

**ISCKMC 2022****International Scientific Congress «KNOWLEDGE, MAN AND CIVILIZATION»****SOCIAL IDENTITY OF THE NORTH CAUCASUS YOUTH:  
DYNAMICS AND RISKS OF CONFLICT**

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**Abstract**

The article considers the value content of the social identity of the multi-ethnic North Caucasus youth, the priority of the all-Russian, ethnic, confessional, and regional identity, and the risks of conflict between these identities. The empirical basis of the study was the results of sociological surveys conducted by the authors in 2020 and 2021. The identity of a modern young person has a multi-component hierarchical character. In general, for the regional youth, regardless of ethnicity and religion, the role of traditional values is declining. The remaining value differences due to ethnicity can become a trigger for conflict among youth. The all-Russian identity is a priority for young people, while regional and ethnic identities are no less significant. Among the main factors that determine the risks of identity conflict among the region's polyethnic youth, one should single out the system of dual identities traditional for the North Caucasian peoples. The risks of politicization of ethnicity and further ethnicization of politics, destructive influence of global network communities are remains. The problems are also the increasing inequality in the distribution of basic facilities between young people, which is also ethnic in nature, social dislocation and frustration of young people, as well as the dynamics and direction of ethnomigration processes in the region. It is necessary to further transfer the attention of young people from the political and ideological to the socio-cultural aspects of interethnic relations, the formation of the main all-Russian spiritual and moral values among polyethnic youth.

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## 1. Introduction

The North Caucasus is a unique region in many respects. Along with the transit geopolitical position, it is distinguished by ethno-cultural diversity, multi-ethnic and poly-confessional composition of the population. The North Caucasian peoples are characterized by the love of freedom, commitment to their land, customs and traditions. The events of Russian history at the end of the 20th century: ethno-political conflicts and armed clashes, accompanied by the breakdown of the Soviet socio-economic structure that had developed in the region and mass migrations, left a deep mark on the social memory of the people of the region, laid the foundations for many contradictions. During this period, there was an increase in interethnic tension and ethno-political conflict, accompanied by a sharp weakening of the state, the archaization and criminalization of public life, the growth of social anomie and the radicalization of youth. Conflicts of interest increasingly escalated into identity conflicts. Against this background, there was a weakening and destruction of the all-Russian supra-ethnic identity. Today, integrative processes prevail in the country and the region, the consolidation of the peoples of Russia based on an all-Russian identity, the main all-Russian socio-cultural foundations. These processes are not easy due to the insufficiently formed basic Russian spiritual and moral values, growing property and social inequality, and destructive external influence. An additional regional risk-generating factor is the system of “dual” identities that has developed among the peoples of the North Caucasus – all-Russian and ethno-confessional. Their relationship is complex and increases the risks of identity conflict.

## 2. Problem Statement

Youth is at the forefront of socio-cultural transformations in the region. Young people are most involved in network communications and communities, subject to external influence, traditional values and social groups have largely lost their role as significant identification landmarks in their eyes. The identity of a young person has a multi-component hierarchical character, in its structure, an important place is occupied by values, meanings, ideas and norms of behaviour that determine the correlation of an individual with one or another community, a social group — social (group) identity. The identity transformation is a conflicting nature. Identity conflict is a socio-cultural conflict based on value differences. Earlier studies have confirmed that in the portfolio of identities of the region's multi-ethnic youth, all-Russian, ethnic and regional identities are in an unstable balance. Among ethnic Russian young people, the all-Russian identity prevails, while among the youth of the North Caucasian peoples, ethnic and regional (regional-republican) ones prevail. Religious values are less significant for the self-identification of Orthodox Christians and more significant for Muslim youth. In the minds of young people, regardless of ethnicity, the role and importance of the main Russian spiritual and moral values are declining. Understanding between them is characterized by a lack of cognitive foundations and vagueness (Erohin et al., 2021). The questions posed above determine the subject field of this study — the significance of traditional and modern value bases for young people's social identity, the priority of all-Russian, ethnic, confessional and regional (regional-republican), analysis of the impact of exogenous (global) and endogenous factors on the transformation of social identity.

### **3. Research Questions**

The following main questions are considered and analysed in the article.

#### **3.1. Values of young people's the social identity**

Reveal the significance for young people of traditional and modern value bases of social identity, depending on ethnic and confessional affiliation.

#### **3.2. Dynamics of the priority of the all-Russian, ethnic, confessional and regional identity**

Based on data from sociological surveys in 2020 and 2021 establish the dynamics of the priority of the all-Russian, ethnic, confessional and regional identity of the youth of the North Caucasus, depending on ethnic and confessional affiliation.

#### **3.3. Risks of identity conflict**

Assessing the risks of identity conflict in multi-ethnic youth communities of the North Caucasus in the context of exogenous and endogenous factors affecting the region.

### **4. Purpose of the Study**

Analysis of the value content of socio-cultural foundations social identity of the multi-ethnic and multi-confessional North Caucasus youth, prioritization of the all-Russian, ethnic, confessional and regional identity, assessment of conflict risks of these identities.

### **5. Research Methods**

The qualitative methodology is based on the conceptualization of identity, socio-cultural analysis, understanding of the "life world" of the polyethnic region's youth. Quantitative methodology (sociological surveys) made it possible to measure the variables that reflect the importance for young people of all-Russian, ethnic, confessional and regional identities, to establish their value bases.

#### **5.1. Qualitative research methodology**

The identity reflects the ability of a person to comprehend himself and his place in the world in the process of correlating with others, allowing us to make multidimensional mapping of the world, which is in constant motion, to determine our place in this world and the places of others. Rothman defines group identities as self-perceptions filled with a "cultural formula". The cultural formula assumes reliance on group values, needs and preferences, while identities are a source of controversy and can catalyse conflicts. The conflicting parties may perceive themselves as "separated maximisers", feel themselves to be carriers of multiple identities, or be part of a collective whole and come into conflict at the intergroup level. Identity becomes the ideological basis of the participants in the conflict, filled with individual and group values (Rothman & Alberstein, 2013). The multidimensionality of the category "identity" makes it

possible to reflect the totality of modern nonlinear sociocultural processes taking place in different social times for different communities. Identity allows you to make a conceptual synthesis of value and rationally motivated foundations of human social activity. It enables one to connect individual and collective sections of social experience, fix the state and at the same time reflect the dynamics of a person's ideas about his place in the world and about "I" (Semenenko, 2017).

In the formation of identity, both the state and the change in public sentiment are reflected. Self-identification involves reflection on socio-cultural practices and political actions. The rapidly changing individualizing society of "liquid modernity" is characterized by the denial of previous forms of sociality, and avoidance of responsibility, which erodes family, ethnic and national identity. According to Bauman (2000), nowadays in increasingly short supply: "Patterns, codes and rules to which one could conform, which one could select as stable orientation points and by which one could subsequently let oneself be guided" (p. 61). As Huntington (2004) writes: "Modernization, economic development, urbanization, and globalization have led people to rethink their identities and redefine them in narrow, more intimate communal terms. Subnational cultural and regional identities are taking precedence over broader national identities" (p. 205).

The civil (national) component of self-identification is going through the greatest problems in the modern world loses much of its former normative value. National values and symbols are fast disappearing. The image of the "classical" national-territorial state is blurring, increasingly losing its value as the main identification landmark in the eyes of a modern man. The consequences of this are the growth of disintegration processes, the loss of the former internal national unity, and "fragmentation and narrowing of identity". There is a rise in ethnic, racial, gender, religious and civilizational self-awareness, a surge of subnational movements for political recognition, autonomy and independence, an increase in the diasporization of modern societies (migrants remain in the paradigm of their native culture). According to Horowitz (1985): "In divided societies, ethnic conflict is at the center of politics. Ethnic divisions pose challenges to the cohesion of states... Ethnic conflict strains the bonds that sustain civility and is often at the root of violence" (p. 24).

In modern scientific discourse, identity conflicts refer to a sociocultural conflict, the basis of which is the value differences, which are actualized as a result of crises and transformations of identity. Identity-based conflict is value controversies and divergences. Brubaker and Laitin (1998) concluded that the disappearance of ideological confrontation in the modern world and its replacement by large-scale value clashes on the grounds of ethnic and confessional differences. The motivation of parties involved in identity conflicts goes beyond rationally understood interests. They appeal to values, protection of group identities, feelings of ethnic, religious, and other forms of collective loyalty to separate "friends" from "foes". The likelihood of radicalization of identity conflicts is determined by the presence of security threats, an increase in frustrations and an escalation of social inequality. This may cause open confrontation, the markers of the conflicting parties are ethnic and confessional affiliation. Multiethnic regions with a high degree of ethnization of politics and politicization of ethnicity are characterized by a low level of political stability, the ineffectiveness of the public administration system, growth of corruption and lack of formation of civil institutions (Weber et al., 2016). Ethnic entrepreneurs strengthen the political role of ethnicity and intensify group solidarity by appealing to defensive rhetoric about

language, ethnocultural values and identities contributing to steering the conflict of interest towards an identity conflict (Maksic, 2017). In such conflicts, the struggle unfolds not just around material or power problems, but also for the sake of protecting the culture of the group, its status and identity. The majority of ethno-political conflicts are based on some kind of irrational principle, hidden in cultural stereotypes, dissatisfied (imaginary and real) historical grievances, and mythologized ideas of participants about each other. The appeal of the parties to the conflict to identification values leads to its axiological irrationalization (Blagojevic, 2009). Ethnicity embodies an element of powerful emotional tension. It can be reactivated if groups are aware of the threat to their interests, which leads to ethnification, ethnic intolerance, competition, and, ultimately, violent conflict.

## **5.2. Quantitative research methodology**

The quantitative method allowed the authors of the article to measure the variables that reflect the importance for the youth of the North Caucasus of the main traditional and modern values and group identities (all-Russian, ethnic, religious and regional) and to identify the dependence of the studied variables on ethnic and religious affiliation. The empirical basis of the study was the results of sociological surveys conducted by the authors in 2020 and 2021. The object of the surveys were students aged 18–24 years of the leading universities of the North Caucasus. The sample size was about 1000 respondents. The surveys were conducted online, questions were generated using cloud tools.

## **6. Findings**

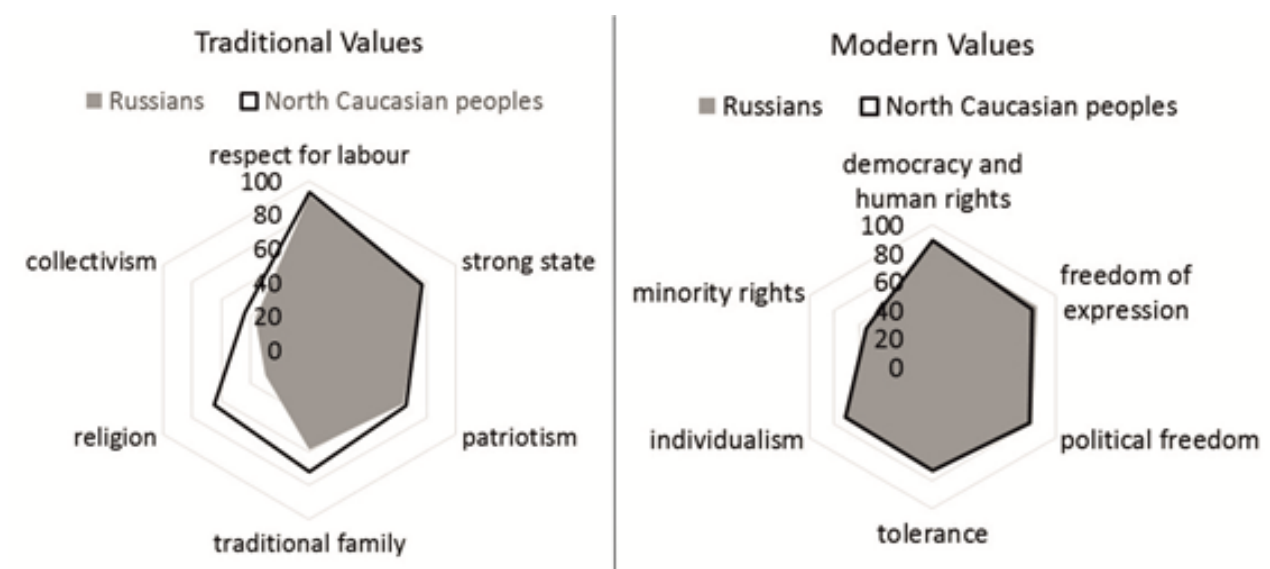
Information technology has created an environment of networked communities that contribute to further fragmentation of identity bases. Young people have the opportunity to go beyond their local communities and state borders, identifying themselves with a wide variety of groups. Network communications form a new reality, little dependent on the usual socio-political institutions and practices. This makes it possible to purposefully use identity discourses for political manipulation by young people. The region's youth, regardless of ethnicity, is rapidly assimilating modern ideas about life, patterns of behaviour and interpersonal relationships.

### **6.1. Value foundations of identity**

The results of empirical research confirm that the youth of the North Caucasus is characterized by a set of identities (all-Russian, ethnic, regional-republican and confessional), which is in dynamic interaction. The most significant issues are the compatibility of these identities, the priority for young people of the common value-semantic foundations of Russian self-consciousness, and the search for historical and cultural ideas that unite all peoples and form the multinational Russian people. In the region, it is possible to implement various models for the development of these identities: from competition and conflict to a harmonious combination based on common values and semantic foundations shared by all.

An important component of the all-Russian identity is the idea of young people about the common past, and the coexistence of different peoples within the framework of a single state. Through the

formation of common values, views on life and memories of the historical past, young people form ideas about national-state interests, love for their country and loyalty to the Russian state. For the majority of young people surveyed, a number of traditional Russian values continue to be significant, such as respect for work, a strong state, patriotism, and a traditional family. In general, the importance of the values of religion and collectivism was indicated by a minority of respondents. At the same time, for the peoples of the North Caucasus, the value of religion, the traditional family and collectivism are higher than for the Russian youth. In the value-semantic content of the identity of the youth of the region, regardless of ethnicity and confession, a significant role is played by modern values, such as democracy and human rights, freedom of expression, political freedom and autonomy of the individual, tolerance, individualism and the rights of minorities (Figure 01).



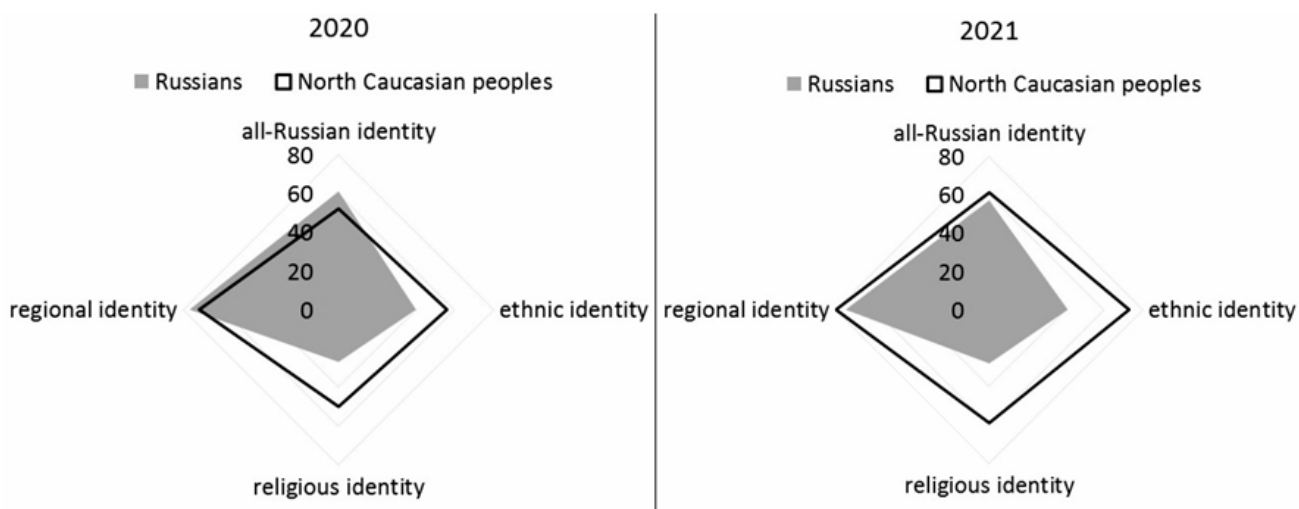
**Figure 1.** Value Foundations of Identity

## 6.2. Importance for young people of all-Russian, ethnic, confessional and regional identities

It can be assumed that modern values become decisive for certain urban youth groups, while traditional values are the most significant for rural youth. Based on this, it is possible to form a conflict environment, strengthening value divisions, which can develop into open conflicts between separate groups of young people. This is confirmed by the opinion of the respondents, the majority of whom (81%), regardless of ethnicity and confession, pointed to the possibility of conflicts among young people between those who share traditional and modern values.

A significant marker of identity is young people's awareness of their connection, and attachment to a particular social community. The most significant for the respondents is the awareness of their connection with their closest relatives and their small homeland. The next most important is the emotional connection with the country, people of their ethnicity and religion, while for representatives of the North Caucasus peoples, awareness of the connection with people of their ethnicity and religion is much more significant than for Russian youth. The significance of ethnic identification for young people who share modern values is declining. At the same time, it is still of great importance for the North Caucasian

people. If a negative scenario for the development of the region is realized, this can become an important destabilizing factor. In general, all-Russian identity has formed among the majority of respondents, regardless of ethnicity. Regional, ethnic and religious identity is much more important for the North Caucasian peoples than for Russian youth (figure 02).



**Figure 2.** Importance for young people of all-Russian, ethnic, confessional and regional identities

Significant differences in the priorities of ethnic, regional and religious identity between the youth of the North Caucasian peoples and Russians by ethnicity carry the risk of conflict and can provoke the transition of domestic conflicts into local ethnic conflicts.

## 7. Conclusion

The study found that in the minds of the youth of the North Caucasus, regardless of ethnicity, there are processes of transformation of socio-cultural norms and values. Traditional and modern values are spread to varying degrees among young people from different ethnic and confessional groups. In general, for the youth of the region, regardless of nationality and religion, the role of traditional values is reduced. Value differences between Russian and Caucasian youth can become a trigger for conflict. The all-Russian identity is a priority for young people, while regional and ethnic identities are no less significant. In the multi-ethnic youth communities of the North Caucasus, the risks of identity conflict remain. The following factors can be singled out that determine the risks of conflict of identities among the polyethnic youth of the region:

- the system of dual identity traditional for the North Caucasian peoples (all-Russian and ethno-confessional).
- conflict potential of collective memory.
- risks of politicization of ethnicity and further ethnicization of politics.
- risks of destructive influence of global network communities. The involvement of young people in online communities increases the plurality and blurring of identities. Such communities can

become "maximizers" of the conflict of identities among the multi-ethnic youth of the region, platforms for gathering supporters of radical ideas.

- problems of a socio-economic nature: increasing inequality in the distribution of basic facilities between separate groups of citizens, which is also ethnic in nature.
- social dislocation and frustration of young people.
- dynamics and direction of ethnomigration processes in the region (migration along the line "mountains — plains", "village — city", which has an ethnic character).

It is necessary to further transfer the attention of young people from the political and ideological to the sociocultural aspects of interethnic relations, the formation among the multiethnic youth of the main all-Russian spiritual and moral values.

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