Problems of Social Cohesion Development

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Abstract: The article covers the problem of social cohesion in today Russia. It is a pressing problem because of rapidly growing social disconnection in our country. The author analyzes communication as the condition of overcoming disconnection. The author also characterizes cohesion of instrumental and emotional type and defines conceptions of “social cohesion” and “social communication”. According to the author, there are a number of technologies that promote development of social cohesion. Communication in a group plays a leading role. Communicating mutual values, cooperation variants, external threats and forming of a group itself may be fulfilled only by communication systems.

Key words: Suggestion • Conformism • Social group • Social cohesion • Communication systems • Communication process • Verbal and nonverbal communication

INTRODUCTION

Social cohesion problems in today Russia are pressing more than ever. Average citizen sometimes has a certain image of the country he/she lives in, while TV (main source of information for majority of people) communicates a completely different image of it. The main source of discontent is awareness of the dramatically different people’s wealth (in modern Russia, the ratio of incomes of 10% of the richest and 10% of the most poor people is up to 25-30) [1]. People are outraged not by the difference itself but by demonstration of “the other” life style. This “otherwiseness” stimulates the most intensive development and manifestations of social disconnection. Condition and the main technology of overcoming this disconnection and creation of social cohesion is communication. One of the most well-known communication models was defined in 1948 by American sociologist H. Lasswell. According to Lasswell, the main function of mass-media is maintaining balance in society that means “equivalent enlightenment of expert, leader and citizen” that ideally helps to reach comprehension and consent in problems relating to the world as a whole [2].

Lasswell’s model in 1953 was followed by Newcomb’s model. Audience in this model is considered not as a recipient but as an equal communicating subject. As respondent and communicator are linked by mutual expectations and aims, mutual interest to the object of communication and the result of communication are making their points of view closer or farther [3].

Still one can again hear distressing opinions that wishful cohesion is as far away as it was long before, that there is a strong “consciousness industry” and that a person is incapable to resist “mass culture” [4].

Scientists divide cohesion in several groups: cohesion of instrumental and emotional type (sympathy basing on similarity of value systems), organizational that relates on aims and content of the work, work conditions, results, the way the work is organized and interpersonal (sympathy, trust, respect, friendship); behavioral related to intergroup interaction and aimed on solving problems of the group.

Cohesion of the group in general is the degree of group members’ unity when they have the possibility to choose their behavior. Cohesion is manifested by the extent of sympathy and antipathy of members of the group. In sociology social cohesion means development of norms and control of observance of a set of norms that all members of the group and in wider meaning the society itself, should meet. Social cohesion implies existence of groups a person identifies himself with, the unity of value, aims, strong interpersonal relations, coordination of actions [5, 6].

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Group has a critical influence on development of a person. Abstract thinking capability, speech, language, moral principles, manners, rituals develop in group [2]. Strictly speaking, personality of a human being would have never been developed outside group. Existence of group is the main condition of his development and socialization. Simple set of aggregations is not a group that means that mere existence of people in a country does not mean social cohesion. Similarly, as communication is condition of development of a person, it is the main condition of group development.

Under the conditions of social instability people begin to feel a need to belong to strong and relevant group. This may be as explanation of the growth of a number of national-socialism followers in Germany in 1930s. People turned to the groups with demonstration if their strength and exclusiveness as their main idea. Maturing of social group is long and sophisticated process of its social development related to perception of people's place in society and group, unity of interests, values, development of group mind and behavioral norms. These norms (both written and imperscriptible) are imposed to members of the group by more or less strong measures. Norms are behavioral standards accepted in the group. It may be specific behavior (for example, sleeping till evening and drift from one night club to the other all night), use a great number of slangy or foreign words, visiting a certain resorts in a certain periods, etc.

Of course a person may be forced to belong to group. Person may be a member of some group not because he(she) likes it but, as it was said before, in the periods of social instability or in a certain psychological state person needs to be a member of group where his/her status is higher of at least the same as of the others. For example, the pupil who is at the bottom of the class, hooligan and has the lowest grade would be pleased to be a member of group where his importance as the strongest and harsh person is constantly being stressed.

A number of factors retain a person in group. These are the environment that force him/her to select relevant group, environment (situation) in the group (attractiveness and appeal of the group), personal aims that influence selection of a certain group, interpersonal relations in group [5, 6]. Interpersonal relations in a primary group are so important (these are that very relations that forms initial personality) that they are being reproduced even in army units. Army commanders’ capability to reconstruct close friendly relations characteristic for civil initial group in their units allowed Nazi combat units to succeed at the beginning of the Second World War. Unlike American army German soldiers who were together in combat training fought together too.

Person may observe the norms despite of his/her acceptance of these norms when he/she understands that observance is necessary to remain in group. This may be done consciously or not (suggestion and conformism). Formally nothing forces a person to be a member or to seek membership in group and observe its rules and requirements. But if group can satisfy some needs of a person (in self-esteem, self-realization) membership in this group he/she will consider prestigious [7, 8].

Socially valuable criteria for definition of a group are sex, age, nationality, race, profession, etc. [1]. Membership in group is sometimes stresses by “markers” such as uniform, decoration, inscriptions, neckties, tattoo, etc. Markers help group identification, allow distinguishing one's own group from the “other’s”. In pioneer and sports units in games different marks were used (arm-bands, forage caps) to distinguish no strangers from strangers. Cars, cloths, accessories, etc. play the role of such marks in real life. They allow distinguishing no strangers from strangers. Using brands for distinguishing among groups became popular lately. (Group is formed of followers of a certain brands, for example, Versace is thought to be preferred by rich people with poor vertu due to plenty of gold and superfluity of ornamentation).

These marks, “markers” are symbols of membership in a certain social group, a sign that is interpreted as “I'm the horse of the same color”, a message to others. Symbols help to transfer information about membership in group faster and further because there is no need to explain verbally what group you belong to.

People communicate information, ideas, opinions and state of mind by communication processes [1]. Communication process is mutual exchange of values, information, symbols. A man is “symbolic” animal. A person identifies himself with a certain group by identifying himself with a certain status, values, role, social symbols. Symbols are external signs of this identification, manifestation of a person's membership in group.

When people are members of one group communication process may be verbal or nonverbal. But it is necessary to communicate not only inside the “own” or as sociologists say small group. The “own” group is conditional term. For example is 6th group of the faculty the “own” for the 7th group student? From one point of view, it is not “his own”, but from the other, students of all groups of the faculty are members of his group.
But he can have a chat with a student of his “own” (small) group, even run into him. He may never meet the other year students, but over time information that somebody graduated not even from his faculty but from the University provides the ground to consider that man to be “the horse of the same color”. Symbols are external signs, manifestations of the essence of thing or phenomenon. Student's record-book is a sign (symbol) of a student, rhomb on a lapel – sign of higher education (as it was in Soviet Union). But these symbols are clear only for non strangers. 2012th graduate student may be unaware what does this rhomb means for 1982th graduate student.

Russian author Vladimir Vysotski wrote a song “Protopi ty mne banyu” (Heat a bathhouse for me) that actually pictures the whole history of Russian people in Stalin period. But only those who lived then or know the history quite well understand it. For ignorant people who are not interested in the history of their country, or as they are called in Russia “Ivan, the family renegade” it is just one of odd songs. Many pictures illustrating classic subjects are odd for those who are not aware of ancient Greek myths.

Communication is the main condition of development of social cohesion and also one of technologies together with creation of mutual idea, rituals, sanctions, activity of socialization agents, attributes (symbols, markers, signs) used in this process [9, 10, 11]. These technologies are valid for groups of different levels from primary small (for example, family or students' group) to secondary (up to social institution and the society as a whole).

Social cohesion is a state of people feeling themselves members of large strong and socially valuable group, conscious of their individual characteristics and characteristics of other people. Social cohesion development technology is not fully studied but the role of communication in this process is doubtless. Communicating mutual values, cooperation variants, external threats, membership symbols and creation of the group may be done and is possible only via communication systems. Communication is both condition and technology of social cohesion development and group creation including group in the widest sense – the society. Well-known social psychologist E. Goffman notes that in interpersonal relations “we invariably face the necessity of organizing our behavior in such a way to correspond the perception of what is going on of our cooperation partners in the from that is clear for them. What is also necessary our actions should be addressed to the other’s mind. It limits our words and actions but allows us to bring the whole world in correlation in our comprehension that helps the other to pick up our hints and parables” [12].

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