Practices of Interethnic Interaction and Formation of the National and Civic Identity in the South of Russia

Yury Grigorievich Volkov¹*, Galina Sergeevna Denisova², Anatoly Vladimirovich Lubsky¹, Valeria Petrovna Voytenko¹

¹Institute of Sociology and Regional Studies of Southern Federal University
²Institute of History and International Relations of Southern Federal University
*Corresponding author E-mail: volkov.yu.g@mail.ru

Abstract

The article deals with institutional formal and informal practices of interethnic cooperation and their influence on developing the national and civic identity in polyethnic communities in the South of Russia. The doctrinal documents and statutory regulations that govern the formal practices of interethnic cooperation contemplate involving civil society institutions in implementing the state national policy of the Russian Federation within the framework of the public-private partnership, thus creating institutional conditions for developing the national and civic identity. Informal practices of interethnic cooperation that have formed in local communities as a result of the dialogue between government officials, nongovernmental organizations, and ethnic groups allow developing common goals and public values, which are the basis of developing the national and civic identity and strengthening the civil unity.

Keywords: Development of the national and civic identity; Ethnic identity; Ethnocultural education; Formal practices of interethnic cooperation; Informal practices of interethnic cooperation; Institutional practices of interethnic cooperation; Interethnic cooperation; National and civic identity; State and civic identity.

1. Introduction

Globalization in the late modernity society [1] is followed by the crisis of national identity [2]. On the one hand, this is preconditioned by the fact that globalization poses a serious challenge to the national differences; while on the other hand, globalization provides the possibility for ethnic communities to reconstruct their ethnic identity. As a result, modern polyethnic states have entered a new "identity epoch" full of sound and fury, where, according to researchers, the search for national identity divides and segregates [3]. In modern Russia, after the "disassembly" of the Soviet people as the matrix of collective identity in the USSR, the search for the ways to build a nation [4] and develop national identity has started [5].

In Russia in the 1990s, there was an attempt, in the course of liberal transformations, to implement the nation-building project aimed at forming a civil nation and the national and civic identity as a necessary condition of the national integration and consolidation of the Russian society. Yet the complete implementation of this project was prevented by several difficulties related to strengthening of the processes of forming ethnic nations and ethnic and national identities in the Russian polyethnic regions. Besides, the Russian collective consciousness at the turn of the century was overwhelmed by a conservative wave as a reaction to the one-way enthusiasm with the Western experience that had prevailed in the Russian society before [6].

That wave cancelled out the attempt of implementing the nation-building project aimed at forming a civil nation and the national and civic identity in Russia as the project ceased to comply with the mental programs of the majority of Russians. In view of that, a new project was proposed within the framework of the state nation-building policy; the project was oriented towards forming the Russian nation both as a political nation that united citizens of the Russian Federation and as a civic nation based on social harmony. Implementation of the project resulted in formation of a polyethnic political nation in Russia that united citizens of the Russian Federation, and the national identity, which was called "state and civic identity" within the scientific discourse. The identity was based on the state self-identification of individuals and the etatist culture, involving loyalty to the state above all [7].

Domiining state and civil identity have not diminished topicality of the ethnic and national identity issue in the modern Russian society. The ethnic and national identity is understood as the identity of individuals who compose ethnic communities aiming at strengthening their state status and the national and civic identity, which includes sense of community and solidarity with citizens, responsibility for one’s fate and the life of others. In view of this, studying practices of interethnic cooperation influenced by historical memory, linguistic and ethnocultural factors, along with development of the national and civic identity in the polyethnic regions of the South of Russia is an important scientific mission.

2. Scientific Literature Review

Scientific literature has already covered various aspects of the national policy implementation aimed at regulating the interethnic relations in Russia [8], focusing on the existing problems and contradictions [9]. Thus, while giving a positive assessment to such benchmarks of the national policy as strengthening the all-Russian civic consciousness and preserving the ethnocultural diversity, several authors note that the policy does not provide an
elaborate mechanism for ensuring interconnection of the united Russian civic consciousness and the ethnocultural diversity of the Russian society [10]. In essence, those are considered as independent trends of the national policy, and, as a result, in practice the first becomes the domineering one [11]. Thus, while drawing attention to the fact that the national policy does not formulate the main vector of the ethnonational development, the researchers [12] note inefficiency of the existing institutions of the ethnonational policy [13, 14]. The researchers also believe that “the effectiveness of the modern state national policy also depends on the extent to which the general civic identity effectively corresponds to the ethnic identity” [15]. Yet lack of proper coordination among the federal, regional, and municipal authorities in the sphere of national policy prevents “achieving the interethnic concord and a civic identity. This situation is partly linked to the lack of clear understanding on how to implement national policy on the local level” [16]. In many ways, this is because several doctrinal grounds of the national policy even in the very beginning did not result from egalitarian dialogue between the state and society, as well as between the federal and regional authorities [17]. Consequently, when regulating the interethnic relations in the regions, the federal authorities tend to move beyond the ethnos social and group representation, while the regional authorities and national and cultural associations see the sources of their legitimacy in the social and group connotation of the ethnos. Because of this, in the sphere of interethnic cooperation, especially in the Southern Russian regions, collisions between the formal and informal practices of such cooperation happen quite constantly. Moreover, according to the researchers, such collisions often come along with informal practices in the sphere of interethnic relations’ regulation that distort or display formal practices. As a result, the mechanisms of the national policy aimed at deethnification of social and political relations in polyethnic regional societies get blocked [18]. The researchers also draw attention to the fact that in the polyethnic regions of the South of Russia there is a contradiction between the doctrinal attitudes at the level of various concepts, programs and legislative acts and the actual political, ideological, and cultural practices [19]. As they believe, in many aspects this is preconditioned by ineffectiveness of administrative decisions in the sphere of interethnic relations, as well as insufficient attention paid to the national and cultural needs and civil rights in the regional communities [20]. Scientific publications have already analyzed several issues related to formation of the state and civic, national and civic, and ethnonational identities in the regional communities in the South of Russia [18]. However, the researchers believe that the state and civic identity, which in modern Russia ensures “the equilibrium between the civil society, ethnic identity, and the state”, is universal. At the same time ethnonational, national and civic identities are the most significant particular identities [21] that create a complex symbiosis filled with “particular emotional and evaluative content”, which “makes the running of identity processes” in the Russian polyethnic regions “even more difficult” [22]. However, the influence of interethnic cooperation practices on formation of the national and civic identity in the South of Russia has not yet been the subject. This fact makes the content of this article problematic.

3. Methods

Methodological grounds of the scientific study of interethnic cooperation practices and formation of the national and civic identity are the activity-related paradigm and the institutional theory, along with the so-called “soft” concepts of social identity developed within the constructionist approach. The practices of interethnic cooperation are considered within the action paradigm as various repertoires of social actions that are preconditioned institutionally. Modern institutional theory is based on a synthesis of normative and cognitive concepts of social institutions. Under the normative concept, the institutions are understood as formal and informal rules and norms of social interaction, and under the cognitive concept – as cognitive formations that are the basis of social actions. That is why the institutional practices of interethnic cooperation are interpreted as actions preconditioned by the formal and informal norms, which, during the process of interethnic interactions, undergo interiorization, reinterpretation, and exteriorization, thus generating transformation of the old and formation of the new institutions of interethnic cooperation [23]. In this regard, it is possible to identify formal and informal practices of the interethnic cooperation in regional polyethnic communities that receive normative-regulatory and cognitive-normative legitimation from participants of this cooperation. The framework of “soft” concepts, formed under the constructionist approach, has asserted the rendering of social identities as discursive constructs that are mobile and dependent on the context [24]. Several researchers underline that these “identities are mobile not only in time and space but even when they are related to the same subjects at the same time and space point” [25]. Because of this and due to constructivists, it is a common idea in the scientific community, that social identities are not essentialist entities, natural, single, and fixed, but they are rather artificial, multiple, and variable and dependent on the context [26]. When it comes to identity, the constructionist believes that it is not so important, “who we are”; what is important is “who we may become, how other people treat us, and how this corresponds to our self-perception”. Thus, the “identities”, as the constructionists believe, “are created during the process of representation, but not outside of it” [27]. Interpretation of social identities as discursive constructs has led to conclusion that perception of these identities is the result of symbolic struggle or competition of various narratives as their cognitive models. In this regard, the researchers underline that there always exist several narratives on the social identity that compete with each other, and citizens can choose among them [28]. As a result, some narratives of social identity may prevail while the other will be put aside; yet the “victory” can never be considered complete.

Within the framework of the constructivist approach, national-civic identity has a reflexive character. It is formed as a result of information influence and the choice made by socially and individually significant referents: the civil society and the citizens as subjects responsible for their deeds and actions in society. Thus, the national and civic identity is based on civic consciousness and civic culture that involve identification of an individual with the civil society as the civic political nation and a citizen as a socially active and responsible person.

4. Results

Formal institutional practices of interethnic cooperation in the polyethnic regions in the South of Russia are regulated by such statutory documents as “The National Policy Strategy of the Russian Federation till 2025” established by Executive Order of the President of Russia in 2012 and “Implementation of the State National Policy” adopted by the Government of the Russian Federation in 2016. According to the doctrinal provisions of the “Strategy”, “the goals of the state national policy of the Russian Federation are: a) strengthening of the all-Russian civic consciousness and the spiritual community of the multinational people of the Russian Federation (the Russian nation); b) preservation and development of the ethnocultural diversity of the peoples of Russia; c) harmonization of the national and interethnic relations; d) ensuring equality of rights and freedoms of a person and a citizen regardless of race, nationality, language, religious beliefs, and
other circumstances; e) successful social and cultural adaptation and integration of migrants” [29].

The goals of the state program “Implementation of the State National Policy” are: a) harmonization of the national and interethnic relations; b) ensuring the equality of rights and freedoms of a person and a citizen regardless of race, nationality, language, religious beliefs, and other circumstances; c) successful social and cultural adaptation and integration of migrants; d) preservation and development of the ethnocultural diversity of the peoples of Russia (the Russian nation). Compared to the Strategy, the Program mainly focuses on necessity of harmonizing the national and interethnic relations, and further strengthening of the all-Russian civic consciousness and the spiritual community of the multinational people of the Russian Federation (the Russian nation). However, the main objectives of the Program are: 1) to increase the effectiveness of involving institutions of civil society in implementation of the state national policy of the Russian Federation, including the development and improvement of system of the public-private partnership when implementing the development of the multinational people of the Russian Federation, including the development and improvement of the effectiveness of involving institutions of civil society, as well as expanding the share of citizens who identify themselves as Russian are common for representatives of various ethnocultural groups, and ensuring the equality of rights and confessions that accumulated centuries-long experience of preserving and developing ethnocultural diversity of the peoples of Russia, while on the other hand, strengthening the all-Russian unity and to preserve the ethnocultural diversity of the peoples of Russia”. It tends to create “conditions for strengthening the all-Russian civic unity and preserve the ethnocultural identity of the peoples of Russia” [30].

Content of the “Strategy” and the “Program” confirms the adherence of state authorities to the idea of historical development of Russia as a polyethnic state, which cares about harmonization of the national and interethnic relations. On the one hand, it is preserving and developing ethnocultural diversity of the peoples of Russia, while on the other hand, strengthening the all-Russian civic consciousness and the spiritual community of the multinational people of the Russian Federation (the Russian nation).

However, these documents contain clear indication of the trend towards separating ethnocultural communities from the sphere of political relations, while the state ensures legal equality of all citizens, irrespective of their ethnic, linguistic, or religious characteristics. In other words, ethnic and ethnoconfessional values move from the sphere of political relations, where they were considered as bright markers of social groups, to the sphere of private life.

Collapse of the Soviet Union, dismantling of the soviet ideology oriented towards the intercultural integration, which was reflected in the notion of internationalism, and the active period of ethnic mobilization in political sphere, that lasted in Russia for over 10 years, required new forms of organization and practices for the interethnic cooperation in the regional polyethnic communities. In this case, the search vector was considered the transition from the Soviet model of multinational people to a more flexible model of cultural diversity without segregating society into culturally distinctive groups, as well as abandonment of administrative and political meaning of the ethnocultural groups. Implementation of this approach within the context of stabilizing political system and aligning the legal framework in the regions of Russia led to the fact that interethnic conflicts related to vertical interaction of the federal canter and the federal subjects (mostly republics) on authority and resources were replaced by interethnic conflicts in local communities related to horizontal interaction of ethnic groups in regions and municipalities at the beginning of the 21st century [31].

This development required the federal authorities to delegate their powers in the sphere of regulating interethnic relations to the regional and municipal levels. This was achieved, first, by developing a set of legal instruments that transferred the responsibility for ensuring positive interethnic cooperation to the regional and local authorities; second, by creating the legal framework for organizing the interaction of the state administration institutions with the civil society; third, through implementing state support of traditional Russian religious confessions that accumulated centuries-long experience of ensuring intercultural interaction; fourth, due to selection and support of the initiatives and practices of informal interethnic cooperation implemented by people in day-to-day life.

In this list, the first and the second items relate to ensuring formal institutional practices of the interethnic cooperation in the regions. The third and the fourth items relate to ensuring information institutional practices characterized by the absence of administrative and legal regulation of social relations [32].

Regional and local authorities play an important role in achieving the complementarity of interethnic cooperation in the modern Russian State policy. According to a special Federal Law, heads of the regions and municipalities are prompted to create conditions for organizing joint practices of interaction involving representatives of various nationalities [33]. Stimulatory action of the law is ensured by certain sanctions. Thus, according to the Law, any interethnic disorders or conflicts arising in a region (a municipality) present additional grounds for dismissing a head of the region (a municipality). In line with that, the results of official monitoring of the people’s evaluation of interethnic relations and the share of citizens who identify themselves as Russian are considered when assessing the effectiveness of the administrative bodies’ activity.

Local authorities are now responsible for implementing the measures aimed at strengthening interethnic and interconfessional relations, support and development of languages and cultures of Russian peoples, and preventing interethnic conflicts. Including these issues in the agenda is due to the necessity of creating conditions in the day-to-day life of people aimed at providing conditions for institutionalizing positive interethnic cooperation and defining public goals and values that are common for representatives of various ethnocultural groups, aimed at forming the national and civic identity.

To implement these forms of activity in all regions in the South of Russia and in most municipalities, such civil associations as public councils, advisory councils, or councils for interethnic concord are established. They have become the platforms for discussing current issues of the regional and municipal life with participation of authorities, representatives of ethnic groups, and nongovernmental organizations. Functioning of these platforms confirms not only stability of identified forms of interaction but also their effectiveness. Solutions of this kind, considering targets and values of the local communities, are made in accordance with specific nature of the local problems and socio-cultural traditions. This approach allows implementing the principle of necessity to develop public and private partnership under which the state (and regional authorities) in elaborating the development strategy relies on the system of basic values shared in the society [34].

The goal of such institutional practices of interethnic cooperation is to preserve and develop the ethnocultural communities by way of dialogue regarding the strengthening of the civic community and achieving the unity of the polylocal community. Such institutional practices of the interethnic cooperation imply not only convergence, but also preservation of certain isolation of ethnocultural groups, which, acquiring national-civic identity, do not lose their distinctiveness and ethnic identity. Development of
this approach corresponds to the strategy of building the Russian nation, which basic characteristic is a combination of the civic community and the ethnocultural diversity.

In this dialogue, the representatives of the ethnic communities declaring the needs of the ethnocultural development “promote” implementation of their most important interests: first of all, support of the national languages, expansion of the public space of their functioning, support of various trends in the ethnic culture and ethnic tourism, and strengthening the institution of the national education.

At present, the issues of ethnocultural education organization are the domain of the regional authorities. Monitoring studies of ethnocultural education in the regions in the South of Russia indicate the presence of stable ethnocultural identity in the majority of population, which is achieved by educational means [35]. However, creating a legal framework for developing ethnocultural education and national languages does not guarantee successful implementation of this activity. Empirical studies in various regions, including the South of Russia, confirm that there are obstacles restraining this process. “The bureaucracy “in education” and administrations of educational institutions tends to unify the educational space. Mass-media distribute various phobias and negative ethnic stereotypes. Parents, who interpret social functions of school differently, might face the conflict of interests. Another serious obstacle is the lack of high-quality textbooks and study guides on teaching national languages” [36]. In other words, various social actors resist to establishing the principle of developing the cultural diversity. A significant factor in this regard is, for instance, activation of pragmatic interests in the mass consciousness. From this point of view, studying national languages and the ethnic culture has little monetization potential in the job market, which is confirmed by mass surveys of students and expert interviews of university teachers. However, a vast majority of population preserve their need for the ethnocultural education, yet not in the classical form but in mastering the local folklore, sports events, national cuisine, tourism, etc. [37]. This is the aim of interaction between the national-cultural autonomies and educational institutions. For example, a large-scale project “150 Cultures of the Don” has been implemented in the Rostov region for the last 10 years. This involves participation of general middle schools and various national-cultural autonomies. Their cooperation aims not only to introduce to the young the cultures of peoples living in the region but also to involve students and teachers in comparative cultural and anthropological studies, for example, of specific features of calendar holidays and ceremonies that are celebrated in all ethnic cultures of the region.

In this context, an important area of the public and private partnership’s activity is the development of new methods in the sphere of ethnocultural education and national languages, training of professional staff for this activity, and promoting ethnocultural values among the youth. Another important area is supporting the development of ethnic culture (literature, folklore, ethnic dance ensembles and ethnic music groups). Federal and regional grants are provided for activities in this area and seekers of such financial support compete for those grants [38].

Effectiveness of the institutional practices of strengthening the ethnic culture and, consequently, the cultural diversity of Russia is evidenced by the high personal value of the ethnic identity for representatives of various age groups, which is confirmed by the results of the public opinion polls conducted in various Russian regions [39]. However, preserving stability of the ethnic identity does not diminish significance of the state and civic and national and civic identity. Empirical studies in all the regions of the South of Russia confirm that students and schoolchildren easily attribute ethnic identity to these identities.

5. Conclusion

Practices of interethnic cooperation are various repertoires of social actions preconditioned by social institutions as formal and informal restrictions. Thus, formal and informal practices of interethnic interaction can be identified in regional polyethnic communities, which receive normative-regulatory and cognitive-normative legitimation from the participants of this cooperation. The national and civic identity based on the civic consciousness and civic culture premises identification of an individual with the civil society and with a citizen as a socially active and responsible person. Formal institutional practices of interethnic cooperation in the South of Russia are regulated by such statutory documents as “The National Policy Strategy of the Russian Federation till 2025” (approved in 2012) and the State Program of the Russian Federation “Implementation of the State National Policy” (adopted in 2016).

The analysis of these documents, the main goal of which is strengthening of the all-Russian civic consciousness and preserving the ethnocultural diversity of the peoples of Russia, shows that, by preconditioning the formal practices of the interethnic cooperation, the documents contribute to creating institutional conditions for forming the national and civic identity. These conditions are as follows: first, to develop and improve the system of the public-private partnership in the sphere of implementing the state national policy of the Russian Federation; second, to involve the institutions of the civil society in implementation of the state national policy of the Russian Federation; third, to improve the effectiveness of interaction among the authorities and the national-cultural autonomies and other institutions of the civil society; and fourth, to expand public involvement in the state national policy of the Russian Federation.

Informal practices of the interethnic cooperation that receive cognitive-normative legitimation from the participants of such cooperation, have long-standing historical and socio-cultural traditions in the polyethnic regions of the South of Russia that were almost destroyed in the 1990s within the context of reethnicization, outbreak of peripheral nationalism and "the parade of sovereignties" in the national republics. Restoration of these traditions was facilitated by discontinuation of interethnic conflicts of the “vertical nature” related to the contradictions between the federal center and the regions regarding the powers and resources of the authorities; and by the federal authorities delegating power in the sphere of interethnic relations’ regulation to the regional and municipal levels. Currently, the powers motivate heads of the regions and municipalities to create conditions for, first, developing ethnic culture and national languages, and second, supporting public initiatives and organizing informal practices of interethnic cooperation implemented by people in their day-to-day life. The practices based on the dialogue between government officials, nongovernmental organizations, and ethnic groups aim at strengthening the interethnic and interconfessional cooperation and preventing interethnic conflicts in local communities.

The dialogue as the basis of the informal practices of interethnic cooperation contributes to developing common goals and public values, which are significant for the polyethnic community considering the specific nature of its local problems and socio-cultural traditions. Thus, the informal practices create favorable conditions for building the national and civic identity based on these goals and values and strengthening civic consciousness in the local communities, at the same time preserving their ethnocultural diversity.

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