

## SOCIAL MEMORY AND CIVIC IDENTITY OF YOUTH IN THE CONTEXT OF CONSTRUCTIVIST METHODOLOGY

### MEMÓRIA SOCIAL E IDENTIDADE CÍVICA DOS JOVENS NO CONTEXTO DA METODOLOGIA CONSTRUTIVISTA

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## ABSTRACT

**Objective:** This study investigates the relationship between social memory and the formation of civic identity among the youth, using constructivist methodology to understand how historical representations influence identity building at regional and state levels.

**Methods:** The research employed a qualitative approach, analyzing empirical sociological research and semi-structured interviews with young residents of the Republic of Tatarstan. The study focused on the role of historical landmarks in shaping civic identity.

**Results:** The findings suggest that social memory plays a crucial role in forming youth civic identity, with historical landmarks serving as pivotal points for identity engagement and interpretation.

**Conclusion:** The research underscores the importance of social memory in the development of civic identity, advocating for educational programs that incorporate local history to strengthen youth engagement and identity.

**Keywords:** Social Memory; Constructivism; History; Youth; Civic Identity; National Community; Socialization of Youth.



## RESUMO

**Objetivo:** Este estudo investiga a relação entre a memória social e a formação da identidade cívica entre os jovens, utilizando a metodologia construtivista para entender como as representações históricas influenciam a construção da identidade em níveis regional e estadual.

**Métodos:** A pesquisa utilizou uma abordagem qualitativa, analisando pesquisas sociológicas empíricas e entrevistas semiestruturadas com jovens residentes na República do Tartaristão. O estudo focou no papel dos marcos históricos na formação da identidade cívica.

**Resultados:** Os resultados sugerem que a memória social desempenha um papel crucial na formação da identidade cívica dos jovens, com marcos históricos servindo como pontos pivô para o engajamento e interpretação da identidade.

**Conclusão:** A pesquisa sublinha a importância da memória social no desenvolvimento da identidade cívica, defendendo programas educacionais que incorporem a história local para fortalecer o envolvimento e a identidade dos jovens.

**Palavras-chave:** Memória Social; Identidade Cívica; Jovens; Construtivismo; Representação Histórica.

## INTRODUCTION

The process by which young people become integrated into social relations and form their worldviews, value orientations and civic positions is closely related to their acceptance of the image of their country's past (Barth, 1969). The self-consciousness of any society is inextricably linked to its historical narrative. It can be argued that the symbolic significance of historical events forms the semantic basis of national, ethnic and civil identity. Social memory becomes a sphere that allows for the strengthening of intragroup values and the fostering of a patriotic attitude among the population, which is of particular importance in the process of social formation of such a specific group as youth (Weber, 1980). The appeal to historical precedent frequently constitutes an essential component of the formulation of federal and regional educational, intercultural and interfaith interaction programs. Furthermore, it is employed with great efficacy in the domains of culture and the media.

In this context, it is crucial to elucidate the methodological foundations that permit us to regard memory as a social phenomenon. In recent decades, the cultural sciences have been engaged in active theoretical interpretation of concepts such as "memory", "recollection", "oblivion", "nostalgia" and the definition of their meaning in



relation to culture, politics, economics and other spheres of society.

The social dimension of memory is a subject of research within a variety of disciplines, including sociology, history, political science, culturology, and philosophy. Additionally, it is a topic within the social sciences. Such interdisciplinarity is contingent upon the fact that the research problem itself cannot be formulated or solved within the boundaries of any of the collaborating disciplines. Nevertheless, all such studies are conditionally united in a single direction, which is called memory studies.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

The article uses materials of the analysis of empirical data collected in the framework of research devoted to the historical heritage of the Republic of Tatarstan. The key part of the data are the results of the analysis of a series of semi-formalized interviews with visitors of the museum-reserves Ostrov-grad Sviyazhsk and Velikiy Bolgar (n=33). The method of survey data processing is thematic coding and creation of a single array of survey data. Sviyazhsk Island-grad Sviyazhsk and Velikiy Bolgar are the key historical landmarks of the Republic of Tatarstan, around which many practices of historical memory actualization in the region are concentrated.

The construction of historical narratives in the republic is not only about these two sites, but these cases are saturated with actualization practices (including institutionalized ones) in culture, science, as well as in the sphere of tourism and religious life, which allows us to study the strategies and mechanisms of social actors of different levels regarding the construction of the image of the past and its actualization in connection with ethnic identity, ethnic and cultural policy, as well as the tourist economy of the region.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

One of the central themes in memory studies today is the interpretation of the relationship between memory and identities of various kinds. However, the various types of social practices that are in connection with the actualization of the past are also important. The concept of actualization can be understood in two distinct ways.



On the one hand, it refers to the referencing of the past in order to justify certain decisions made by the state, political and social movements, and public figures. On the other hand, it can be seen as the justification of a certain assessment of present events, made possible through the use of the past, and as a motivation for action.

In the broader context of memory research as a social phenomenon, several main approaches can be discerned. The earliest approach to memory research is the functionalist approach, which focuses on the role of memory in social groups. Functionalists typically study communities, defined as groups with a history of direct interaction. Functionalists concentrate on the unifying function of memory within the group. The presence of shared memories serves to reinforce the unity of the collective, providing it with the stability and awareness of its own integrity. The concept of shared memories is understood as "collective representations". The most significant representatives of the functional approach are E. Durkheim (1963), M. Halbwachs (1992), M. Mauss (2006).

The phenomenological approach, as elucidated in the works of E. Husserl (1989), A. Schutz (1972), P. Ricoeur (2000), P. Berger and T. Luckmann (1966), is aimed at establishing a correspondence between the stock of social memories and the life world of an individual. The act of direct interaction between individuals creates a shared social memory, as these interactions are present in all members of a small social group. The commonality of memories serves as a determining factor in the conditions for successful communication to continue. Concurrently, the individual's personal repository of memories is a distinctive assemblage of recollections pertaining to various social entities with which the individual engages on a regular basis.

The cultural-semiotic approach, represented by the works of Y. M. Lotman (2010), J. Assman (2004), A. Assman (2004), O. G. Oexle (1996), J. Rüsen (2006), considered social memory in its cultural dimension, through the relationship to the means of mass communication, historically variable and, accordingly, forming different and multiple types of representations of the past. The authors analyse "cultural memory", which, according to the theorists of this approach, has a textual nature and is a combination of two basic elements of canonical texts and ways of their decoding, which allow to ensure the relevance of these texts regardless of the stage of social development.

The structuralist approach, represented by the tests of C. Lévi-Strauss (1958), M. Foucault (1994), F. Barth (1969) and closely related to the cultural-semiotic approach in its methodological



prerequisites of research, focused its attention on uncovering timeless structures that permeate all layers of social reality. Identifying similar structures in texts, myths, kinship relations, and the structure of social institutions, the representatives of this approach continued to use the methodology of classical metaphysics as their initial theoretical assumptions, since they viewed the concept of structure through the prism of the categories of centralisation, static and closed text.

The possibility of applying poststructuralist methodology to the analysis of social reality, in particular, to the phenomenon of social memory, was considered in the works of M. Foucault (1994), J. Derrida (1992), P. Nora (1989), P. Bourdieu (2007).

The most effective approach is to utilise the principles of poststructuralism, which implies the recognition of the constructivist nature of the phenomenon of social memory. However, the processes occurring in society in connection with the actualisation of the past cannot be considered solely within the framework of textual analysis or solely in terms of the transmission of representations in communication at different levels. In a narrow sense, the term 'images of the past' refers to the representations of both groups and individuals, as well as the practices (e.g. feelings, actions, evaluations, decisions) based on these representations. It is unlikely that a single, static image of the past exists. Rather, representations of the past are discrete. Even within the same group, it is possible for several images of the past to coexist. Practices associated with the concept of the "past" are similarly intermittent, varying in scale and form. These may include official events, the establishment of holidays, unofficial celebrations, the opening of museums, or the emergence of conflicts at the domestic level. They may also encompass changes in ideas about one's own identity. Furthermore, the concept of the past is inextricably linked to a specific group or groups and geographical locations. Consequently, the metaphor of "spaces" is a valid analytical tool for understanding memory.

The social space of memory is heterogeneous, comprising a variety of social groups and actors who encounter both texts and practices that simultaneously actualise and interpret the past. Consequently, any allusion to the past inevitably influences one's perception of the present. To illustrate, a young respondent visiting the Bulgarian Architectural Museum-Reserve notes: "here the past additionally forms a picture with the present, that is, the monuments, in one way or another, strengthen the sense of connection with the past, with the ancestors, with their choices, respectively, historical and gives an understanding of how it affected the present and



perhaps how it will affect the future through examples for behaviour, but for everyone it will be different" (male, 24 years old).

This heterogeneity can be explained using the ideas of "social fields" by P. Bourdieu (2007) and "fields" of memory by J. Olick (2007). It is also crucial to consider the interpretation of the received information and the formulation of a decision regarding the manner in which the new assessment should (or should not) influence the practices of an individual member of society or an entire group.

Such practices may include both the decision on the need to "revive" traditions and the reassessment of attitudes towards a particular social group (ethnic, age, territorial, etc.) or one's own identity. Moreover, these practices are not uniform across society as a whole or even across individual social groups.

For instance, some younger respondents indicated that formal criteria for recognizing the importance of historical heritage are important. For example, they noted that both Bolgar, Sviyazhsk, and the Kazan Kremlin are UNESCO sites. This indicates that they are sites of global significance (female, 21 years old). For others, it is significant that the historical narratives and images that visitors encounter while visiting historical sites emphasise the values of tolerant intercultural interaction between people of different faiths and ethnicities. It can be argued that the multicultural nature of the country, with its diverse population comprising Russians, Tatars, Muslims, Orthodox Christians and other faiths, has been a key focus. "That we respect the traditions and beliefs of other religious groups, and they respect ours." (male, 31 years old).

The respondents regard these values as a significant part of local civic identity. Even those respondents who have visited only Sviyazhsk, a historical monument that, conventionally, can be called Orthodox, note the importance of these sites for the identity of all Tatarstanis and Bolgar (a place of memory associated more with Islamic culture). "It's such a religious place, I think it retains some kind of identity because it's so Muslim... That's what I think is important, but I haven't been there. Because even if you compare it to St Petersburg, everything there is European, copied from the West. But in Tatarstan there is a completely different identity and I think it is important for the preservation of culture" (female, 21 years old).

Furthermore, it is of significant importance to young respondents that ethnic diversity is normalised in physical space. For instance, when discussing the appearance of modern cities, some respondents indicate a preference for observing references to the historical past of specific





ethnic groups in the visual style of buildings, signs, souvenirs, and so forth. They further note that the space of historical monuments on the territory of the Republic is particularly saturated with such images: "Nowadays, there is a little more nationality in the landscaping, in the appearance of some places. I wouldn't say that it is pressurising. It's more about restoring a little bit of identity, because after the nineties, when a lot of things were destroyed, everything began to erode, and it is clear that the national republic must still exist somehow around this idea, otherwise it will not be interesting, not attractive" (male, 25 years old).

It can therefore be reasonably concluded that the social space of memory should be considered, with particular attention paid to discourses and narratives (embodied in various forms of texts) and practices (in the broadest sense). Concurrently, the attributes of these discourses and practices are directly influenced by the distinctive characteristics of the social fields in which they are situated.

From the perspective of identity construction, social memory serves to unite group members and to provide a certain level of social integration and opportunities for social interaction. The link between collective memory and identity was first explored by M. Halbwachs (1992) at the outset of memory studies. This researcher posited that each group constructs its own memory of the past, thereby justifying the formation of a distinct group identity. This is particularly pertinent in the context of civic socialisation of young people. The images of the common past and their interpretations, which they receive during socialisation in the national culture, assist young people in developing an understanding of their own involvement in the history of the country and in determining their attitude to the political and cultural events of the present. The formation of self-identifying cultural codes is facilitated by the imagination of a shared past with other citizens of the country.

Within the framework of the constructivist approach, the metaphor of "imagined community" by B. Anderson (2006) is suitable for the interpretation of identity. In this context, the term "imagined" does not simply the absence of a tangible reality or the fabrication of a fictitious entity. Imagined communities are those groups that we take for granted; for example, we do not need to invent and imagine every time a certain group of Russians is referred to. It is also important to note that the nation of boundaries and the existence of a community must be supported by something or someone in order for it to remain self-evident. Social memory represents a pivotal source of information that influence our perceptions of group boundaries



and characteristics.

Consequently, the utilisation of the constructivist approach and the theory of "social fields" enables the incorporation of various elements of social memory, including heterogeneity, permanence, and the interconnection with the social framework of the field in which memory is generated and perpetuated (constructed). Social constructs are both the images of the past themselves and the practices associated with them (dissemination of meanings). These practices are highly diverse and encompass a multitude of activities aimed at shaping specific representations of the past. Furthermore, it encompasses the production and reproduction of meanings, as well as any practices based on reference to the past and its meanings. All of these can be considered the "politics of memory."

Elements of social memory, such as museums, films, music, books, etc., that represent the past of a national community become components that sustain the imagination of the existence of particular cultural boundaries of civic identity and help individuals interpret its particularities (Eflova et al., 2024). Consequently, memory and identity are inextricably linked. Identity is inextricably linked to memory, and identification is one of the primary functions of social memory.

Cultural patterns associated with history are seen as an element in the construction and consolidation of an "imagined" community, or in other words, a constructed community. In considering the relationship between the collective memory of a group's past and its identity, it is important to recognise the importance of the group's understanding of history and its relationship with its ancestors. Common ancestry and a sense of shared history reinforce a sense of unity and a certain solidarity in the present.

The manner in which representations of the past contribute to the consolidation of the collective identity of a group can be elucidated through an analysis of the distinctive characteristics of the cultural artefacts in question (the narrative they convey) and the emotional responses they elicit in the members of the group. Social memory is most often focused on images of events and historical figures with unambiguous positive or negative connotations, without any shades of grey. The dichotomy of images of triumph and suffering, victims and national heroes structures memory. They assist in defining the current situation and in determining the most appropriate response.





## CONCLUSION

In analysing the relationship between memory and identity, particularly in the context of contemporary Russian society, it is crucial to acknowledge that memory images possess not only cognitive and behavioural-normative aspects, but also emotional elements. Furthermore, the latter is inextricably linked to the preceding two and is of equal (and on occasion greater) importance. The absence of concrete historical detail renders them mythologised and politicised images of good and evil, carriers of socially significant values.

In many ways, it is social memory that helps members of society to define current social situations and make decisions about how to react. Thus, the constructivist approach to the analysis of the role of social memory for the formation of youth civic identity allows, on the one hand, to conduct a deep analysis of those images of the past that determine the features of civic consciousness, on the other hand, to work effectively with the "spaces" of memory (texts, cultural works, mass media, museums and monuments, educational programmes, etc.) and to develop effective programmes for the development of youth civic identity, introducing it to the values of patriotism and the culture of their own country.

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