness to the interaction participants. The dynamics and focus of modern social political processes orient

sociologists who study social practices for mobilizing people to use hybrid research methods.

Modern society is developing in the direction of building a communicative connectivity of social and political relations. The increase in the quality and quantity of social practices and the emergence of new dynamic communication systems also imply an increase in the capabilities of specific citizens within the local communities. Nevertheless, social practices demonstrate a discrepancy in the mobilization of initiatives, especially related to the problems of local development and the possibilities for implementing population initiatives in specific territories. In our opinion, with the help of a sociological approach, the trajectories of mobilizing civil initiatives for solving social problems of the territories in partnership with local authorities are possible to be justified.

The development of new social economic and political projects is impossible without using in the field of implementation (by analogy with the fields of P. Bourdieu) different in content and focus, but at the same time unique in their resources – initiatives of the local population, specific practices of social and political interaction.

In political science, mobilization is considered through the possibilities of an activist society [1], and in sociology, the realization of mobilization forms is indicated by the use of social political technologies by the interacting parties that ensure the connection between the global and local levels of social development (for example, in the framework of N. Luhmann’s universal sociological theory) [2]. Thus, in the works of A. Etzioni, the mobilization potential of society is determined by the influence of globalization [3].

K. Deutsch linked the processes of social mobilization with the changes that a significant part of the population is undergoing in the context of modernization. At the same time, the old social, economic and psychological obligations are destroyed, and people are ready to be mobilized into new patterns of socialization and behavior, included in the system framework [4].

Mobilization opportunities and the limitations of society in a historical retrospect reveal many techniques bordering on traditional, affective and rationally oriented practices for achieving a goal by the subjects interaction [5].

The experience of social and political interaction between the population and the authorities, as well as empirical material of various sociological studies accumulated during the 1990s and early 2000s in the Russian regions, suggest the need for scientists and practitioners to move to a new level of social processes diagnostics.

II. KEY RESEARCH ISSUES AND APPROACHES

Requests and orders of the population should be considered due to the practices of mobilizing public ideas in the territory, potential risks and threats to the territory development. Social practices of mobilizing the population initiatives are caused by the triangulation formed between the positions of the authorities, public initiatives, resource support of the interaction area.

The sociological substantiation of the conclusions and recommendations, the comparison of resource security and the complexity of decisions on local development problems, the abandonment of the usual management principles of initiating activity “from above” will allow researchers to focus their attention on the dynamics of the transition from ordinary (daily) forms of the population interaction with the authorities (wishes, disturbances, requirements, statements, addresses, letters, hidden claims, fears and threats from the population). As a result, a new aspect of the research subject area is being formed, consisting of the conjugation of managerial and amateur principles in the municipal authority implementation within the territory.

“The main thing in the population and government interaction becomes civil activism, which should be considered as a reciprocal movement, based on the original regulatory value system, common and differentiated interests, common threats of solidarity and security of the people and the country” [6].

According to N. I. Lapin and a number of native sociologists, the contemporary social political state of Russian society is characterized by an active person presence who acts “as a social subject whose activities are comparable with the actions of social institutions” [7]. Such an interaction subject “not only internalizes the norms and values of society, but also affects their components in accordance with new needs and interests with the continuous increase (due to the achievements of scientific and technological progress) of resources availability for both group and personal activity” [8]. Mobilization schemes can be formed taking into consideration formal and informal, open and latent civil positions.

Also, regional specifics of the development and accumulation of social, intellectual and cultural resources acquire independent specificity and weight. The variety of initial conditions for regional development and the availability of opportunities for timely support or transfer of opportunities

draw the attention of sociologists who study the social cultural characteristics of the Russian territories development [9].

The active form of mobilizing the population is a protest activity. This type of participation is noticeable due to the destructiveness of consequences, public resonance and attracting public attention. Recently, participants in social and political interaction have been actively using the “Internet tools” (for example, for recruiting supporters or collecting informational reflections, evaluating of certain resonant political events by users). The report of the All-Russian Public Opinion Research Center (RPORC) on the results of studying the attitude of Russians to the Internet space was discussed in the Russian-speaking segment of the Internet. Thus, a significant part of Russians negatively relates to the availability of politically contradictory content on the network, 81% of citizens negatively view anti-government appeals, 79% of respondents negatively relate to sites and groups in social networks used to organize anti-government marches and demonstrations [8, 10]. It should be taken into account that such assessments on the Internet are subject to transformation due to the constant updating of the user network, the emergence of young users new generation being less inclined to loyalty or preferring avoidance tactics and “cloud isolation”.

D. Fisher and other researchers, relying on the accumulated theoretical experience and the results of their own research in the United States, point out the expanding possibilities of the Internet and its influence on changing the ways in which participants in social and political protests interact. Political actions are becoming easier, faster and more universal. It is not only about the insignificant costs of the Internet, as a tool for mobilizing the population, and reducing barriers to political participation, but also about changing the interaction quality between people.

Scientists note the dual role of the Internet: on the one hand, it enhances the disintegration of the local community, physically isolating people from each other, but on the other hand, it provides the means to unite with like-minded people who are not geographically close. New “close” people appear at a distance. In practice, it turns out that the Internet does not replace personal contacts, but feeds them, providing additional ways to unite activists into new forms of interaction. Moreover, these people will have latent intrinsic motivation to participate in protest actions [11].

We believe that it is necessary to take into account the nature of the social consequences of mass mobilization technologies for the population with its daily worries and problems, as well as to take into consideration the main directions of society social development. It should be noted that protest forms can often be effective in the short-term (tactical) perspective and destructive for society in situations of continuing mobilization activity of the population, when the “fear” and threat of committing certain forms of violence in society can become the main tool for managing public and political consciousness.

In connection with the intensive modernization and development of new communication practices, researchers are faced with the question of the methodological approaches

priority. Is it possible to replace traditional, time-tested mechanisms of public mobilization of community initiatives with mobile, “floating” information and communication technologies? Or the capabilities of information technologies are not an independent resource of mobilization, but represent only the subsidiary executive part of a more general organizational and managerial mechanism. The transition from mobilization traditional forms of public initiatives to the use of information and communication technologies (ICT) is carried out [12].

The most frequently used practice of mobilizing community initiatives should be noted. Among the mobilization practices that are popular amid the interacting parties, three characteristic directions can be proposed by the nature of the relations manifestation: directive management techniques (traditional administrative measures or network practices of strict moderation); compromise practices (correlation of type: “directive” – “local opportunities” or friendly multi-user environment); and diffuse practices (individual self-organization, civic activism, or a free online search for clues and analogies).

In particular, ICT in the perspective of “smart cities” can be defined as systems integrated in the following areas (axes) of activity: smart economy; smart mobility; smart environment; smart people; smart life; and intelligent control [13]. Sociologists and urbanists suggest the concept of a “network city” – the main model of development and connectivity as a source of growth and social development [14]. In our opinion, an important issue is the determination of the social political interaction of priorities to use traditional mechanisms and methods of mobilizing or attract information and communication technologies by participants.

Social networks can be used as a platform for social and political mobilization during the election period. Foreign scientists among the mobilization tools of social networks indicate: text calls for action, hashtag teams, the mobilizing content exchange and frequent (intensively repeated) publications. Thus, owing to innovative, interactive forms of political participation, individual motivated citizens can widely disseminate mobilization calls to action and become influential participants in political discussions along with political parties and media elites [15].

At the present stage, the Russian information and communication practices of interaction between the population and the authorities are often carried out in the form of a demonstration of the population communications frequency, that is, they are declarative in nature. The priority of the number of citizen appeals to the websites and portals of public services, the number of applications and complaints, belong to mobilization activity indicators by modern functionaries. We agree that the frequency and direction of communicative acts can serve as an indicator of the interest or severity of a social problem. However, the qualitative characteristics of mobilization assessments, initiative and exclusive appeals are important to be discovered.

In the changing dynamics of social relations, the combined, hybrid approaches can accompany the situation development and denote mobilization prospects, and the way

out to the possibility of using neuromethodics in the sociological diagnostics development of public and political initiatives of the population.

The social engineering support (mini-technology) of interaction between the population and the authorities allows researchers to “keep abreast” of a specific situation development. However, the technologization of social and political relations must take into account the dynamic nature of the accompanying social processes. Technologization of social processes can “subordinate”, streamline non-trivial ideas and knowledge, erase the boundaries between the traditional and the new in the content of social initiatives, align the ideas of the population excluding their uniqueness and individual personal resources.

In order to use social engineering technologies accompanied by public initiatives in groups, work collectives and organizations (using mini-technologies and “soft power” principles), researchers need to consider the following values:

- ideas about the nature and content of the population labor/professional activity of the territories (nature of social resources);
- specific of the population social and political interaction (depending on the profile of the region);
- the time and place of participants interaction of the studied structure (freedom degree, “df” interaction participants, popular social spaces, time limits, including free, timekeeping, etc.);
- risks, severities and positive hopes/expectations of the population;
- perspective and retrospective state of the population mobilization activity;
- the use possibility of social technologies support/interventions by the parties.

The role of electronic media and network practices in covering public initiatives, new “fast practices” use of social communication is essential.

“The network is stronger than the vertical. The more cumbersome, the “iron” the vertical of power becomes, the more often it loses to the “weak” horizontal influences” [16]. New dynamic practices of social and political communication require “mobile power” use, which is more flexible and adaptive in relation to changing circumstances.

The population mobilization potential can be realized in the framework of organizational, managerial and project activities of the authorities, and it is also formed in an original way, with considering local resources or local interests of the communities.

III. RESULTS AND PROSPECTS

According to the research results of the population mobilization activity, we have got a combination of classical survey methods, projective methods for analyzing the Internet audience, and an extensive field of hybrid methods practical application for studying mobilization problems and generally

changing social structure of Russian society has been also revealed.

The mobilized initiative has more chances to be implemented, and mastered not only among the initiators, but also among other groups of the population; new practices transfer is possible.

We propose the following main options for the initiatives implementation in the territories: 1. Declarative principle (approach). Attention and equipment of the implemented projects depends on the installations launched on the territory from above (from the regional or federal center). 2. The median (level) approach – mainly two versions of the events development: A). The variant when an invariant basis is chosen in accordance with the possibilities, the remaining projects are supported and implemented as far as the resource possibilities are concerned; B) Variable approach – various projects are supported, intensity and direction is changed during implementation, transfers and situations of freezing initiatives in favor of other directions are possible 3. A diffuse approach in the projects distribution (initiatives), when resources and participants capabilities are randomly and non-systemically used.

The departmental studies results demonstrate that maintaining the “traditional” sources of confidential political information implies new niches of Internet communication and opportunities to discuss current topics with confederate people and colleagues (Table 1). The respondents say the following among open answers: “The reliability of the received information gives rise to doubt”, “Nothing”, “There is an opinion”, “Everybody lies”, “Personally, I don’t have any; if they want to hide, they will do it anyway.”

TABLE 1. POLITICAL INFORMATION SOURCES, WHICH EARN THE MOST CONFIDENCE FROM POPULATION (KEMEROVO REGION SURVEY, 2017, N = 393 PEOPLE; 2018, N = 400 PEOPLE)

Information sources	2017, %	2018, %
Printed mass media	16	14
TV broadcast	28.8	24.5
Radio	9.1	7.3
Internet	24.5	20.5
Public speech of politicians	8.8	7.3
Information exchange with confederates, and work/study colleagues	7	8.3
Independent experts speech	-	13.2
Rumors, conversations in queues or public places	2.6	3.5
Posters, advertisements, information boards, slogans on buildings, etc.	1.6	1.2
Other	0.8	-
Nothing	0.8	0.2

Social mobilization as a social technology is aimed at activating the population, including the population participation increase in decision-making processes, mobilizing and managing resources. It is carried out through an understanding of the needs and problems of all stakeholders. According to the research results in 2017, 12% of the respondents (*n* = 393 people), in 2018 – 20.8% (*n* = 400 people) applied to solve their problems, protect their rights in an organization or to certain people. Citizens' appeals were

mainly to the police, court; public appeals to information on the Internet to search for solutions to similar problems also remain popular.

A peculiar new form of the population mobilization was the working-out of the Kemerovo region strategy development until 2035, within which the site [17] was created, in order to accumulate initiative projects and proposals for improving the social economic conditions in the region. This practice is focused on combining the efforts of the authorities and public initiatives for “quick solutions” that cannot burden the processes of social and political interaction with additional resource costs.

The youth has significant mobilization potential in the territory. According to the results of a sociological research conducted by KemSU, the Department of Sociological Sciences on Kemerovo Region territory in May-June 2017 (the sample was 604 people) and dedicated to the evaluation of the population public initiatives and social activity, in which young people under 30 years old participated, 56.3% of the respondents noted the use of youth initiatives (scale: region, district, city). These are, for example, initiatives in sports, self-management, leisure activities, education. 40.4% of the respondents emphasized the young people ability to express their interests and directions through the Internet. At the same time, the respondents (30.6%) noted that only selected people with close family ties received serious offers, and 15.9% of the respondents believed that the government and society noticed only loud, public speeches by youth representatives.

In our opinion, youth organizations and movements can become a unifying platform for mobilizing young people. Under these conditions, it will be important to develop the potential of a youth leader, his abilities to mobilize young people and lead them to participate in any initiative projects, organizations and movements to form and defend their own positions.

The population activity potential is a significant indicator of measurement, showing the vector of probable opportunities. We asked the respondents to indicate their intentions (Table 2).

TABLE 2. READINESS TO IMPLEMENT VARIOUS ACTIONS (5-POINT SYSTEM EVALUATION, WHERE 1 – LESS READY, 5 – MORE READY)

Life decisions variants	2017	2018
Move to another city	2.9	2.7
Write complaints and appeals to higher authorities	1.9	2
Join the virtual political community (on the Internet)	1.3	1.6
Join the political party	1.4	1.6
Join a meeting or demonstration to defend their position	2	2.2
Make suggestions and initiatives to the authorities	2.1	2.3
Apply to the organization leadership with initiatives	2.3	2.4
Change the job	2.7	2.6
Master the new profession	3	2.9

The sustainable priorities of the respondents election are: personal mobility (the desire to move in another city, change jobs and perhaps learn a new profession); and activist mobility (go to the meeting; make suggestions and initiatives to the authorities; apply to the organization leadership with initiatives, etc.).

Exploring mobilization capabilities, the current approved actions of the population are important to be demonstrated. We clarified what real social, economic, and political actions respondents tend to support and take part in their implementation (Table 3).

The respondents support a high level of activist measures approval that have become widespread in the Russian social political life (organization of voluntary Saturday work - subbotniks, meetings with neighbors and close people, meetings dedicated to Russian holiday dates). It is appropriate to note the growth of "activism" manifestations among the population included in social networks and target communities. For researchers, these communities are not only of great practical interest, but also of considerable difficulty in identifying and covering their activities. Public control group creation, the search for successful analogies of solving issues on the Internet, a discussion of problem solutions among colleagues and proposals to the organization management can be named among the original, peak indicators.

TABLE 3. OPPORTUNITIES TO IMPROVE LIFE QUALITY SUPPORTED BY THE POPULATION (KEMEROVO REGION SURVEY, 2017, N = 393 PEOPLE; 2018, N = 400 PEOPLE)

Opportunities for population activity	2017, %	2018, %
Hold a subbotnik on cleaning the territory	32.8	34.7
Organize neighbors to solve the issues of improving a home or yard area	15.4	15.6
Create a group of public control over the work of municipality	6.3	12.9
Organize and/or take part in the meeting	5.3	6.5
Make suggestions for improvements in organizations	7.2	8.1
Offer ideas, projects for implementation to the local government	11.4	10.1
Use the experience of solving similar problems by other people and organizations	7.2	11.9
Not ready to support anything	13.8	0.2
Other	0.8	-

An interesting practice of the respondents is the assessment increase of the active position, that is, a significant decrease in the number of respondents who are not ready to support any initiatives. The mobilization interest of the population is a dynamic characteristic of social political interaction, public initiatives are not solely caused by personal preferences, but the use of social braces, traditions, resources and technologies of the local population dialogue, government officials, social institutions and organizations.

IV. CONCLUSION

Thus, the social practices study of the population mobilization initiatives reveals a poorly studied niche existing at the meso-level of social interaction. Macro-level

mobilization strategies and lower public initiatives are being implemented and accumulated in the space of real territories, cities and social organizations. At this level, demonstrations of individual-personal and professional-common relations between "cronies" are happening. The population of the territory, resources and interaction space together constitute the spatial temporal basis for the development and maintenance of social relations; the nature and fullness of these interactions largely depend on mobilization activity.

It should be born in mind that the mobilization study requires an integrated, including a hybrid research approach combining qualitative and quantitative methodology. Among the promising research areas of the population social and political mobilization in total of civil and power interests in the territory, with considering the reorganization of the sociological approach, the use of artificial neural network tools can be designated (ANN) [18]. The data array with multiple quantitative and qualitative characteristics for use by the taught neural network module is formed to build a model of regional social and political mobilization.

Prospects and possibilities of using the neural networks apparatus in sociological research are a relatively young area, but it has been developed in Russian sociologists works [19].

The main objective of the new hybrid methodology is the use of universal learned neural network modules to identify common features and specifics of regional social and political mobilization in the Russian Federation. The practical side of the direction implementation will be a hybrid model design of social and political mobilization in the regions of the Russian Federation on the basis of the learning module of the neural networks formed as a result of cooperation with representatives of the natural science.

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