

Cultural potential of the Russian province higher educational institutions young teachers

Tatiana Vladimirovna Gavrilyuk

Tyumen State Oil and Gas University, Volodarskogo Street, 38, Tyumen, 625000, Russia

Abstract. Basic properties and substance of cultural capital and potential of young provincial intellectuals are researched in the article. The meaning of terms “cultural capital” and “cultural potential” are explicated. The Author analyses main approaches to studying cultural potential of the person and social group. The empiric base is presented by mass survey and the focus group interviews with young teachers of the institutes of higher education located in the Ural federal district. They were considered as main subjects of cultural work in social space of the region.

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Introduction

the study of cultural potential of the social groups whose activities are connected with intellectual production, acquires special importance in the conditions of Russian society's transition to the informational stage of development. Young people, traditionally regarded as the most mobile and prone to innovative activity group, play a special role in the process of culture translation and renewal, not only learning social standards, values and meanings, but also actively modifying them. The subjectivity of young intellectuals in the Russian city cultural space can be viewed through the prism of the accumulated social experience, and in the dynamic aspect, by exploring its potential. Conceptual models of this group's cultural potential study and the search for techniques adequate to such models remain insufficiently studied in Russian sociology.

The focus on the cultural component is actualized in connection with the problem of cultural lag in most Russian provincial cities as well. Despite the "naturalness" of this trend [1, 268 - 269], a substantial gap between the regional spiritual culture development rate and the material sphere progress is a serious problem requiring sociological understanding. The main tasks of the theoretical research stage, which is the focus of the article is to specify the basic concepts used in this problem field, to select approaches to the study of individuals and social groups' cultural potential and to justify the research methodology. Young university teachers aged 35 are considered as the population of analysis.

Methods

The study was conducted in the frames of the project “Provincial universities young teachers' professional potential”, implemented by Tyumen State Oil and Gas University in 2012-2013 under financial support of the Russian Foundation for the

Humanities grant. The chief of the project was V.Gavrilyuk [2].

The empirical basis of our study was made up by the data of mass survey and focus group interviews with young teachers of the Ural Federal district universities. The mass survey sample was targeted; its volume amounted to 208 people, which seems to be sufficient for such a general population as young teachers. The survey was conducted through questionnaires at the respondents' place of work; teachers of 9 universities of Tyumen and Sverdlovsk regions participated in the survey.

Focus group interviews were conducted in the leading universities of Tyumen (the total number of respondents was 48: 4 groups of 12 people).

Body

The category of cultural capital was conceptualized and developed in P. Bourdieu's papers. For our purpose it is important that the cultural capital can be in three states [3, 60]: incorporated state, objectified state, institutionalized state. Following P. Bourdieu's logic, the first form, i.e. incorporated capital will be considered as the cultural capital basis. Knowledge, meanings, ideas and values acquired by the individual, are defined as both the perception of the processes occurring in society, and performance of social roles.

Differences in the content of the accumulated cultural capital is the most important basis of social differentiation in modern Russian society, standing on the threshold of the information stage of development, when socially significant awareness becomes the most important criteria of stratification. Today the reference social group's entering the cultural and symbolic space is a necessary condition of successful professional socialization. Educational institutions are primarily the transmission channels of cultural codes

underlying perception and social actions. They, in turn, have unequal access to the most significant cultural codes, thereby reproducing and supporting cultural and social inequality. In this context the study of regional cultural capital formation educational mechanisms is of great interest.

The dynamic aspect of the above notions is reflected in the concept of "*cultural potential*", interpreted widely enough depending on the subject, potential carrier. The given, basic for our study, concept is used by representatives of different sciences which creates research approaches variability. In a broad sense, "*cultural potential*" is used to denote the ability of culture to functioning, survival and development under the current socio-economic conditions of this or that country. It is often used to characterize territorial entities (city, region, state), when the aggregate of the accumulated cultural resources in the form of material artifacts or results of people's intellectual activity (scientific, philosophical, artistic) is expected to constitute cultural heritage and can be used for socio-economic and cultural development.

Today the concept of "*cultural potential*" operates in the context of several sociological paradigms. Comparison of methodology of the authors working in this subject area is a prerequisite of the conceptual framework development for studying young teachers' cultural potential. We have highlighted some of the main approaches: resource approach, structural-functional approach [4], activity approach [5], theoretical-informational approach [6, 335 - 385], cultural-psychological approach [7, 209-220], integrative approach [8].

It seems appropriate to actualize L.N. Kogan's approach who explored individual and group's culture in their actual *cultural values learning, interpretation and creation activities*. Realization of cultural potential in the activities of social communities and individuals may change the elements of collective consciousness, which in turn, changes the types of behavior existing in society and having a different degree of social approval. This approach allows applying social groups' cultural potential for estimating development trajectories of society in general or of regional socio-cultural systems, focusing on the purposeful activity of the subject as the main factor of social and cultural transformations. Its practical importance is in overcoming the limitations of structural-functional and resource approaches.

Having selected this approach as a conceptual model of our research, we shall note that Kogan used the notion of "*cultural level*" not quite adequately to modern realities. In this regard, we need to expand somehow the conceptual apparatus of

this approach without disrupting the overall focus of the research strategy. The basic concept of "*cultural potential*" will be used to indicate the *ability of a person's or social group's cultural capital to be implemented into real activity results connected with both the change of the very subject's essential qualities and creative transformation of the socio-cultural space*.

Besides, it is necessary to emphasize the fact that the actualization of a person's or social group's cultural potential and accordingly certain modifications of culture in general are closely associated with the existing social conditions of the accumulated cultural capital realization. For example, in the study of the so-called "*creative class*" R. Florida [9] has indexed the city social environment features depending on the degree of their influence on the creative potential of personality. In his work the author proves interrelation of the environmental factors, the cultural potential realization mechanisms and the socio-economic development of the region.

Let's refer to the results of the empirical study of Russian provincial young university teachers.

The results of the empirical study

During the study of the *cultural potential* the group under study's cultural needs, content, direction, and young intelligentsia's motivation in the sphere of culture and leisure were identified. The study was conducted in two stages:

1. Mass survey whose data was used to determine the basic components of the young teachers' *cultural capital*:

- importance of learning and creation of cultural values in comparison with other forms of leisure;
- priorities in selection of main information channels in the sphere of culture;
- preferences in consumption of cultural-informational products and perception of art (kinds of television programs, the arts, genres of literature);
- regularity and frequency of attending cultural institutions.

2. Focus group interviews, the results of which revealed the cultural activity motivation character, cultural preference determinants, general self-estimation of a group of young intelligentsia's *cultural potential* and its basic components. The young teachers from the Tyumen State Academy of Culture, Arts and Social Technologies as an expert group were asked additional questions about the role of Tyumen in the cultural space of the country and the possibilities of the city cultural development.

The logic of the research data analysis was as follows: general structure of the respondents'

leisure and place for "cultural leisure" in it → the respondents' satisfaction by the city socio-cultural environment (characteristics of the accumulated cultural capital and conditions of its formation) → the content and focus of activity in the sphere of culture and leisure (parameters, which allow estimating the cultural potential).

The young teachers' cultural capital analysis should start with definition of their leisure time structure. When answering the question *"What do you prefer to do in your spare time?"* the respondents were offered to choose up to five most important occupations ("To spend time with the family" (54,3%), "To spend time outdoors or at the dacha" (51%), "To enhance professional knowledge and get self-educated" (50%), "To communicate with friends, acquaintances and company" (49%), "To do sports" (35,6%). The results demonstrate that leisure structure of young province teachers doesn't considerably differ from the forms of leisure of the most Russians [10].

The group interview results analysis helps to understand the nature of such respondents' answers distribution. Thus, when answering the question *"In your opinion, how does the scientific intelligentsia of our city arrange their leisure time?"* the teachers of all the Tyumen universities emphasize the material aspect of free time arrangement - lack of money to attend the institutions of culture: *"I don't think the average teacher can afford to diversify his leisure"; "There may be enough institutions, but still lack of money is decisive"; "An oilman can fly to Moscow and attend the "Bolshoi" at a weekend, but we can only attend our Drama theatre"*.

The idea *"teachers are like other people"* has become the key one in almost all group interviews, emphasizing the fact of slight difference between this group's leisure activity and the preferences of the majority. Besides, the respondents spoke about the necessity to control their own behavior in public places because of "publicity" of their profession and special public opinion and existing stereotypes about teacher's reputation and cultural preferences. The young teachers do not feel part of a particular community and are not sure about the adequacy of calling their group "intelligentsia" (e.g. *"The complexity is that one has always to think about a possibility to meet their students in any city, at any point and they must be ready to be discussed next day after that"; "... teacher is always exposed to his image, he has to correspond to it, even in the "Goodwin' Shopping Centre, even in the cinema, and not to laugh loudly" etc.*). There are only separate remarks, where the respondents identify themselves as representatives of the intellectual elite.

When assessing the work of cultural institutions, the majority of the respondents marked their sufficient number in the city: *"We have everything, but we are not aware of it"; "Any cafes, clubs, ranging from theme parties, to private shows"; "The infrastructure is quite diversified. The content may be dissatisfactory"*.

Some of the statements indicated a lack of the inhabitants and very respondents' interest in attending the institutions related to art: *"I don't think that if we had a larger number of well-known theatres and museums this would mean people's readiness to attend them"; "There is still no time to go there". "A funny story... when discussing the opening of the new theatre, I asked "Will you often attend it?", she said: "Am I a fool to go there?";*

The results of the mass survey show that the respondents attend the institutions associated with body-care and meeting material needs most readily; slightly less than one third of young teachers attend sports institutions and trade centers regularly. The rest of the cultural institutions are attended ad hoc by the majority of respondents; the most popular are: cinemas, theatres, exhibitions and libraries. Museums, philharmonic halls and exhibitions are not attended by about 40% of the respondents.

The teachers were also asked about their preferred types of art. Some statements show a pronounced orientation to the arts, traditionally regarded as part of elite culture, but others demonstrated the opposite tastes, emphasizing the orientation to mass culture or purely professional interests, replacing all the others: *"Since none of the students can see it you may read whatever, even pornographic literature"; "I read scientific literature even at home. It is more interesting to read something related to your research area, than about an actor who sprayed acid on someone's face"; "Man strives for simplicity, it is easier to understand. When somebody starts to sing something romantic - what it is, I don't understand"; "When I drive up to the parking lot near the university building I up, I make " OPA GANGNAM STYLE " [a popular song of a Chinese rapper - author's note] sound quieter for nobody could hear what kind of music I listen to. Again, the image plays its role; the students should think that we listen to Bach, Vivaldi or Tchaikovsky"*.

The results of mass survey show that young teachers prefer the most popular kinds of art - cinema and music (about 55% of the respondents chose this variant of answer). Less preferred were: theater, literature, dance and art photo. It turned out that art interests less than 20% of the respondents and architecture interests 11,7%. Judging by the answers literary preferences were mainly related to the professional activity of the respondents. 56,7% of the

respondents prefer scientific literature. Around a fifth of the interviewed teachers choose detective stories, adventures, Russian and foreign classics, science fiction and historical literature. An alarming symptom is the recognition of almost one tenth of the respondents that they read little and seldom. For the group, for which reading is a basis of professional activity this symptom is indicative in terms of assessing their cultural potential.

The teachers of the Tyumen Academy of culture, arts and social technologies who participated in a group discussion as experts were suggested to assess the prospects of cultural development in Tyumen by answering the following questions "Do you think, that Tyumen may become one of the cultural centers of Russia? What prevents from this?" and "What could the state, the public, and the high school do to make artistic culture and art in Tyumen develop more dynamically?" The answers allowed making a conclusion about the relationship between young teachers' cultural potential realization conditions and their real innovation readiness.

The initial reaction of the respondents when answering the question about Tyumen as a cultural center was bewilderment: "What does "cultural center" mean?"; "Generally, how long will it take?"; "Is there any sense in this?"; "Why should we invent the wheel? There is St-Petersburg, and let it be on...". This reaction is indicative and demonstrates that the majority of young teachers have not thought of such a direction of the city development. The tendency to decentralization and glocalization observed in developed countries during a new stage of social development has no real equivalent in the context of cultural development in our region.

During the group interviews some assumptions were made about "regional mentality" which limits people's consciousness and prevents from introduction of innovations into the cultural sphere. It was stressed that transformation of Tyumen into cultural centre could be positive because "it will enhance the status of our city. It would sound completely different if I mentioned that I am from Tyumen when meeting someone from Europe or Moscow, or St. Petersburg. Nobody would think that Tyumen is the city where brown bears roam on the streets; and over time the attitude would change". Noteworthy is the tendency to appeal to an image and stereotypes established in the public consciousness and reflected in the answers to the previous questions concerning the artistic tastes and preferences.

The second question addressed to the teachers of the Tyumen state Academy of Culture was aimed at the study of their understanding the main subjects of culture as well as evaluating how interested they are in the real reforms in the cultural

sphere of Tyumen. In the course of conversation it immediately turned to the state support and financing, some interviewees focused on the activeness of creative subject, however, in connection with the desire to receive a financial support from the state and local authorities: "If we don't disturb and provoke them [officials - author's note], funds will not appear ...", "Money will not appear all by itself, it only appears when one is active: one will not be provided with it at once, maybe only after the thirtieth request, when the official is bored". It is obvious that young teachers regard the state as the main subject of culture reproduction; and the respondents regard the narrow-mindedness of this position only as impossibility to unite and make the government support their own projects. The etocratic society, guided by the attitudes preserved in the consciousness from the Soviet time, is still expecting the cultural policy to be directed from "above" and take into account the needs and interests of creative groups.

Conclusion

The experimental data clearly illustrate the fact that young university intellectuals in Tyumen do not feel like a community, supposed solve a particular kind of tasks in the cultural space of the city. High level of young teachers' involvement into the leisure sphere of the city is observed, but they neither consider themselves a special "cultural layer", nor regard their own lifestyle different from the lives of the majority. Modern young teacher is no longer an agent of real cultural influence, while limiting their function of educational influence on students by maintaining the 'image of a teacher" based on no real cultural properties. The unstable identity of young intellectuals, consumer's attitude to the cultural space, passivity and lack of self-organization significantly reduce their creative potential.

Corresponding Author:

Dr.Gavrilyuk Tatiana Vladimirovna
Tyumen State Oil and Gas University
Volodarskogo Street, 38, Tyumen, 625000, Russia

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