

Social Behavior of University Students in Civic Sphere (Based on Results of Sociological Study in Rostov Region, Russia)

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Abstract

The specific features of social needs and life strategies of students as a special social group, the significant role of universities in the formation of civic consciousness and the peculiarities of the transformation of the civic sphere in Russia actualize the study of the social behavior of university students in the civic sphere. The main purpose of the study is to identify the features of the social behavior of university students in the civic sphere and to determine their types. The methodological framework is based on the synthesis of socially deterministic and neoinstitutional approaches, the theory of mental programs, M. Rokeach's value approach and the activity-based approach to studying social practices. As external factors, the authors examine the features of organizational and institutional conditions for the implementation of civil-social and civil-political practices by students. The authors investigate the following internal factors: conservative and liberal mental programs which include ideas about civic participation as a terminal and instrumental value, attitudes and motives behind practices. The study is based on the data of the author's questionnaire of 382 students from seven universities in the Rostov region. According to the results of the study, there are four types of social behavior of students in the civil sphere: civic type, career-leisure type, hybrid type and conformist type. The most common type of behavior remains conformist as it is formed under the influence of conservative mental programs and formal conditions for the implementation of civil practices. The most adaptive to modern realities in the civil sphere is the hybrid type of students' social behavior. The university is a platform of special social trust between students and determines broad prospects for the development of informal civic events.

Key-words: Students, Civic Life, Civic Practices, Social Behavior, Mental Programs of Social Behavior, Civic Type of Social Behavior, Career-leisure Type of Social Behavior, Hybrid Type of Social Behavior, Conformist Type of Social Behavior.

1. Introduction

Higher education students are one of the most active, advanced youth groups involved in civic life. However, Russian society has always had its specific features, where, on the whole, historically one would not participate in public life, pursue political rights, or freely become a volunteer. Nevertheless, today researchers are increasingly writing about the growing importance of civic participation of student youth in Russia in connection with the active support of volunteering and social projects within the framework of state youth policy. Today in Russia there is an increase in the number of students with a responsible type of civic consciousness, although most continue to participate in state-approved practices organized "from above" by the state or universities.

Civic participation of student youth can be explained by various reasons. First, this is due to the need to implement the social needs and life strategies of students, which is confirmed by Russian studies by the Public Opinion Foundation and the Levada Center [1]. Second, the particular relevance of last year's events in Russia: volunteer actions during a pandemic, rallies. Third, the special role of the university not only in education and science but also the influence of the university on the socio-economic, spiritual and moral state of the country and civil society [2]. Foreign researchers also confirm the high activity of students in protest actions [3].

The specifics of the development of students as a special youth subgroup, the significant role of universities in the formation of citizenship and the features of the transformation of the civil sphere in Russian society actualize the study of new strategies of social behavior of university students in the civil sphere.

2. Literature Review

The social behavior of students in the civil sphere has already become the object of research by both Russian and foreign scientists. Some researchers consider the students' civic behavior as part of extra-curricular activities or extra-role behavior in comparison with in-role behavior [4] in the educational sphere. Extra-role behavior does not contribute to higher education as such but this behavior makes a social contribution to the educational institution, to the student group, to the student, and involves joining clubs, participating in student government, etc. Foreign authors write about the so-called the Student Volunteer Army (SVA) whose actions are manifested in "spontaneous volunteering" in the form of response to natural disasters and subsequent recovery [5]. In Russian reality, this resembles search-and-rescue organizations such as Liza Alert [6]. There are studies on

specific civic practices in Russian regions. According to a survey by Rostov sociologists, regular student participation remains fairly low. The most interesting spheres of extracurricular participation for young people in the framework of the university are creative clubs, volunteering and self-government bodies. Among the civil practices outside the university students note events dedicated to the Victory in World War II, volunteer actions and festivals [7].

Various factors that influence the social behavior of students in the civil sphere have also been examined in sociological scientific literature. For example, researchers note that the desire to participate in social events decreases with age as one studies at the university [8]. Almost half of the students have an internal readiness to participate in extracurricular student activities but many times fewer actually participate [8]. Some researchers write that the more developed extracurricular activities in specific universities are, the more active students' civic participation is [7, 9]. The authors believe that less activity in social and political actions is more characteristic of those who graduated from technical schools or colleges [10]. The impact of civic socialization on enhancing students' civic engagement is also investigated. The authors discover that in Indonesia, students learn norms within the national discipline "Pancasila", where civic participation of young people is encouraged [11]. Gaining work experience in a social environment can significantly increase young people's political commitment [12]. Moreover, several works confirm the positive influence of organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) of students on further career success [13, 14]. Some researchers emphasize that the use of social networking services(SNS) can contribute to the formation of new social communications for civic participation [12,15,16].

Moreover, the impact of socio-economic status on youth civic consciousness was studied [17]. According to the research results, young people with the lowest family income have the lowest cognitive and behavioral level of citizenship. On the other hand, higher self-esteem, a mature professional outlook, and good relationships with peers are significantly correlated with a higher level of youth civic consciousness.

Researchers have not yet reached a consensus on the influence of socialization agents. Some researchers argue that family, friends, teachers and the environment form a responsible citizen, and political conversations and discussions can positively influence knowledge about citizenship and civic participation [11]. Other scholars argue that, for example, in the civic behavior of Chinese students, there are no significant differences between public and private universities, between women and men, rural and urban youth, students with different family backgrounds. However, students who

study social sciences, as opposed to technical and natural sciences, are better aware of the importance of citizenship and civic participation [18].

Authors studying the involvement of young people in civic participation in the United Kingdom found that despite the efforts of youth government offices, there is a significant degree of alienation and frustration of young people, limited funding and a formal, paternalistic approach [19].

One of the studies reveals the national features of students' attitudes towards citizenship and civic behavior in China [18]. According to the results, most Chinese students have a clear understanding of the concept of civil society, are patriotic and loyal to the state, and also believe that the students should actively participate in activities that benefit their community and society. This is largely determined by the significant influence of traditional Confucian values on civil rights and obligations of citizens – "everybody has an obligation for the well-being under Heaven".

Russian sociologists have constructed models for how students show civicism in Russia: active, engaged and passive [20]. However, these models represent cognitive counterparts of social reality, do not take into account the differentiation of motives of students' social behavior in the civil sphere, and do not consider the special influence of mentality on the features of social behavior in the civil sphere.

Thus, a critical review of the research topic made it possible to understand that certain aspects related to the study of students' social behavior in the civil sphere were considered in Russian and foreign academic literature. However, the social behavior of students in the civil sphere as an integral social reality has not yet been the subject of specialized sociological research. Moreover, the peculiarities of students' mental programs that determine their social behavior of students in the civil sphere in Russia were not identified, the features of civil practices, which makes it possible to determine the types of social behavior, were not considered.

This issue requires the formation of a methodological field of research, which is based on the socially deterministic and neoinstitutional approaches [21,22], the theory of mental programs [23-26], M. Rokeach value approach [27], the activity-based approach in the study of social practices [26]. Although a similar methodological platform has already been used in a sociological study of the social behavior of students in the educational sphere, in the civil sphere, mental programs have a different content: values, attitudes towards civic practices and social practices themselves [28].

3. Methods

The concept of mental programs proposed by G. Hofstede is an efficient methodological tool for cross-cultural research [23,24]. Nevertheless, the methodological construct of multidisciplinary sociological research into the mental programs of the students' social behavior in the civil sphere is based not only on G. Hofstede's ideas but also on G. Kelly's theory of personal constructs according to which people consciously choose from several possible options the most optimal ones, from their point of view, for behavior in a particular social situation [25]. The theory of personality constructs in the context of modern neoinstitutional concepts [21, 22] makes it possible to identify the features of the reflexive structures of students' mental programs, including values, attitudes, and motives that determine their social behavior in the civil sphere [26]. At the same time, civic participation can be viewed by students, on the one hand, as a terminal value, which is a desire to help people, the city, society, and influence government decisions. On the other hand, students can see civic participation as an instrumental value, within the framework of which participation in specific civic practices becomes the goal of an interesting pastime, building a career, realizing one's abilities and making useful acquaintances [27]. The attitudes in the mental programs of students represent their readiness to carry out conscious social actions in the civil sphere. Motives act as an internal driving force that encourages students to engage in civic activities. Within the framework of modern theories of social practices, the students' social behavior in the civil sphere is a response to the current civil situation in Russian society in the form of participation in civil-social and civil-political practices [29].

The empirical basis of a multidisciplinary sociological study of the students' social behavior in the civil sphere in the Rostov region was the results of the original questionnaire conducted in seven higher educational institutions of the region in January 2020 in the face-to-face format as well as using the capabilities of the online platform SurveyMonkey [30]. The representativeness of the research was ensured through the implementation of a multi-stage stratified proportional sampling (the sample consisted of 382 respondents: 60% women and 40% men, 83% Bachelor and Specialist students, and 17% Master students, 83% of students from university main bodies and 17% from branches). The results of this survey, the sociological analysis and interpretation made it possible to identify the values, attitudes and motives of students' mental programs that determine their social behavior in the civil sphere, the features of their civil-political and civil-social practices, as well as highlight various types of social behavior of students in the civil sphere in the region.

4. Results

The social behavior of university students in the civil sphere is a response to the social situation that has developed in civil society in Russia, which is due to various external and internal factors. External factors are associated with the development of state youth policy, support for volunteering, the spread of formal practices loyal to the state, and the formation of a new institutional environment in the civil sphere of Russian society. Internal factors of students' social behavior are, first of all, their mental programs, which include students' ideas about citizenship, civic participation and its role in the implementation of life strategies.

A review of the results of youth policy efficiency in the Rostov region demonstrates that the conditions for participation in formal civic practices exist both in the region as a whole and in the universities under study. The limitation is that since civic practices are formal, the practices are closely related to power structures and are determined by formal indicators: a limited number of participants, targets, special reporting and low informatization. Therefore, having reached the target indicators, officials do not set themselves the goal of a wider involvement of young people in certain public events. In the universities of the Rostov region, formal civil practices organized by the university administration are also implemented to a greater extent, and informal (volunteer, charitable, environmental) practices organized at the initiative of the students themselves are implemented to a lesser extent.

For the development of civil-political practices of students in the Rostov region, favorable conditions have not yet been created. Students do not strive to participate in political processes, which is due to a low level of trust in political parties, the ritual nature of participation in political elections, and a paternalistic-statist view of power. For most students, compulsory participation by the school or university administration in civil and political practices causes alienation. Even in the case of a desire for legal forms of participation in political processes, participation turns out to be associated with lengthy approvals, lack of interest on the part of city administrations about approving the conditions for holding public events [31].

Although formal conditions for civil practices exist, one must turn to internal factors: values, attitudes of student social behavior. When studying the social behavior of young people in the civil sphere in regional communities in southern Russia, researchers noted that at the turn of the century the mass consciousness of Russians, including young people, was swept by a conservative wave, which made the mental programs of youth social behavior antinomic. Nevertheless, the influence of

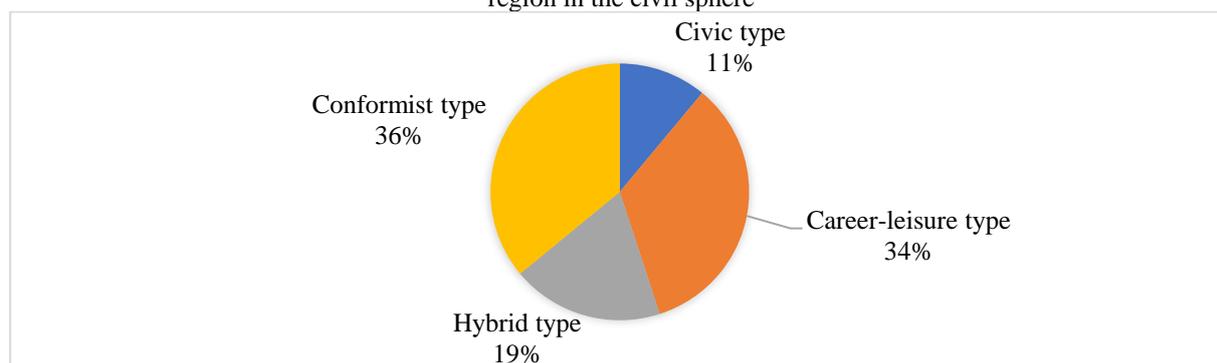
the media which broadcasts information about civil society in the West, about the importance of civic participation for achieving civil rights, influencing government decisions, transform the students' perception of civic participation. Thus, two opposite types of mental programs of social behavior in the civil sphere have formed in Russian society: conservative and liberal.

The so-called official type of civic consciousness, faithful and loyal, has developed in the mental program of the conservative type of social behavior in the civil sphere. Citizenship for conservatives as representatives of the paternalistic nature of relations between the state and society reflects only the understanding of their rights as a citizen, the fulfillment of their duties and awareness of the moral obligations of a citizen to the state and society. For young "conservatives", being a citizen of Russia means living in Russia, having a Russian passport, these "conservatives" are not particularly interested in civic organizations and are not ready to participate in their activities, citing lack of time, desire, and lack of faith in the efficiency of joint civic actions. In their opinion, an ordinary citizen cannot influence the state of affairs in the country in any way.

Speaking about the mental program of the liberal type of social behavior in the civil sphere, it is important to note that the program largely includes the activity-based component of citizenship. For liberals, citizenship is primarily a value and a terminal one. Liberals need to participate in solving socially significant economic, social and political tasks for the country, as well as respect for the rights and freedoms of other citizens. For young "liberals", being a citizen of Russia means being socially active, working for the good of society, contributing to its development, and respectfully treating other nationalities. Such students are aware of the existence of civic organizations, are ready to participate in their activities, believe that the development of their region can be influenced through participation in the activities of organizations, public initiatives. Public activity can be both oppositional and pro-government. In the mental program of the liberal type, citizenship is understood either as oppositional, critical, rebellious or as active, competent, moral, manifested in creative social activity.

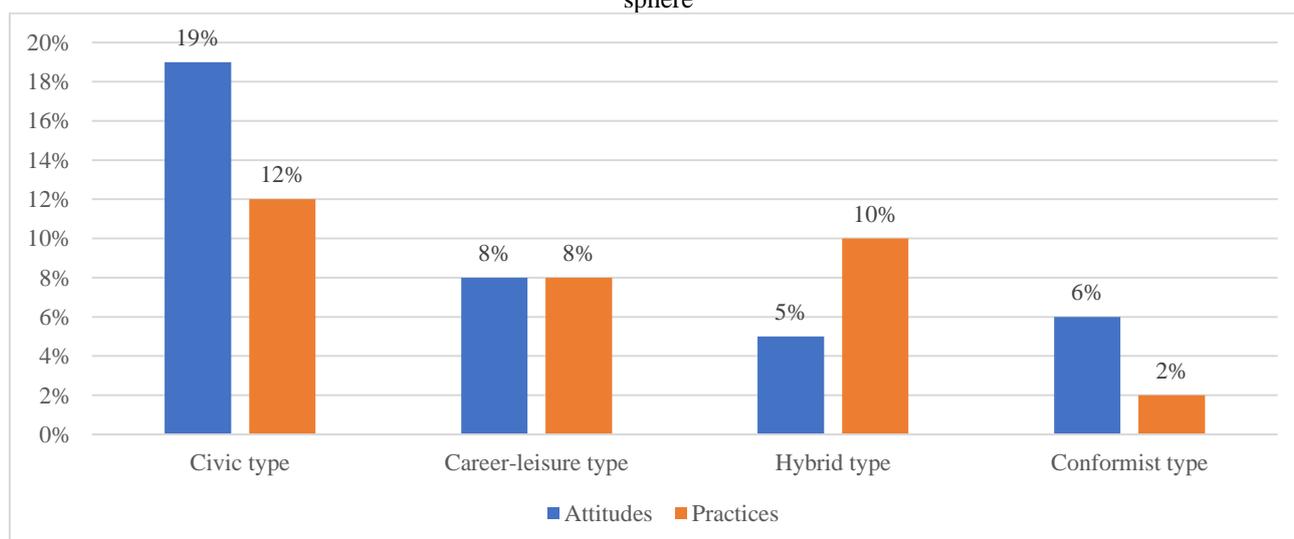
The results of a sociological study of the mental program structures: the idea of civic participation as a terminal or instrumental value, attitudes towards participation in civic practices, motivations and implementation of civic-social and civic-political practices made it possible to identify four types of social behavior of students in the civic sphere: civic type, career-leisure type, hybrid type and conformist type (Diagram 1).

Diagram 1. Shares of distribution by types of social behavior of students at higher educational institutions in the Rostov region in the civil sphere



About 11% of students can be attributed to the civic type of social behavior of students in the civil sphere. The students have liberal-type mental programs. For the students, civic participation is a terminal value that is manifested in the desire to help other people, the city, society, defend their rights and interests, influence government decisions. Although these students are characterized by average attitudes for participation in public initiatives and the activities of public organizations, the students most often continuously take part in civic practices (12% in comparison with career and leisure – 9%, hybrid – 8 %). However, these students who are more inclined to participate in protest actions, which is confirmed by the study of their civic practices – the students participated in political protests more often than others (Diagram 2).

Diagram 2. The distribution of protest attitudes and practices among types of social behavior of students in the civil sphere

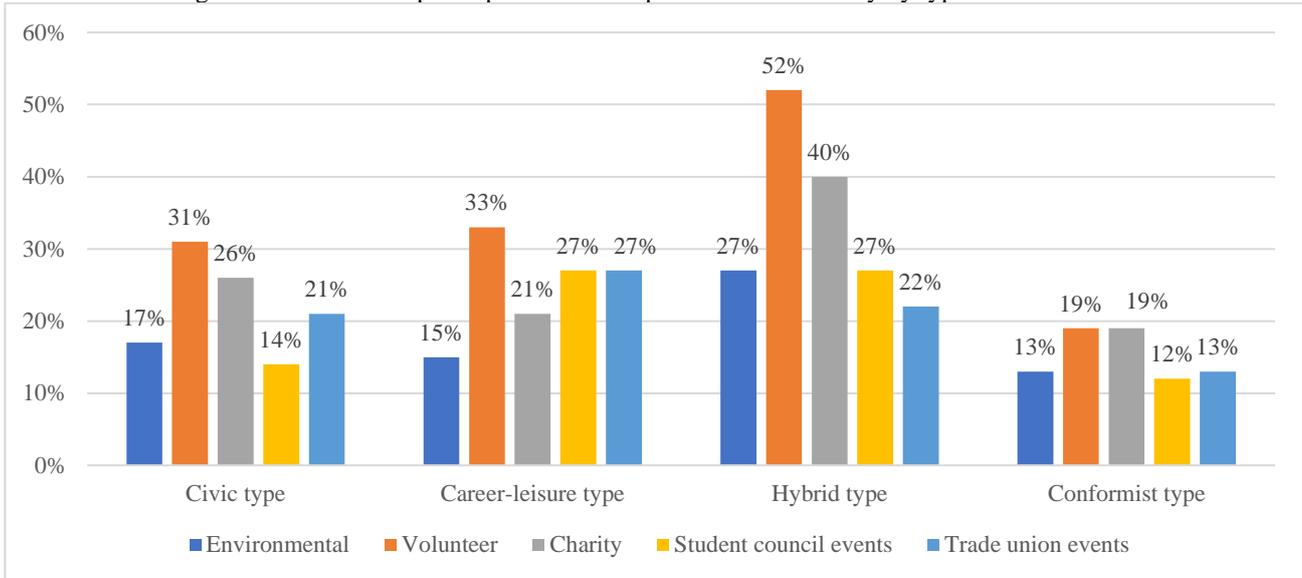


Students with a civic type of social behavior have average attitudes towards participation in various events at the university: 17% are ready to take part in environmental events, 31% in volunteer, 26% in charity, 14% in student council events, 21% in the activities of the trade union (Diagram 3.) However, this attitude remains unimplemented in environmental (only 10% had participation experience) and charitable (12% had participation experience) events, which reflects the high demand of students for such civic practices at the university. These students take part in university activities, often for the institution's benefit, striving to help people, the city and society.

The majority of students participating in civil practices – 34% – belong to the career-leisure type of social behavior in the civil sphere. For such students, participation in civic practices is an instrumental value: an opportunity to spend their free time interestingly, meet new people, communicate with friends, fulfill their abilities, and build a career in public and political life. Although these students have higher attitudes towards participation in the activities of public organizations and public initiatives, their participation is varied, only 9% regularly participate in their free time. These students are more likely to be ready to discuss public issues in Internet communities (27%). The motivation for participation in political elections is the desire to support a certain candidate or party, which is associated with the instrumental value of civic participation to build a career.

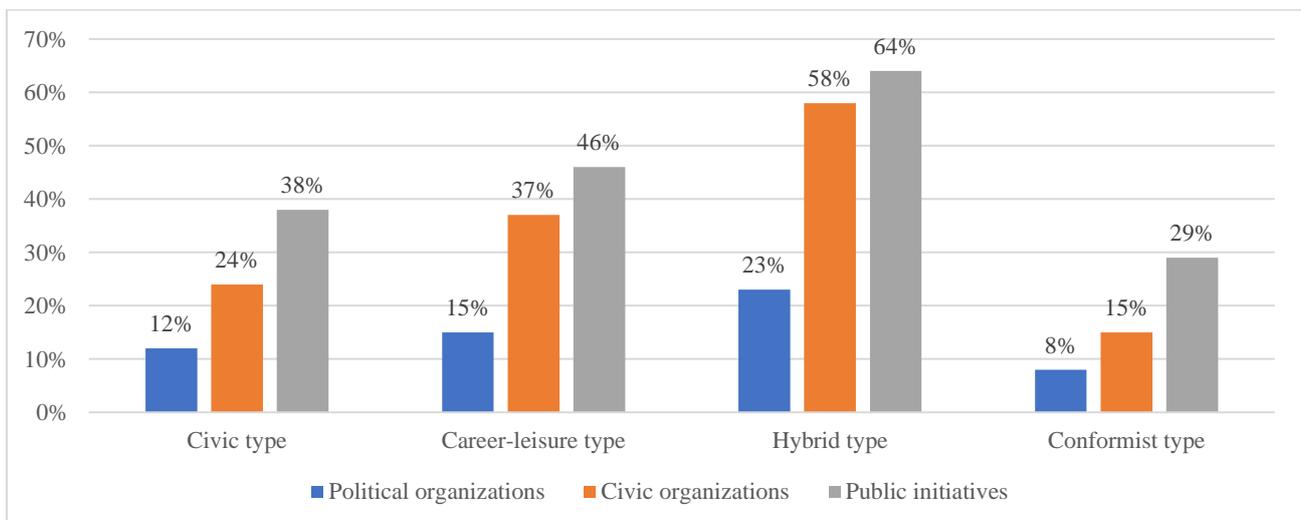
The determining factor for students of the career and leisure type of social behavior in the civil sphere is time. More often than others, these students indicated that they did not take part in civil and political practices because there was no time. This explains the instrumental value of participation in university and civic practices outside the university with the motivation to spend their free time. That is, when the students have a couple of hours, they will gladly take part in the activities. As for the events within the university, students with a career and leisure type of social behavior are more likely to have an attitude towards the activities of the student council and the trade union of the university, which they later implement (Diagram 3). Such students more often than others indicated the motivation for receiving a high scholarship for participating in extracurricular activities at universities.

Diagram 3. Attitudes to participation in civic practices at university by type of student social behavior



As a result of sociological analysis of the empirical results, a hybrid type of social behavior of students in the civil sphere was identified, which included about 19% of students. The type is hybrid because it is a synthesis of civil and career-leisure characteristics. For these students, civic participation is both a terminal and an instrumental value: the students strive to help people, the city, society, and just spend their free time, communicate, and even build a career in public and political life. It is these students who have the highest attitude towards active participation in civic practices of both political and non-political nature: the activities of political (23%) and public organizations (58%), public initiatives (64%) (Diagram 4).

Diagram 4. Attitudes for participation in civil organizations by type of social behavior of students



High attitudes are manifested in high participation rates, although not permanently. For example, when it comes to university events, students with a hybrid type of social behavior are ready to take part and participate in environmental events (27%), and in volunteer (52%) and charitable (40%) events (Diagram 3.) Such students can often be found at civic events outside the university: at large volunteer events (Victory Volunteers, World Cup) (29%), at charity events to help the elderly, disabled people (44%), collecting material assistance for the poor (32%) as well as city volunteer clean-ups and environmental events (60%). In addition, students with a hybrid type of behavior are more likely than others to participate in demonstrations and processions (26%). Such students more often than others have experience in organizing events within the university (33%).

There are more students with a conformist type of social behavior in the civil sphere – 36%. This is because a clear understanding of the expediency and significance of civic participation has not yet developed in Russian society. Most students with a conformist type of social behavior have a conservative type of mental program of social behavior. The feature is that civic participation for them is neither a terminal nor an instrumental value. Students with this type of social behavior in the civil sphere have practically no attitudes towards civic participation: these students are rarely interested in the activities of public organizations or public initiatives. The only way the students can be active is through online practices: discussing issues in Internet communities, signing a petition. All modern youth are included in the virtual space, so their activity is understandable, at least on the Internet.

A small share of these students has ever taken part in civic-political or civic-social practices, rather ritually or compulsorily. For example, these students take part in political elections not to vote for a particular candidate or political party but rather to fulfill their civic duty (14% versus 25%). However, mostly the students do not take part in civil and political practices because they are not interested in politics at all. Among students with a conformist type of social behavior, there are students for whom civic participation was previously a value but now other life circumstances or plans have become dominant.

The particular significance of the university as a platform for the formation of civic engagement and participation is manifested in the study of attitudes towards university activities, even among students with a conformist type of social behavior. For example, 13% of such students would take part in environmental practices, 19% in volunteer and charitable activities, 12% and 13% in events of the student council and the university trade union (Diagram 3).

The main reason for the refusal to participate in civic practices of students with a conformist type of social behavior is the lack of time – 51%, lack of desire – 49%, 17% do not know where and how to take part. About 23% do not believe in the efficiency of events, do not trust public organizations and people who organize events (Diagram 5.)

Diagram 5. Reasons for refusing to participate? in civil practices among students with the conformist type of social behavior



Speaking of the socio-demographic aspects of the types of students' social behavior in the civil sphere, the civil and hybrid types are more common among young women, since the latter are more inclined to help their loved ones, participate in charity. Young men are more often conformists who are skeptical about civic initiatives. Students from rural areas are often instrumental in civic practices: want to spend their free time, communicate, and sometimes make a career in public and political life. Freshmen are more likely to either have hybrid values and take part in civic practices to show civic stance and achieve personal goals or do not participate at all. The most permanent participants in civic practices are those students who assess their financial situation as rather good, which corresponds to the criterion of the middle class, which is also typical for Western society.

5. Discussion

Thus, the civil sphere in Russia remains quite formalized, where civil events are implemented at the initiative of committees on youth policy, relevant government agencies, and university administrations. However, the very concept of civil society should more reflect the independence of its actors, self-organization, and informal character.

The results of a sociological study of the social behavior of university students in the Rostov region show that the most common type of social behavior remains conformist. This type is

characterized by passivity in the civic sphere, the lack of desire and time for students to take part in civic practices. This type of social behavior was formed, on the one hand, under the influence of conservative mental structures prevalent in Russian society, where it is not customary to take part in public issues, influence government decision-making. On the other hand, such behavior was fostered in formalized conditions for the implementation of civic practices, where state bodies responsible for working with youth involve a minimal part of students in formal civic activities.

However, it must be emphasized that more than half of the students have an attitude of readiness to participate in civil-social and civil-political practices. Thus, we note the strong influence of liberal ideas about civic participation on student youth. Moreover, in each of the types of students' social behavior in the civil sphere, civic participation is both a terminal value and an instrumental value associated with the corresponding motivation. For only 11%, civic participation is a terminal value: a desire to help the city, society, and influence government decisions. Such students belong to the civic type of social behavior and are serious about participating in civic practices, including demonstrating protest attitudes.

Among a more significant part of students, instrumental ideas about civic participation are widespread, manifested in the desire to spend their free time interestingly, communicate with friends, fulfill their abilities and build a career. Such tendencies, on the one hand, determine the semantic transformations of the understanding of civic consciousness and its instrumentalization in Russian society. On the other hand, the tendencies represent an efficient mechanism for involving students in the civic sphere: holding interesting events in which students can fulfill their needs, creating platforms for youth communication and spending free time, as well as such civic practices in which the students can fulfill their abilities.

The most adaptive to modern Russian realities is the hybrid type of social behavior of students in the civil sphere, which includes one-fifth of the student community. The students realize that civic participation for them is both high moral values associated with helping people and society, and sometimes just communication or spending free time. The flexibility and breadth of motivational differences form their higher attitudes towards participation in the activities of public organizations and the implementation of public initiatives. As a result, these students are more likely than others to participate in a larger number of civil-social and civil-political practices. It is students with a hybrid type of social behavior who are more likely to have experience in organizing informal civil practices outside the university.

We see that student youth represents a prospect for the formation of civil society in Russia. However, the implementation of formal practices by youth committees is not a key mechanism for involving students in solving social problems. The university is rather a special platform for social trust between young people, and the creation of conditions for the independent organization of civil environmental, volunteer, charitable initiatives will stimulate the students' activity and their awareness of their own importance for society. These conditions can be manifested in additional funding of social projects and student initiatives, the allocation of special zones for conducting civil practices such as co-working spaces, moral approval from the university administration and teachers of the involvement of students in the civic sphere.

6. Conclusion

The main goal of the study, which was to find out the characteristics of the social behavior of university students in the civil sphere, was achieved. According to the results obtained in the survey of students of the Rostov region, four types of social behavior of students in the civil sphere are distinguished: civic type, career-leisure type, hybrid type and conformist type. The analysis of the results allowed one to conclude that the most common type is the conformist type of social behavior which was formed under the influence of conservative structures of mental programs, as well as organizational and institutional conditions in the civil sphere. However, more than half of the students are willing to participate in civic practices, although the students have both terminal and instrumental values.

Comparative studies with other regions of Russia seem promising due to the specific features of Russia's multinational development and the varying degrees of influence of conservative and liberal structures of mental programs on the social behavior of students. The results of the study may be interesting from the point of view of a new methodological perspective, as well as for sociologists studying the issues of social behavior of students and managers, developing a strategy for extracurricular activities in universities and state youth policy.

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