

FUNCTIONAL FEATURES AND TARGET SETTINGS OF THE CONCEPT OF "CIVIC ACTIVISM" IN THE CONDITIONS OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OF THE STATE

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ABSTRACT

The article is devoted to the study of the peculiarities of theoretical and practical implementation of the concept of "civic activism" in the conditions of sustainable development of the state. The authors consider approaches to the definition and semantic content of the concept of "civic activism", reflexion of the theoretical concept into the plane of practical application, taking into account the need to implement the concept of civil society as a prerequisite for sustainable development of the modern state. Given the existing contradictions between the conceptual interpretation of the notion of "civic activism", the authors of the article, considering the approaches and ideas of domestic and foreign researchers, come to the conclusion about the most effective interpretation of the concept of civic activism through the prism of accumulated and expressed political action, as well as in the context of social changes caused by the initiative of formalised social groups expressing their interests and positions. Such directions of theoretical understanding of the concept of "civic activism" are most effectively able to reflect and fill the socio-political practices implemented as a public policy of modern democratic states in order to preserve sustainable progressive development.

Keywords: Political activism; Civic activity; State development; Civic initiatives; Citizenship; Civil society.





CARACTERÍSTICAS FUNCIONAIS E DEFINIÇÕES DE METAS DO CONCEITO DE "ATIVISMO CÍVICO" NAS CONDIÇÕES DE DESENVOLVIMENTO SUSTENTÁVEL DO ESTADO

RESUMO

O artigo é dedicado ao estudo das peculiaridades da implementação teórica e prática do conceito de "ativismo cívico" nas condições de desenvolvimento sustentável do Estado. Os autores consideram abordagens para a definição e o conteúdo semântico do conceito de "ativismo cívico", a reflexão do conceito teórico no plano da aplicação prática, levando em conta a necessidade de implementar o conceito de sociedade civil como um pré-requisito para o desenvolvimento sustentável do Estado moderno. Dadas as contradições existentes entre a interpretação conceitual da noção de "ativismo cívico", os autores do artigo, considerando as abordagens e ideias de pesquisadores nacionais e estrangeiros, chegam à conclusão sobre a interpretação mais eficaz do conceito de ativismo cívico pelo prisma da ação política acumulada e expressa, bem como no contexto de mudanças sociais causadas pela iniciativa de grupos sociais formalizados que expressam seus interesses e posições. Tais direções de compreensão teórica do conceito de "ativismo cívico" são mais efetivamente capazes de refletir e preencher as práticas sociopolíticas implementadas como política pública dos estados democráticos modernos a fim de preservar o desenvolvimento progressivo sustentável.

Palavras-chave: Ativismo político; Atividade cívica; Desenvolvimento do Estado; Iniciativas cívicas; Cidadania; Sociedade civil.

1 INTRODUCTION

Civic activism is one of the most complex topics, the interest in which is conditioned by the ambiguity of perception of its functional features and target setting. On the one hand, civic activism is a window of opportunity, but on the other hand, how and who can use these opportunities, and whether society and the state can adequately respond to the initiative, create conditions for its implementation and prevent it from turning into a force that can be used against them. Therefore, it is important to determine what are the functional capabilities of civic activism and what are the limits beyond which it should not go in its development, as this threatens its degeneration into other forms, which turn out to be less stable and, as a consequence, less predictable in terms of consequences for society and the state.

Of particular interest is also the formation and development of civic activism, who initiates these processes, whether it is explained by the development of society or is the result of the complication of the political system. This interest is due to the fact that often even in scientific articles we see that there is a confusion between the concepts of "civic" and "political" activism, as the authors consider them without taking into





account the functional differences and targets that allow us to understand their features and interrelation.

The solution of the issue of demarcation of these concepts is directly related to maintaining a balance in the relationship between civil society and the state, which is impossible to ensure without an active and responsible civic and civil position (Green, 2016). Moreover, the Russian political discourse has already formed a demand for the formation of "responsible development" of society, therefore, in order to determine how to achieve this, we need a theoretical and methodological understanding of the phenomenon of "civic activism" itself, its clarification and identification of its differences from political activism, taking into account modern socio-political realities.

2 METHODS

In writing this article we have used institutional and systemic-functional approaches. The institutional approach allows us to identify the interrelation of formal norms and informal rules of the game, which ultimately form a continuum of complex organisational relations and forms of interaction between civil society and the state. On the one hand, the use of the systemic-functional approach allows us to consider activism as a system that has a complex structure, each element of which has a certain purpose and fulfills certain functions to satisfy the needs for which this system was built. On the other hand, the systemic-functional approach allows us to identify any complex subsystem as an independent object of study and decompose it into separate structural elements with their own functions. This allows us to distinguish between political and non-political activism and to determine the place of civic activism in the development of Russian society and ensuring the sustainability of the state, its most important functions and opportunities for the implementation of socio-political transformations.

3 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The discussion of any problem in the scientific community usually begins with the elaboration of the conceptual apparatus, because the content filling of different meanings of one and the same concept usually causes discussions. The content diversity of concepts is due to the fact that some of them are filled with meanings coming from different historical epochs and traditions both inside and outside Russia,





especially if we take into account the fact that domestic political science borrowed many concepts from Western European political theory and practice.

Before studying civic activism, let us look at the etymology of the word "citizen", see how this concept has been filled with additional meanings, and how this has been reflected in academic discussions of civic activism. Is a citizen a member of the state and/or civil society? What semantic load - political and/or non-political - does the concept of "citizen" carry?

If we turn to the explanatory dictionary of the Russian language by S.I. Ozhegov and N.Y. Shvedova (1999), we see that a citizen is "a person belonging to the permanent population of a given state, enjoying its protection and endowed with a set of rights and obligations", and a civilian is "referring to the legal relations of citizens among themselves and their relations with state bodies and organisations" (p. 143). That is, the political context comes first, the connection to which we can trace back to antiquity, when a citizen was referred to as "a resident of the polis with certain rights and duties of a public and private nature" (Ozhegov & Shvedova, 1999, p. 113), for example, a citizen in Athens was considered a free man with the right to elect and be elected (Ozhegov & Shvedova, 1999, p. 114). Thus, the semantic core of the concept of "citizen" in this context is the political understanding on which the concept of democracy is based.

Developing this idea, I.B. Fan (2003) in his article "Citizen in the context of the city: the historical meaning of the concept" comes to the conclusion that

'urbanity' is associated with a whole complex of phenomena and concepts: the inclusion of an individual in the dense social ties of the city, belonging to the circle of "their own" - a community of citizens equal to each other, with the participation of a citizen in the publicly exercised management of the city. (p. 114).

Thus, speaking of civic activism, in this case we are talking about the active participation of citizens in the affairs of the state, in the realisation of their political and civil rights and duties in order to bring changes in the life of society and the state. Consequently, in this case we mean the activity of a citizen and a high level of his political culture, which, in our opinion, means that it would be more correct to use the concept of "civic activism" - activism inherent or peculiar to a citizen.

However, if we look at the interpretation of the concept "civilian" in the explanatory dictionary of the Russian language by S.I. Ozhegov and N.Y. Shvedova (1999), we notice that unlike the concept "citizen", it has three additional meanings: 1) peculiar to





a citizen as a conscious member of society; 2) non-military, civilian; 3) non-church, not connected with the church rite (p. 143), i.e. connected with the institutions of society, not the state. Can we then link civic activism with the development of civil society?

According to A.A. Ivin's Encyclopaedic Dictionary of Philosophy, civil society is a sphere of *spontaneous* self-expression of free individuals and voluntary associations and organisations, shielded by law from direct interference and arbitrary regulation of their activities by public authorities (Ivin, 2006, p. 191). That is, the concept of "civil society" includes the totality of non-political relations in society, namely: economic, social, family, spiritual, moral, national, religious relations and others. However, there is no political component of activity here, because civil society is usually opposed to political society (Togaibayeva et al., 2020, 2021).

The formation of civil society takes place under conditions of capitalist development, in which the state avoids interfering in the private lives of citizens and imposing a single ideology and a single system of values. The diverse interests of people, as we know, are realised through their joint activities, for the organisation of which they join voluntary associations and unaccountable to the state (Rybak et al., 2023).

Civic associations foster in their members a sense of co-operation, solidarity, and commitment to society. This leads to the fact that individuals who voluntarily join a group with a wide range of goals and preferences among its members acquire not only cooperation skills and a sense of civic responsibility for collective endeavours, but also unwittingly learn self-discipline, tolerance and respect for the opinions of others (Afanasyev & Afanasyev, 2022; Bobkov et al., 2020). And here there are two options for the development of events: either two strong institutions work together on the implementation of a common goal - to ensure the stability of the state, i.e. integrate, or switch to the strategy of confrontation, trying to absorb each other, which leads in the conditions of development of the democratic paradigm to the instability of the state or transformation of the state structure. For example, in the case of absorption of civil society by the state, a totalitarian regime is established.

In practice, states seek to narrow the sphere of unregulated activities of voluntarily established organisations and associations, to separate and atomise them, setting the boundaries within which civil society can operate, i.e. the state brings order to civil society, shields it from interference in the political sphere, and sets the rules of the game.

In response to the actions of the state, civil society also seeks to limit its activities to





the political sphere, leaving everything else to the free choice of individuals, i.e. it exerts an influence on the state without which it would never have gone to a significant limitation of its competence (Akimov & Kadyshева, 2023; Avdeev et al., 2023; Ryssaldiyeva et al., 2019).

And if there is an imbalance in the interests of civil society and the state, and they cannot agree to work out common rules of interaction, the two institutions switch to the strategy of rivalry, the result of which can be assessed as either "lose-lose-win" or "lose-lose".

However, the atomisation and diversity of civil society institutions that oppose the state, counterbalance it and at the same time are under its patronage, without civic support, activity and responsibility remains only a facade.

Activism and activism. These two concepts have a fine line of distinction, the understanding of which is important for the development of targeted programmes aimed primarily at either the formation of civil society or ensuring the sustainability of the state in the context of the diversity of political transformations taking place in the world.

Activity (from Latin *activus* - "active") is considered as an immanent free form and a way of self-expression of the subject (according to Hegel). It denotes not the totality of personal actions, but the disposition to action, so the one who acts under the pressure of events cannot be qualified as "active". In humans, activity manifests itself in the form of a personal need in the activity of creative transformation of the surrounding world: its socio-cultural and biological components, especially in the conditions of realisation of what he does it for. Thus, the phenomenon of activity should be considered as a multicomponent system, combining such properties as spontaneity, arbitrariness, supersituativity, effectiveness, etc. Consequently, we can talk about civic engagement in the context of civil society.

As for activism, its definition in Russian and foreign dictionaries differs significantly. In Russian dictionaries, activism includes various types of human activity, the purpose of which is the active transformation of the world. While in Western dictionaries "activism" is considered as the practice of taking direct measures to achieve political and social goals.

This raises the question of what concept is embedded in the following definitions: 1) voluntary collective activity around common interests and values, implemented publicly and unselfishly, 2) activity of various self-organised, independent groups of citizens





who perform active actions in the public space aimed at solving specific local problems, 3) self-expression and self-realisation of a person as a creator of the quality of his/her life and changes in the life of the community important for him/her?

In contrast to Western political thought, within the framework of domestic science, the first two cases refer to activism, but whether they refer to civic activism depends on the methods to be used, and the third case refers to civic activism. The different semantic load of the concepts and the context in which they are used determine the fact that the issue of politicisation of civic activism in political science remains one of the debatable ones, as some believe that it is outside politics, while others believe that it is part of politics.

4 SUMMARY

Summarising the results of the analysis, we conclude that it is necessary to distinguish the concepts of civic activism, civic activism and civic engagement. However, it is worth noting that the concept of "citizenship" is difficult to translate from Russian into other languages, preserving its meaning.

Civic engagement is society's actions aimed at realising social interests (Frolov, 2014, p. 61). It is not just an indicator of the degree of involvement of members of society in civic activities, but also a part of civil society itself (Butorov et al., 2022; Klimovskikh et al., 2023). Civic activity is defined as one of the forms of social activity, which is expressed in an indifferent attitude to the problems of society, the ability and desire to demonstrate one's own civic position, to defend personal and group interests and rights, as well as awareness of personal responsibility for the well-being of the state (Gusarova & Toropova, 2012, p. 135). It involves any *individual* action with social consequences, which is largely related to collective activity (Fatikhova et al., 2023; Fokina et al., 2023; Riekkinen et al., 2019).

Civic activism in Western European political thought is often interpreted as political activism considered in opposition to civic activism. We agree with this only partially. Certainly civic activism includes political activism, but is not limited to it. Political activism is a form of political activity, the essence of which is to influence political decisions, lobbying one's own interests. It is defined through the phenomenon of activism, the specificity of which consists in a set of actions of both individuals and social groups aimed at the realisation of their political interests, primarily to win and





retain power.

Civic activism is directly related to the active realisation by citizens of their rights and responsibilities not only in the political, but also in the socio-economic and spiritual spheres, and is aimed primarily at the use of power to solve their problems, which cannot be solved at the level of civil society without state intervention or policy change. Civic activism presupposes the existence of such a high level of political and civic culture of the members of society, as well as a broad representation of their interests in the government, which allows them to solve their issues without creating intermediate near-political movements and associations (Grigorieva, 2017; Hernández García de Velazco et al., 2022).

Civic activism, if we consider it on Euler's circles, is something that lies at the intersection of civic activism and civic engagement. It is a collective activity of citizens, who are grouped in formal and informal communities, with the aim of drawing the attention of other citizens and the state to public problems that need to be solved in the near future. Civic activism is independent from the state and does not have the purpose of political activity, but it can have a political component. This activity is carried out on the initiative of citizens themselves, united by common interests and civic values, within the framework of public policy. It is characterised by self-organisation, the ability to *spontaneously* mobilise citizens in a short time, publicity and focus on finding ways to solve public problems. Thus, civic activism is simultaneously a part of both civil society and the state. This is the reason why in the articles of Russian authors we come across the fact that civic activism is considered as a political activity, despite the fact that civic activism is a part of civil society and, therefore, is outside the political space.

5 CONCLUSIONS

There is no common approach to the definition of civic activism in social sciences. In this regard, some authors understand civic activism as public service, others consider it through the prism of collective action, others - through the prism of social change, and others - as political activity. However, in our opinion, it is not worth combining all the meanings into one concept, and it is necessary to distinguish them, as they have different functional features and targets. For the development of civil society it is important to form civic activity and responsibility for their actions/inactions, for the state in the conditions of the democratic paradigm of development it is





necessary to form civic activism. Civic activism ensures the maintenance of balance in the relationship between the state and civil society, acting as a political mechanism for regulating the processes of their interaction, because the lack of integration of these institutions can lead to the absorption of one by the other and change the political system.

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