

Informal Patterns of Civil Society and Social Stability at a Local Level

Patrones informales de la sociedad civil y la estabilidad social a nivel local

Aues M. KUMYKOV [1](#); Murat Z. SHOGENOV [2](#); Nazir A. CHEMAEV [3](#); Fatima Z. SHOGENOVA [4](#); Natalia N. RESHETNIKOVA [5](#)

Received: 04/11/2017 • Approved: 10/11/2017

ABSTRACT:

The issue of civil society in the region has become one of the most widespread public discourses. However, beyond the debates on democratization one can find a variety of examples of deeply rooted ways of civic participation at the level of local communities. The purpose of this paper is to provide a review on conceptual approaches to civil society in order to develop a set of working definitions for a potential empirical research in this field.

Keywords: civil society, regional policy, political stability, sustainability, social institutions.

RESUMEN:

La cuestión de la sociedad civil en la región se ha convertido en uno de los discursos públicos más generalizados. Sin embargo, más allá de los debates sobre la democratización se puede encontrar una variedad de ejemplos de formas profundamente arraigadas de participación cívica en el nivel de las comunidades locales. El propósito de este trabajo es proporcionar una revisión de los enfoques conceptuales de la sociedad civil con el fin de desarrollar un conjunto de definiciones de trabajo para una investigación empírica potencial en este campo.

Palabras clave: sociedad civil, política regional, estabilidad política, sostenibilidad, instituciones sociales.

The problems of civil society in modern Russia are one of the most widespread public discourses that are actively discussed among politicians, society, mass media, experts, and scholars from various spheres. However, the traditional treatment of civil society and related debates are only a tip of the iceberg. The most interesting and significant part, presented by local models and manifestations of civil society, attracts not so much attention of researchers.

When one tries to go beyond the discourse of democratization, it is possible to find multiple examples in various cultures of the world, in which certain informal, deep methods of civil participation make a substantial contribution into provision of local stability – despite the non-democratic foundations of local political systems. At the local level of various regions of the Russian Federation, there are a lot of informal, and in certain cases – traditional, models of civil participation which perform the role of authentic institutes of civil society. Despite the fact that these institutes are beyond the limits of the dominating debates, they deal with topical issues and often solve them. These institutes are especially important in the circumstances of weak

presence of the institutional state at the local level, where the control of the state over distribution of authority and resources is rather limited [6](#). In this local context, the role of civil society in provision of stability is largely predetermined by its potential of non-violent solution of the emerging social conflicts and, therefore, in provision of cooperation between the main social actors. At that, due to deficit of such studies at the local level, it is difficult to identify and distinguish the stabilizing and destabilizing factors and tendencies.

Civil society at the local level is a complex field for any research. It faces a set of problems, the most complicated of which is the corresponding conceptualization. The complexity consists not only in difficult academic debates on civil society and diversity of notions in various theoretical and practical interpretations. The largest problem is the issues to which level these concepts can be analytically relevant for a specific localized social and political reality. On the one hand, theoretical foundations of civil society as a democratic institute come from the Western academic tradition. On the other hand, the Western tradition provides a scarce idea of studying the dynamics of local civil institutes – especially in complex transit or hybrid political systems. For development of a set of work definitions for the empirical research, let us conduct the comparative analysis of current conceptual approaches.

As is known, the notion “civil society” has several patterns and corresponding definitions in the Western tradition. The most general and popular is the treatment of civil society as an inseparable element of democratic civil values. Another approach emphasizes the institutional aspect of civil society and defines it as a system or aggregation of non-government organizations and establishments [7](#). However, separation of civil society from the state and business is the key characteristics for both approaches. This aspect is reflected in the concept of the “third sector” of society, which includes family and the private sphere [8](#). In particular, in our opinion, it is a specific characteristic of civil society which focuses on *its informal patterns and local level of manifestations* and is the most perspective one for potential empirical studies in North Caucasus. In their turn, these manifestations could have various forms.

There are various definitions for description of participation of local societies in self-administration and everyday life. Some of them emphasize the political component and the corresponding activities; others emphasize on the level of public involvement into a wider specter of local social relations, including on the social roles and groups.

The first definition is treated as “civic engagement/participation”. It is seen as people’s readiness to participate in the political process and other issues that influence the life of local society. Very often, the level of civic participation is used for evaluation of the level of democratization. According to some studies, the higher the level of civic participation and involvement of people, the higher the indicators for such key principle as equality [9](#). Civic participation may include various forms of individual and group activities within the groups aimed at solving any problems or interactions with the institutes of representative democracy, or, in other words, with local authorities [10](#). Within this concept, the source of activity is the sense of personal civic responsibility of a society’s representative regardless of specific social connections or networks in which he can be involved. There is a similar definition which supposes public participation in managerial decisions (public participation), which is considered to be the most important political principle of democratic management. According to the definition of the International association of civic participation, it supposes the political right of the persons who are influenced by the consequences of managerial decisions for participation in the making of these decisions [11](#).

The second approach is defines by the term “social engagement or participation”. This term defines the level of individual’s participation in a wide range of social roles and relations in a specific society [12](#), or, in other words, the readiness of a group member to interact with its other representatives [13](#). Unlike the concept of the social network, the term “social involvement” focuses on the activities, not the group [14](#). That is, the functions related to real participation, not formal belonging to a certain group, come to the foreground. One of the key elements of “social involvement” is the lack of external constraint – an individual participates in

the group's activities due to the interiorized values and norms. In its turn, "social participation" strengthens civic capital and social norms in a specific group. Thus, "social participation" reflects the local level of social relations and is expressed in real activity, unlike civic participation, which has mostly political manifestations at the level of institutes of state and local self-administration.

Thus, civic society is a sphere of social activity – which is different from state and business – in its various formal, informal, and hybrid manifestations at the level of local groups. Specific models of social participation can form on the basis of local identities, but reflect real participation, not formal belonging to a certain social group.

Another important aspect of conceptualization of the research is determination of the actors of local civil society. Based on the offered work definition, this list cannot be limited. Configuration of actors at the local level in North Caucasus is complex and depends on the local peculiarities of authorities and resource relations. Nevertheless, it is possible to distinguish three main paired criteria for typologization of actors:

- 1) formal and informal;
- 2) official and unofficial;
- 3) individual and group.

While the second criterion has a status of officially registered public organizations, the first criterion covers various forms of informal leadership, groups, and partnership organizations. In most cases, it is possible to observe hybrid combinations. The same is true for the third criterion. Local actors could be separate individuals, groups, or formalized organizations. However, there are a lot of various configurations of these actors. Certain subjects could act openly for solving specific issues related to local interests (road repairs, problems with water and electricity supply, etc.). Other subjects act indirectly and satisfy their own private interests together with public actors (e.g., representatives of business or influential families that compete for power and local resources). In certain cases, charismatic leaders cannot be assigned to a specific group.

In its turn, formation of the groups is conducted on various grounds. It is possible to distinguish the following two directions:

- 1) general identity (religious, ethnic, regional, etc.). In this case, the groups are marked as "we-groups" and have peculiar external markers;
- 2) groups of interests (e.g., strategic groups which often use common networks of trust – veterans, countrymen, schoolmates, etc.) [15](#).

Identity groups may also have strategic goals – e.g., ethnic ruling elites and their unions. In their turn, the groups that are united by interests can be aimed at mobilization of identity – if it serves their current interests [16](#). In various social conflicts, depending on their specifics, there could be situational, strategic, and constant identities. Each actor has a set of various identities that could be actualized in specific circumstances [17](#).

There's an important aspect, which should not be ignored during identifying the group actors – especially, in North Caucasus. On the one hand, formation of groups poses an objective interest. On the other hand, this process should be distinguished from subjective design of groups as a result of research analysis. The criteria that are selected for drawing the borders between people and their unions in a specific research do not necessarily coincide with the real process of groups' formation. The fixed identification of ethnic and other social groups is bureaucratically useful for the state that strives for expanding the control to the level of local societies [18](#). This is topical for republics of North Caucasus with their Soviet heritage of the administrative and territorial structure. However, this principle of territorial marking of social groups does not often reflect the corresponding dynamics of identities at the local level. Certain strategic and identity groups may have insignificant or have no connection to a certain physical territory, while other actors are closely connected to a certain geographic location [19](#).

At last, the notion "stability" is also very important for this research. Despite its wide distribution, it is still one of the most arguable and complex issues for interpretation. Representatives of various scientific directions have different understanding of stability. The largest complexity emerges when we speak of empirical studies, for the main issue consists in determining the indicators of stability that could be measured 20.

Within this research, we stick to the approach on the basis of dynamic social stability. According to this concept, it consists of the combination of the following key characteristics of local society that could be assessed with the help of the measurable indicators:

- a) physical security – stability is characterized by low level of socially unacceptable violence;
- b) institutionalized forms of legitimate management, which includes the potential of predictable regulation of conflicts, as well as sustainability of state and local self-administration and legitimacy of political and social order;
- c) economic reproduction as a local society's capability to materially support its living activities;
- d) adaptability to changes – capability to adapt to changing conditions by means of implementing innovations and development 21.

According to the concept of dynamic stability, identification, and detailed analysis of civil actors and institutes may be one of the effective means of full understanding of local social dynamics 22. The role of civil society in this context is determined from the point of view of institutional potential in the sphere of non-violent procedural processing of conflicts, which, in its turn, stimulates the dynamic stability for intra-social relations. Due to solving the most topical problems for local societies, civil society may perform the role of one of the main triggers of social development at the local level.

Due to this, the value of local institutes of civil society for the local stability could be evaluated through understanding the aspects of these institutes' participating in interactions between such key social subjects as state, local self-administration, and local societies.

References

- Avison, William R., McLeod, Jane D., Pescosolido, Bernice A. (2007). *Mental Health, Social Mirror*. Springer. p. 333.
- Civil Society (2015). *Collins English Dictionary - Complete and Unabridged 11th Edition*. <http://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/civil-society>. (12.12.2015)
- Core Values for the Practice of Public Participation (2015). <http://www.iap2.org/?page=A4> (12.12.2015)
- Ekman, Joakim; Amna, Erik (June 2012). Political participation and civic engagement: towards a new typology. *Human Affairs (De Gruyter)*, 22 (3): 283–300.
- Elwert, Georg (1996). Kulturbegriffe und Entwicklungspolitik – über "soziokulturelle Bedingungen der Entwicklung. In: Elwert; Jensen; Kortt (ed.), *Kulturen und Innovationen*. Festschrift für Wolfgang Rudolph (vol. 30), Berlin, Duncker & Humblot, pp. 51-88.
- Elwert, Georg (2002). Conflict: Anthropological Aspects. In: Smelser, Neil J. and Baltes, Paul B. (ed.), *International Encyclopedia of the Social and Behavioral Science*, Elsevier, p. 2542-2547
- Elias, Norbert (1983). *The Court Society*, translated by Edmund Jephcott, Oxford: Blackwell originally published in 1969.
- Koehler, J., Zurcher, C. (2003). Institutions and the organisation of stability and violence. In: J. Koehler and C. Zurcher (ed.), *Potentials of Disorder*, Manchester, New York, Manchester UP, pp. 243- 265.
- Koehler, J., Gosztonyi, K., Böhnke, J. (2011). Assessing conflict and stability in Afghanistan. A methodological approach. In: *Violence, Drugs and Governance: Mexican Security in Comparative Perspective*, Stanford University, 4 October 2011)

Popkova E.G., Tinyakova V.I. (2013) Dialectical Methodology of Analysis of Economic Growth *World Applied Sciences Journal*. Vol. 24 (4). P. 467-475.

Prohaska, Thomas R., Anderson, Lynda A., Binstock, Robert H. (5 April 2012). Public Health for an Aging Society. JHU Press. pp. 249–252.

Scott, James C. (1998). *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed*. Yale University Press.

Smagina N.N., Magomedov M.G., Buklanov D.A. (2017) Sustainable Competitive Advantage of the International Business Tourism on the Regional Level *Overcoming Uncertainty of Institutional Environment as a Tool of Global Crisis Management* Editors: Popkova, Elena G. P. 541-548.

Ugnich E., Chernokozov A., Velichko E., Koryakovtseva O., Kashkhynbay B. & Dossanova A. (2016) University Innovation Ecosystem as a Mechanism of Innovation Process Development *The Social Sciences*. Vol.11. Issue 14. Pp. 3479-3483 DOI: [10.3923/sscience.2016.3479.3483](https://doi.org/10.3923/sscience.2016.3479.3483)

Verba, Sidney (1996). The Citizen as Respondent: Sample Surveys and American Democracy Presidential Address, American Political Science Association, 1995. In: *The American Political Science Review*, Vol. 90, No. 1, March.

Zaleski, Pawel Stefan (2012). *Neoliberalizm i spoleczenstwo obywatelskie [Neoliberalism and Civil Society]*, Wydawnictwo UMK, Torun.

Zhang, S., Jiang, H., & Carroll, J. M. (2011). *Integrating online and offline community through Facebook*. 2011 International Conference on Collaboration Technologies and Systems (CTS), pp. 569-578.

Gunia A.N., Koeller J., Zurcher K. Empirical studies of local conflicts. Part 1. Introduction into methodology and methods of field research. – Moscow: Media Press. – 151 p.

Shogenov M.Z., Mamkhegova L., Kogatyzhev S. History instead of law: compensation for legitimacy by historical interpretations in resource conflicts (by the example of the Kabardino-Balkar Republic) // From understanding local conflicts to using the development chances. Collection of scientific works. Issue 2. Edited by J. Koeller, A. Gunia and M. Shogenov. – Berlin-Nalchik: University of Kabardino-Balkaria, 2014. – P. 114-149.

1. K.M. Berbekov Kabardino-Balkaria State University, Nalchik, Russia. e-mail: profkbsu@mail.ru

2. K.M. Berbekov Kabardino-Balkaria State University, Nalchik, Russia.

3. K.M. Berbekov Kabardino-Balkaria State University, Nalchik, Russia.

4. K.M. Berbekov Kabardino-Balkaria State University, Nalchik, Russia.

5. Don State Technical University, Rostov-on-Don, Russia. e-mail: nata.dstu@yandex.ru

6. Ugnich E., Chernokozov A., Velichko E., Koryakovtseva O., Kashkhynbay B. & Dossanova A. (2016) University Innovation Ecosystem as a Mechanism of Innovation Process Development // *The Social Sciences*. Vol.11. Issue 14. Pp. 3479-3483 DOI: [10.3923/sscience.2016.3479.3483](https://doi.org/10.3923/sscience.2016.3479.3483)

7. Civil Society (2015). *Collins English Dictionary - Complete and Unabridged 11th Edition*. <http://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/civil-society>. (12.12.2015)

8. Zaleski, Pawel Stefan (2012). *Neoliberalizm i spoleczenstwo obywatelskie [Neoliberalism and Civil Society]*, Wydawnictwo UMK, Torun.

9. Verba, Sidney (1996). The Citizen as Respondent: Sample Surveys and American Democracy Presidential Address, American Political Science Association, 1995. In: *The American Political Science Review*, Vol. 90, No. 1, March.

10. Ekman, Joakim; Amna, Erik (June 2012). Political participation and civic engagement: towards a new typology. *Human Affairs (De Gruyter)*, 22 (3): 283–300.

11. Core Values for the Practice of Public Participation (2015). <http://www.iap2.org/?page=A4> (12.12.2015)

12. Avison, William R., McLeod, Jane D., Pescosolido, Bernice A. (2007). *Mental Health, Social Mirror*. Springer. p. 333.

13. Zhang, S., Jiang, H., & Carroll, J. M. (2011). *Integrating online and offline community through Facebook*. 2011 International Conference on Collaboration Technologies and Systems (CTS), pp. 569-578.

14. Prohaska, Thomas R., Anderson, Lynda A., Binstock, Robert H. (5 April 2012). Public Health for an Aging Society. JHU Press. pp. 249–252.

15. Elwert, Georg (1996). Kulturbegriffe und Entwicklungspolitik – über "soziokulturelle Bedingungen der Entwicklung. In:

Elwert; Jensen; Kortt (ed.), Kulturen und Innovationen. Festschrift für Wolfgang Rudolph (vol. 30), Berlin, Duncker & Humblot, pp. 51-88.

16. Shogenov M.Z., Mamkhegova L., Kogatyzhev S. History instead of law: compensation for legitimacy by historical interpretations in resource conflicts (by the example of the Kabardino-Balkar Republic) // From understanding local conflicts to using the development chances. Collection of scientific works. Issue 2. Edited by J. Koeller, A. Guni and M. Shogenov. – Berlin-Nalchik: University of Kabardino-Balkaria, 2014. – P. 114-149.

17. Koehler, J., Zurcher, C. (2003). Institutions and the organisation of stability and violence. In: J. Koehler and C. Zurcher (ed.), *Potentials of Disorder*, Manchester, New York, Manchester UP, pp. 243- 265.

18. Scott, James C. (1998). *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed*. Yale University Press.

19. Gunia A.N., Koeller J., Zurcher K. Empirical studies of local conflicts. Part 1. Introduction into methodology and methods of field research. – Moscow: Media Press. – 151 p.

20. Smagina N.N., Magomedov M.G., Buklanov D.A. Sustainable Competitive Advantage of the International Business Tourism on the Regional Level // Overcoming Uncertainty of Institutional Environment as a Tool of Global Crisis Management Editors: Popkova, Elena G. 2017. P. 541-548.

21. См.: Koehler, J., Gosztanyi, K., Böhnke, J. (2011). Assessing conflict and stability in Afghanistan. A methodological approach. In: *Violence, Drugs and Governance: Mexican Security in Comparative Perspective*, Stanford University, 4 October 2011); Elwert, Georg (2002). Conflict: Anthropological Aspects. In: Smelser, Neil J. and Baltes, Paul B. (ed.), *International Encyclopedia of the Social and Behavioral Science*, Elsevier, p. 2542-2547; Elias, Norbert (1983). *The Court Society*, translated by Edmund Jephcott, Oxford: Blackwell originally published in 1969.

22. Popkova E.G., Tinyakova V.I. Dialectical Methodology of Analysis of Economic Growth // World Applied Sciences Journal. – 2013. - 24 (4). P. 467-475.

Revista ESPACIOS. ISSN 0798 1015
Vol. 38 (Nº 57) Year 2017

[Index]

[In case you find any errors on this site, please send e-mail to webmaster]

©2017. revistaESPACIOS.com • ®Rights Reserved