

EdCW 2020**International Scientific and Practical Conference Education in a Changing World: Global Challenges and National Priorities****FORMS OF CIVIC PARTICIPATION AMONG STUDENTS**

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Abstract

The article examines the attitude of students to various forms of civic participation based on a semi-formal interview, analyzes the relationship between civic participation and the formation of civic responsibility. In the spring of 2020, a regional study was conducted to study the level of development of civic competencies. The purpose of the study was defined as the study of the level of potential for civic participation in the student environment. An individual semi-formal interview was used as a data collection method. 41 first-year students of the Novgorod branch of RANEPА, studying in the specialties State and Municipal Management and Personnel management, were interviewed. From the list of suggested actions of the citizen, the students chose, in their opinion, the three most important and the three least important. Each choice was argued in detail. To assess the degree of importance, 14 actions of a citizen were proposed: to take part in voting; to participate in voluntary organizations; to take part in political life; to choose goods for political, environmental or moral reasons; to have an independent opinion; to strive to understand the opinions of other people; to monitor the actions of authorities, to be a juror in case of receiving a summons; to obey the laws always; to report a crime that you witnessed; not to evade taxes; to be ready to serve in the army if necessary; to support people in your country who are worse off than you; to help other people who are worse off than you.

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1. Introduction

By civic participation, we mean the presence of an active civic position, a willingness to participate in the improvement of the social mechanism and personally influence the socio-political life of the country. Active participation in the life of civil society (social participation) is usually defined in the context of interests – “community engagement” (Scerri & James, 2010).

In foreign scientific sources, “civic participation” is interpreted by the phrases: “civic engagement”, “civic/citizen participation”. In particular, Ehrlich (2000) defines “civic engagement” as a way to increase the quality of life in the community through political and non-political processes. Olson (2012) in “What counts as young people's civic engagement in times of accountability?” reveals the meaning of the term “civic engagement” as a set of individual or collective actions carried out within the framework of civil society institutions.

Civic participation can take two forms: political participation (activities within the framework of political parties and associations) and social participation (involvement in the work of public organizations, charity, and volunteerism). Both Russian and foreign researchers, studying the processes of involving citizens in solving public problems at the local, regional, country and even global level, often put the questions of what it means to be a good or an ideal citizen in the first place (Maximova et al., 2019).

An important factor in the development of civic activism is the coexistence of political and non-political components in it, between which, on the one hand, there is no rigid “watershed”, but which, on the other hand, have specific features, ranging from motives to institutions that provide the possibility of their implementation (Sedova, 2014).

Upbringing of civic responsibility involves the formation of an active civic position of an individual, civic self-determination, awareness of internal freedom and responsibility for their own political and moral choices (Ershova & Fedorova, 2019).

2. Problem Statement

“Civic engagement” and “citizen participation” have become something of a catch-all concept in recent years (Olimid, 2014). The development of civic participation of young people is a long process, which is formed stage by stage (Ekman & Amna, 2012). First is the formation of social and civic competence, this requires knowledge of the humanities: law, economics, sociology, political science, form opinion, awareness of the role in civil society, skills of critical thinking. Further, at the second stage, the previously acquired knowledge becomes the basis for the formation of private value and moral guidelines, awareness of personal responsibility and readiness to participate in solving social problems. And at the next stage, there are prerequisites for the manifestation of an active civic position, participation in significant events of the political and social life of the state, aimed at protecting the rights of citizens, increasing the level of social well-being.

3. Research Questions

- 3.1. What are the values of student youth on civic participation?
- 3.2. What is the degree of responsibility of young people in relation to civil actions?
- 3.3. What is the willingness of young people to interact with the authorities?

4. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to determine the level of civic participation among students.

5. Research Methods

To study the questions posed in the spring of 2020, a survey of 1st-year students of the Novgorod branch of RANEPA was conducted by a semi-formal interview method. Students (n=41: 25 –female (f), 16 –male (m)) assessed the importance of various types of civic actions, formulated reasoned responses.

6. Findings

Civic participation develops and strengthens collective norms that play a fundamental role in the creation and maintenance of public order and welfare (Guzhavina, 2019).

According to regional studies, the level of civic participation of young people is recorded at a low level.

Thus, the data of our research conducted in the Novgorod Region over the past 10 years show that about half of the region's youth consider it impossible to influence the city policy, protect their interests in front of government representatives, and discuss the options for solving youth problems with government representatives.

In 2016, we conducted a sociological survey of schoolchildren and students in Veliky Novgorod. Analysis of the results showed that every third student and slightly fewer students (27%) believe that a citizen is a person who has an active civic position. At the same time, about 40% of students and schoolchildren admits that they do not have an active civic position (Artamonova, 2017).

The low level of civic participation of young people can be overcome if they realize the importance of their own rights and freedoms and the ability to implement them in practice, personal responsibility to society and the state in everyday civic practices, and the importance of public dialogue with the authorities (Trošt & Mandić, 2018).

The most important quality of a citizen according to students is the presence of their own independent opinion. One of the significant reasons that confirm the importance of this action, according to the students, is the relationship between their own opinion and the values of civil society: freedom, responsibility, human rights.

Any citizen should have his own opinion; this is to some extent a manifestation of individual freedom. If people are deprived of the opportunity to express their own opinions, the country can plunge into chaos (m).

The next reason is the relationship between your opinion and critical thinking. It is the skill of critical thinking, the use of various sources of information that helps to form an independent opinion, and therefore not become a victim of manipulation.

I believe that only through your own independent opinion, through your personal perception of the facts and the view on the situation, you can assess what is good and what is bad (f).

Another essential action of a citizen, according to the students is not to evade taxes. The argument is most often related to the fact that tax evasion can lead to administrative and criminal liability.

... it is important not to evade taxes, because evading them can lead (and will definitely lead) to adverse consequences, such as imprisonment, large fines, and others (f).

One more important reason for the timely and full payment of taxes is due to the need for the formation of the state budget and the development of various areas – health, education, social security, etc.

Taxes are the part of the state revenue that is spent on the important needs of this state (at least, it should be so), so we will be able to get smooth roads, in my opinion, only when all citizens stop evading taxes (f).

At the same time, according to the students, there are compelling reasons why citizens evade taxes. And they are connected, mainly, with the standard of living of the population, distrust of the forms of tax distribution.

I believe that people avoid taxes for several reasons: 1) poor population; 2) high taxes; 3) taxes should go to health care, roads, pensions, but people believe that the lion's share goes to someone's pocket (m).

The obvious examples of civic participation are elections: participation in federal, regional and local elections, active discussion of development programs (Sheleg, 2018). Participation in voting, according to the students, is necessary first to express their own civic position. Here, it is essential to have a belief in the importance of one's voice, the ability to influence events taking place in the country.

Having the right to vote, everyone can participate in the management of the state, directly exert their influence on the authorities (f).

Political activity is realized by means of electoral activity in the elections (Yevlegina, 2016).

The explanation of the importance of compliance with the laws is more related to the manifestation of civic responsibility and the exercise of their rights. Compliance with the laws, according to students, gives a sense of security and freedom. At the same time, following the laws implies self-control and a high degree of responsibility (Ballard & Ozer, 2016).

At the same time, non-compliance with the laws always leads to aggressiveness in society, increasing tension. In such conditions, according to the students, the existence of civil society is impossible since its basis is solidarity and mutual respect.

... if people do not comply with the laws, chaos can begin in society, and disobedience to the laws inevitably leads to criminal punishment (f).

Among the actions of citizens, marked by students as the least important it is the choice of goods for political, environmental, or moral reasons and participation in voluntary organizations.

The manifestation of citizenship in the choice of goods was most often noted by students as the least important action, in the gender groups the assessments were identical. Students give several reasons why such behavior is not among the important civic actions. According to the students, the choice of goods is not a manifestation of citizenship, because it is not prescribed in the laws. That is, for young people, civic responsibility is more related to the presence of legal responsibility, which is clearly demonstrated by the answers when assessing the significance of the civic actions described above (compliance with laws, payment of taxes).

From my point of view, this has nothing to do with civil society. It is not related to social goals, but rather to individual details (m).

Another group of responses concerns the choice of products for environmental reasons. In this case we find another interesting fact – students believe that an ecological approach to the choice of goods is a purely individual need; they do not see here a global social problem and the need to spread environmental approaches in everyday practices, such as the use of reusable packaging, reasonable consumption, etc. The reason lies, as in the first case, in the absence of legislation and sanctions.

The law does not prescribe that a person will become an unscrupulous citizen if he goes with a plastic bag instead of an eco-friendly string bag (f).

The next reason why it is not necessary to choose products for political, environmental, or moral reasons is completely different criteria for choosing products than were suggested in this question - price, quality, utility, compliance with personal needs and material opportunities. In addition, the measures taken at the state level to restrict the import of certain goods due to Western sanctions, according to students, restrict their rights to their choice of products.

Citizens should not suffer and buy products of inferior quality just because the state will impose sanctions (m).

The second in the group of the least significant actions of a citizen, according to students' estimates, is participation in voluntary organizations. As with the choice of goods, students consider the voluntary nature of such behavior as the main argument.

This case is voluntary, so there is no need to participate in it (m).

In the student community, there is no clear idea that voluntary activity has an effect only when it is systemic; it involves a lot of caring people who have a high level of civic responsibility for what is happening in society. Nevertheless, it is proved that public managers' trust in citizens influences their attitudes towards new forms of participation. Just as citizens' political trust has a positive impact on some forms of participation (Åström & Karlsson, 2020). Among the answers, there is such an argument: paying taxes is much more effective for the state than participating in volunteer organizations. Here we can see the shift of personal responsibility to the state, which cannot but worry. Such a division of civic actions into mandatory, related to the implementation of the law and voluntary, the significance of which, in the students' opinion, is questionable, indicates a low readiness for civic participation in the youth environment.

I believe that a person has the right to decide whether he wants to be in a volunteer organization or not. And if he is not a member of it, then this does not make him an unscrupulous citizen of his country. This is a personal matter for everyone and does not relate to the duty of a citizen in any way (f).

7. Conclusion

Thus, the survey data have shown the predominance of competence-based and value-based civic participation. Students are aware of the importance of civic action, and their arguments are generally declarative. The answers do not contain a reference to their own practices of implementing civic actions (not how I do, or would do, but how others should do it). At the same time, a low level of participation is recorded. This is expressed in the refusal to exercise their own rights actively (particularly, to a favorable environment). Thus, the civic participation of students is manifested mainly at the level of declaring public values.

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