

Consolidation of rural municipal communities as a problem of mass consciousness of the population

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Abstract. The article discusses the issues of consolidation of rural communities, which is one of the most important conditions for the successful development of the village. Based on the study of various theories of solidarity, the article analyzes the value, projective, cognitive, practical aspects of the perception by the mass consciousness of villagers of the idea of consolidating society in the countryside. The empirical basis of the article was the results of a sociological study "Features of the processes of consolidation of rural municipal communities", which was conducted by the Department of Social Technologies and Public Service of the National Research University "BelSU" in 2020 among the rural population of the municipal districts of the Belgorod region. The data obtained in the course of the study allow us to assert that, although subjectively, rural residents have a predisposition to perceive the idea of consolidation, and it has undoubted attractiveness, the research participants realistically and pragmatically assess the possibilities of the practical implementation of this process, which will undoubtedly act as a significant demotivator in the event of initiating a consolidation strategy in a particular region. Thus, the complexity of the consolidation process and its uncertainty are emphasized.

1 Introduction

In conditions of uncertainty and disunity of society, intensified by crisis processes, a person today, more than ever, needs to be united with like-minded people. It is vitally important for people to work with fellow citizens to overcome difficulties and obstacles, achieve their goals and feel satisfied with life. The unity of people based on the presence of common interests, even in difficult or unfavorable situations, is called solidarity. Solidarity brings people together in communities and serves as a platform for the reproduction and growth of human capital.

In the Russian Federation, the task of consolidation is additionally actualized due to the large number of rural settlements and significant subcultural differences between their

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inhabitants. In addition, the permanent crisis in recent years in most spheres of society has led to a significant decrease in the standard of living of most of the population, an increase in social inequality and, as a result, to an exacerbation of contradictions and increased conflict. Under these conditions, an established civil dialogue is in demand at the level of rural municipalities, since in the countryside, more than in the city, the effectiveness of solving life problems depends on its effectiveness. Therefore, the formation of the consolidation potential of rural municipalities should become an important strategic task of their development, as well as state policy in general. In addition, only consolidated communities can be competitive in a globalizing world, and social relations based on mutual trust, sympathy and support create the most favorable conditions for the development of the human personality.

The issues of social consolidation were paid attention to by many authors, who emphasized its necessity and relevance in society.

The idea of consolidation is largely based on the development of the theory of social solidarity by E. Durkheim, who believed that only people who are open to each other can bring the state to a fundamentally new level [1]. The sociologist argued that universal solidarity is much stronger than the use of force and weapons of the authorities. In turn, in the theory of O. Comte, solidarity is interpreted as a universal property of all natural phenomena, reaching its apogee in society and acting in it in the form of consensus [2].

A different approach is presented in the works of the famous American sociologist T. Parsons, according to which society is a complexly organized system consisting of separate elements actively interacting with each other. The researcher noted that this or that system develops through differentiation and complication, but at the same time retains relative harmony. He emphasized that there is a need for the interaction of constituent elements, which must interact with each other, relying on the unity of all value and functional elements and their constituent components. According to the author, any social action must be clearly correlated with a coordinate system that includes “the orientation of the agent or agents towards a situation that presupposes the presence of other agents. Thus, the complex of elements of action and interaction is a complex of relations” [3].

In turn, JG Mead singled out the “institutional” pole in the issue of solidarity, which “is constituted by the reactions of individuals to the identical reactions of other individuals, or to the reactions of organized social groups as a whole, taking into account certain sets of social incentives; these class or group reactions are the sources, basis and content of social institutions”. He concluded: “The life of the social whole is completely determined by social interaction” [4].

In G. Blomer's theory, “the life of a community is a process in which people form, maintain and transform objects of their world through the assignment of these objects. Objects do not have any fixed status, except for their own values, supported through definitions created by people” [5]. According to G. Blomer, in the course of the interaction of members of society, values appear that determine these interactions. The complex of meanings, unchanged in their origin, in Bloomer acquires a transformative orientation and requires daily change and confirmation. This interaction defines solidarity, which is social integrity.

P. Bourdieu considered solidarity through symbolic structures, understanding them as a means of communication. “Symbols,” wrote P. Bourdieu, “are primarily instruments of social integration: as tools of cognition and communication, they make possible agreement on the meaning of the social world, and this agreement plays a fundamental role in the reproduction of social order. “Logical” integration is a precondition for “moral” integration” [6]. Symbolic power, according to P. Bourdieu, creates a consensus in society. “In contrast to the myth, which is a collectively created and acquired product, ideologies discuss particular interests, which they seek to represent as the interests of the general, shared by

the whole group. The dominant culture promotes the integration of the dominant class; it also contributes to the fictitious integration of society as a whole and, thereby, to the apathy (false consciousness) of the repressed class; finally, it contributes to the legitimization of the established order through the establishment of hierarchies and their legitimation" [6].

Consolidation, according to E. Laszlo's theory, is perceived as a "cognitive map of society" with a single ideology. "The social cognitive map," writes the author, "is a song performed by every member of a stabilized society. Through the performance of a common song, members of the society determine the general elements of the environment and give rise to the behavior necessary for the reproduction of society in the future" [7].

J. Alexander reduces solidarity to social justice and examines it through the problems of civil society. The American scientist understands civil society as a form of "social and cultural organization rooted in both radical individualism and uncompromising collectivism" [8].

According to the German philosopher J. Habermas, solidarity is "the relationship of reciprocity, on which the recognition of each other by sane subjects is based, is already built into the action in which the root of the discussion is found. Therefore, the abandonment of a reasoned discussion, undertaken by a radical skeptic, turns out to be an empty demarche. Even one who is consistent in refraining from discussion cannot get out of everyday communication practice; he remains at the mercy of its premises, and the latter, in turn, are partly identical to the premises of an argumentative discussion in general" [9]. Thus, J. Habermas examines the problem of social solidarity through the communication of subjects. In the researches of the scientist there is a statement: "Modern societies have three resources, thanks to which they can satisfy their need for management: money, power and solidarity. A new equilibrium must be established between their spheres of influence. By this I mean that it is necessary to assert the socially integrative power of solidarity against both other power resources - money and administrative power. Until now, the spheres of life, specializing in the transfer of traditional values and cultural knowledge, in the integration of groups and the socialization of the younger generation, have been forced to turn to solidarity. But you have to draw strength from the same source and that political will, which should have an impact on the delimitation of these communicatively structured spheres of life and exchange between them, on the one hand, and on the state and the economy, on the other" [10]. From the point of view of J. Habermas, the solution to the problem of solidarity is possible in achieving the consolidation of three components: the state, capital and society.

Loyalty and loyalty are the key concepts of solidarity, according to J. Kapeller and F. Walkenstein [11]. In turn, E. Kohlers, describing social consolidation, believed that each member of society has the right to take responsibility and act fairly, thereby emphasizing individuality in their decisions [12]. Research on the consolidation of M. Lam is based on the study of the general values of society. In her opinion, the subject of human rights is the basis for a dialogue on the formation of common values [13]. British researcher S. Condor believes that in order to achieve the consolidation of society, a model of citizenship is needed, taking into account all the interests of society [14].

Thus, there is no unity among researchers in determining the content of consolidation. Moreover, there are practically no works that consider the specifics of this process in relation to rural municipalities. In addition, the lack of empirical studies designed to assess the peculiarities of the dispositions of the population of municipalities regarding the state and prospects of consolidation does not allow it to conceptually substantiate it.

The purpose of this work is to analyze the reflection in the mass consciousness of rural residents of consolidation processes in municipalities.

2 Research methodology

The empirical basis for the analysis of the problem of consolidation of rural municipal communities was the results of the sociological study "Features of the processes of consolidation of rural municipal communities", which was conducted by the Department of Social Technologies and Public Service of the National Research University "BelSU" in 2020 among the rural population of the municipal districts of the Belgorod region. The study was carried out using the methods of a questionnaire survey of the population (n = 486) and municipal employees of rural municipalities (n = 100), an expert survey (n = 25) and focus group interviewing based on a multi-stage quota sample. The signs of quotas were: place of residence, gender and age.

3 Results and discussion

When interpreting the findings of the study, one should take into account the characteristics of the territory in which it was conducted. The Belgorod Region is one of the leaders of the Russian agro-industrial complex. The region generates a tenth of the profits in Russian agriculture. Over the past decade, the agro-industrial complex of the Belgorod Region has become one of the leading backbone sectors of the economy. Belgorod agrarians make a significant contribution to ensuring food security in Russia. With a little more than 1% of the total Russian arable land and about the same share of the population, the region produces more than 4.6% of the gross agricultural product of the Russian Federation. The contribution to domestic industrial production of agricultural products is even higher - 7%. The main documents defining the priorities for the development of rural areas of the region include the State Program "Comprehensive Rural Development" and the Strategy "Formation of a Regional Solidarity Society for 2011–2025". The main goal of the Strategy is to improve the quality of human relations.

Taking into account these circumstances, it becomes obvious that our conclusions cannot be extrapolated to the majority of subjects of the Russian Federation, in which the problem of consolidation is practically not actualized.

In the course of the sociological survey, several aspects of the problem of consolidation were subject to assessment.

First, the value aspect, which is to determine the degree of importance and necessity of consolidation of local communities for the villagers. The poll showed that 79.38% of rural residents considered the consolidation necessary. 6.88% of the surveyed population denied its necessity; 13.74% found it difficult to answer the question (Fig. 1). Thus, most of the residents consider it necessary to consolidate the rural municipal community. At the same time, the rate of recognition of the value of consolidation depends on the presence of a clear understanding of it. Consolidation is most valuable for those who have this view (78.51%). Among those who do not have it, the recognition rate for the value of consolidation is only 22.49%.

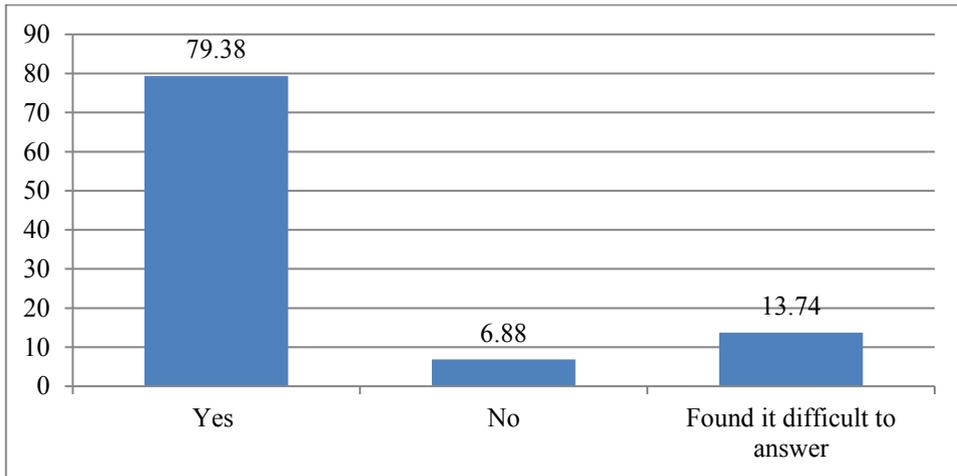


Fig. 1. Distribution of answers to the question: "Is it necessary to consolidate at the level of a rural settlement?"

We associate a high level of awareness of the content of consolidation and recognition of its value with an intensive information campaign, which was carried out as part of the implementation of the Strategy "Formation of a regional solidarity society for 2011–2025". Based on this, it can be assumed that without such efforts, the assessment of the need for consolidation could be significantly lower, which is probably the case in other regions where consolidation practices have not yet been initiated.

Secondly, the projective aspect associated with the assessment of the possibilities of consolidation by the population. Most (66.11%) of the surveyed rural residents consider consolidation possible (Fig. 2). This, according to the respondents, will be facilitated by the presence of common traditional values and a common cause (41.29% and 31.95%, respectively). Thus, in the mass consciousness, consolidation is perceived, first of all, as the achievement of value unity, which is unlikely in a modern deeply differentiated society.

To the question "Who, in your opinion, most of all contributes to the consolidation of society?", 31.40% of the respondents answered that it is the population itself. However, some citizens believe that most of all consolidation practices can be stimulated by local government bodies, the church and the media (19.01%, 16.12%, 15.08%, respectively). It is important to note that the opinion of municipal employees on this issue coincided with the opinion of citizens. So, in their opinion, consolidation is impossible without the desire of the residents themselves, their activity and the desire to unite interests in order to transform their rural settlement (36.44%, 32.20%, 28.81% of respondents, respectively).

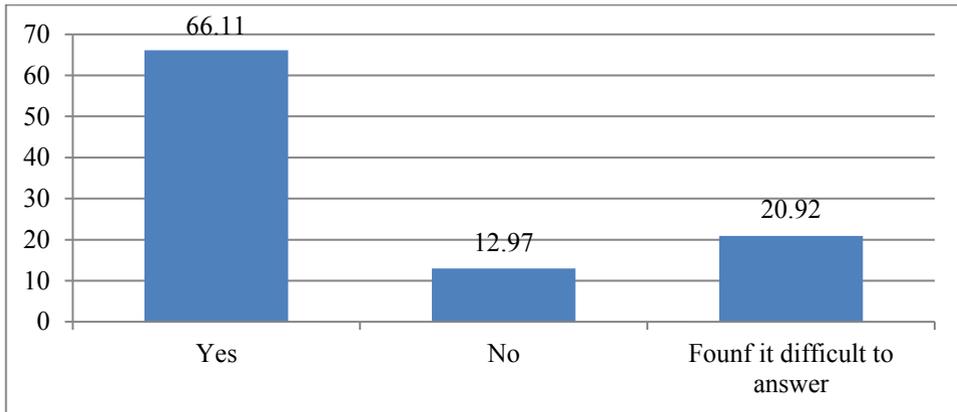


Fig. 2. Distribution of answers to the question: "Is it possible to consolidate society today?".

The share of those who believe in the possibility of consolidation is significantly lower than the share of those who recognize its value. This circumstance is obviously due to the respondents' understanding of the existence of serious barriers arising in the process of consolidation. It is quite significant that local residents associate the idea of consolidation not with the efforts of the authorities, but with the activity of the population itself. Due to this circumstance, most likely, the idea of consolidation will be more successful if it comes not from municipal authorities, but from civil society institutions. Civil society institutions, in comparison with local authorities, have a number of advantages that make it possible to more or less successfully promote the idea of consolidation. These include, first of all, less formalization of their activities and the presence of significant cultural capital, which is a complex of opportunities available to their members to transform the socio-cultural environment, which is a consequence of the ability and readiness of citizens to actively transform activities in the field of culture. In the context of high social differentiation of society, it is in the sphere of culture that a significant number of prerequisites are formed for the unification of rural municipalities.

Thirdly, the cognitive aspect, which consists in determining the presence / absence of clear ideas among respondents regarding an extremely wide range of problems associated with the implementation of consolidation practices. The survey revealed the fact that the majority of rural residents have a fairly clear idea of the reasons that hinder the consolidation of society; found it difficult to name them only 4.58% of the surveyed citizens. Citizens cite as such reasons: the absence of unifying values 39.79%, social differentiation 29.38%, violation of the principle of social justice 27.50%, growth of corruption, crime 23.33%, the gap between generations 20%, disintegration of family and kinship ties 17.08%, decline in the cultural level 15.63 %, destructive informational impact 14.79%, increase in the share of non-indigenous population with a specific culture 10.63%, mistakes and miscalculations of local authorities 9.79% (Fig. 3).

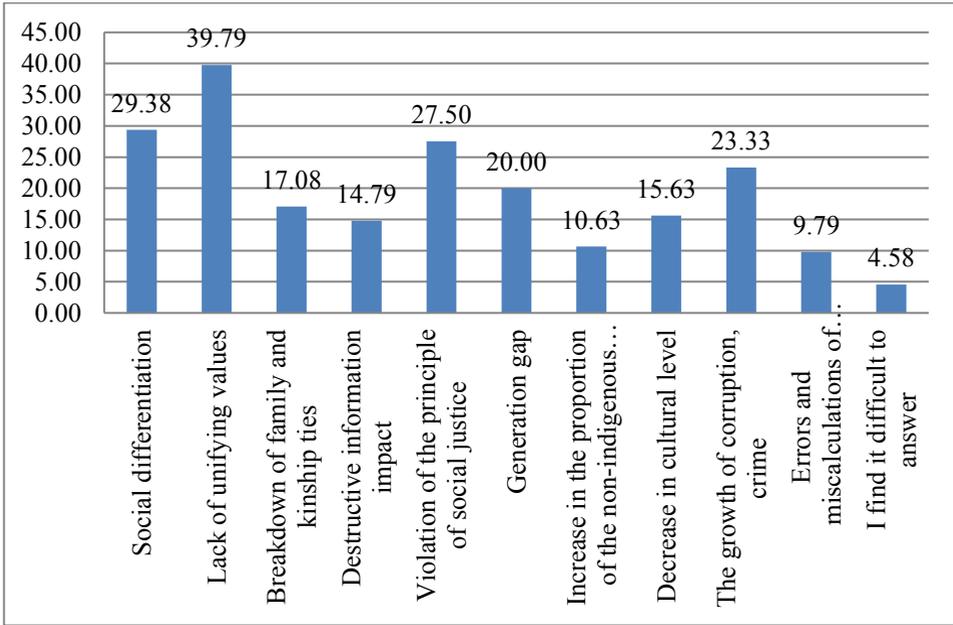


Fig. 3. Distribution of answers to the question: "What can impede consolidation? (indicate no more than three answer options) ".

So, the respondents do not reduce the problem of the difficulties of consolidating to any one reason. None of the above answer options gained the majority of supporters. This additionally emphasizes the complexity of the consolidation process and, to a certain extent, the uncertainty of its assessment of the prospects in the public mind.

Fourth, the practical aspect, which consists in determining the degree of possession of the villagers with the skills of joint participation in solving the problems of the settlement, which contribute to unification and, therefore, consolidate the local community. According to the data obtained, 41.86% of the surveyed population took part in solving the problems of the population, in particular, in the process of landscaping (24.49%) and creative and leisure activities (23.47%) (Fig. 4).

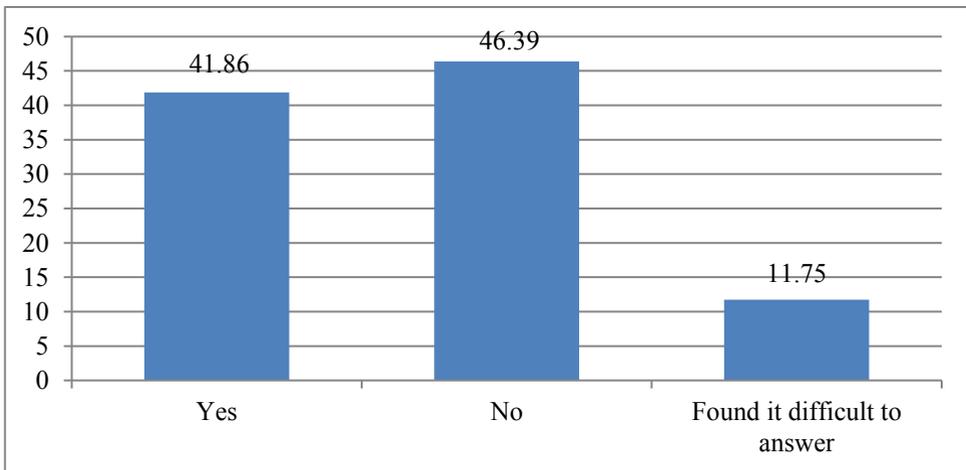


Fig. 4. Distribution of answers to the question: "Do you participate in solving the problems of your settlement?".

However, more than half of rural residents do not have such skills. The main reasons for this, in our opinion, are the lack of interpersonal and institutional trust (including trust in the authorities (Fig. 5), as well as the belief in the possibility of really influencing the situation in their place of residence (28.15% of respondents said that their the word changes nothing).

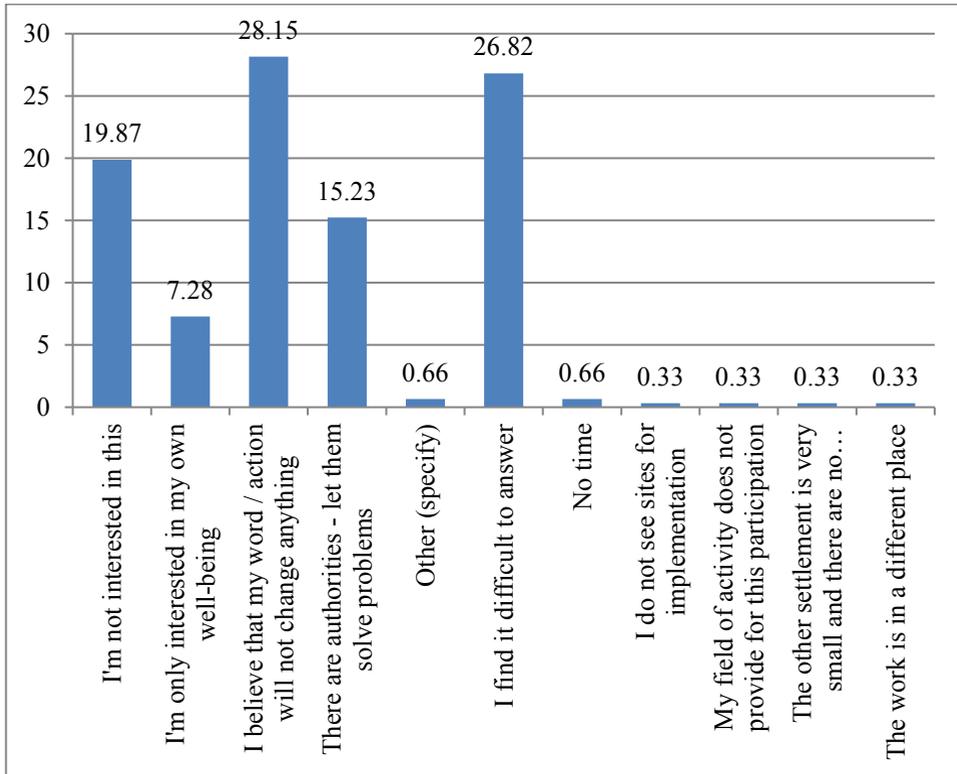


Fig. 5. Answer to the question "Why don't you participate in solving the problems of your settlement?"

Unfortunately, it can be stated that only less than half of the local residents are more or less involved in the transformation of social relations in the countryside, interacting with their fellow citizens. This means that the traditions of collective action, which could serve as a basis for the spread of consolidation practices, have been largely lost in rural areas.

4 Conclusion

The results of the conducted research give us the opportunity to assert that subjectively rural residents have a predisposition to perceive the idea of consolidation. It has an undeniable value and is potentially in demand in modern conditions. At the same time, the survey participants realistically and pragmatically assess the possibilities of the practical implementation of this process, which will undoubtedly act as a significant demotivator in the event of the initiation of a consolidation strategy in a particular region. At the same time, additional difficulties are associated with a significant devaluation of the collective practices of organizing public life, traditional for the Russian countryside, as well as with a rather critical attitude towards local authorities in terms of their ability to really unite the population of municipalities.

The article was prepared with the financial support of the Russian Foundation for Basic Research within the framework of the scientific project "Reproduction of the cultural capital of civil society institutions in the region" (No. 20-311-90013).

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