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COGNITIVE MECHANISMS OF FORMATION OF SOCIAL COMPETENCE OF MIGRANTS

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Abstract

The article is devoted to the issues of formation of social competence of migrants in their host societies, related to mental representations, migrants' positions and social ideas of the host population. Cognitive mechanisms of formation of some mental representations of migrants are reviewed, features of positions of working migrants from Middle Asia, Ukraine and Moldova are studied.

Keywords: social competence of migrants, social positions, mental representations, cognitive mechanisms of adaptation, constructivist approach.

1. Introduction

Modern age raised a series of global problems, which the existence and development of the humanity depends on.

Today Europe is facing a such serious problem as an issue of refugees from Syria running from a civil war and refugees from other countries of Africa and Middle East leaving the homeland because of poverty and war conflicts. According to international organizations, the number of refugees is increasing with every day. Governments of European States, non-government public funds and international organizations are trying to solve this problem by providing them with places of temporary residence, by creating special camps for refugees, by providing humanitarian help, and, in some cases, by using such crucial means as a denial of entry into the country, barriers setting etc.

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Along with an issue of refugees, international community is facing an issue of migrants, the number of which is also increasing. However, in comparison with the refugees, they have a status that allows them to legally live and work in the country, to get social, material, medicine and other services.

It is known that migrants differ in psychological, social and economical features. Thus, a Russian scientist Mukomel V.I. highlighted three groups of migrants in his research in 2011. *The first group* ("permanent") includes migrants, that almost never leave the territory of Russia, excluding rare visits to their homeland. *The second group* consists of "circular migrants", i.e. people who occasionally enter and leave the territory of Russia (generally, to work). This group includes, for example, "seasonal migrants". A special case is *the third group of migrants* that includes people entering Russia for the first time. A large survey of migrants that was done in 2011 showed that 40,8% are permanent migrants, that do not leave Russia for more than a year, 38% are circular migrants (including 11,6% that are seasonal migrants); and 21,2% are people who came to Russia for the first time in search of work in 2011 [1].

However in social sciences there is a methodological problem of highlighting a unified group of migrants, a problem of defining an object of research to study all social and psychological processes happening to people during migration and integration into the other culture.

Regardless of which group of migrants is being studied in any research, the problem of integration into a new society is relevant for all categories, because the new cultural context, in which migrants find themselves, leads to changes, that they experience during adaptation [2].

So far scientists found out that the consequences of migration for every individual or a group depend on many factors that are created during the interaction of these individuals or groups in the process of migration [3]. Among the factors is a migrants' level of formation of a social competence.

The term "social competence" is understood as an ability of an individual (a migrant, in particular) to adequately perceive conditions and opportunities that are provided by a certain society (a group), to efficiently react and solve life issues, to set and reach real goals, to build a positive interaction with other people. It is known, that a low level of formation of social competence in migrants is the cause of difficulties of interaction with host population, difficulties of professional determination, it is the cause of bad living conditions, economic unsuccessfulness and formation of negative emotional

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states such as anxiety, stress, aggressiveness and deviant behavior etc.

The level of formation of social competence, in our view, mostly depends on social ideas and beliefs of migrants, on understanding of the environment, which he needs to adapt to. Samantha Perrin studied the influence of meritocratic beliefs of people from North Africa who migrated to France on the ability to integrate into the western society. In result, a social-psychological adaptation was more successful in those migrants who believed that only the most capable people from all social backgrounds can be directors and managers. Such people accepted the culture of a host country more easily and built interpersonal relationships with people from this country [4]. So the influence of social ideas and beliefs of migrants on successfulness of their adaptation was proven.

In our view, cognitive mechanisms play an important role in formation of social competence.

There is a small number of researches done by foreign scientists in the framework of constructivist approach. These researches prove that the culture in form of cognitive schemes, systems of values and social ideas form the behavior of a person. Cognitive processes, emotions and identity play a special role in this process. Cognitive schemes, social ideas and cultural stereotypes influence a social behavior of a person so hard that they even have an impact on the structure, choice of methods and results of researches on psychological consequences of migration done by scientists who are also of different cultures and are also under the impact of their own social ideas and stereotypes.

2. Materials and methods of the research.

With aim to identify cognitive mechanisms of formation of social competence of migrants as a determinant of successful social adaptation, we have done a research in 2014 in which migrants from Middle Asia, Ukraine and Moldavia took participation.

219 working migrants aged between 35 and 47 who came to Russia from Middle Asia, Ukraine and Moldavia and 235 indigenous residents of Moscow aged between 35 and 45 took participation in the research. Total number of participants was 454 people.

Originally the sample was stratified by sex and age, but in the process of analysis of results, statistically significant differences in answers of men and women (by Fisher criterion) were not identified. It allows us to assume that gender differences in this survey may be offset by factors of ethnicity and social identification of people with a certain group of population (migrants - indigenous people; "locals" - "strangers"). The obtained fact is in line with data of other researches on social ideas about migration and migrants.

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Methodology of studying social ideas that is used in sociology of studying public opinion and social attitude, social-psychological methods of studying social well-being, mental representations in the world picture of a subject, subjective satisfaction by the quality of life were the methodological basis for building empirical research.

The following methods were used in the research: surveys, focus-groups, methods of studying social ideas including individual interviews to clarify statements, content and characteristics of questions related to migration chosen by respondents; psycho-semantic methods: free associative experiment and semantic differential, and also trans-symbolic analysis (TSA method).

3. Results and discussion.

Results of the research showed that working migrants from Middle Asia mostly noted difficulties in legalization of employment and communication with migration services, but in lesser extent they noted the difficulty of learning the Russian language, communicating with local population and understanding the culture and traditions of Russian people.

When analyzing the answers to the questions of the survey, one can assume that a *cognitive mechanism - perspectivisation* is working in this case. It implies that out of many positions the migrants chose two that had complementary character - legalization of employment and mutual understanding with migration services, which this employment depends on. These position found reflection in their mental maps or mental representations of different types - images, frames and scripts. Perspectivisation limits the basic vital needs of migrants or highlights the main one, while the other are either non-significant or have a low value and are not perceived by migrants as important. Possibly, this contributes to the migrants' positive perception of their adaptation to the offered life situation (some false subjective satisfaction). However this cognitive mechanism disrupts the formation of social competence that is so important for continuous actions in the process of adaptation, for viable and adaptive behavior.

This assumption can be also proved by answers of migrants on the survey question: "For every person there is something important. State, how important for you is... and then there is a number of variants". Migrants from Middle Asia highlighted the main things for themselves - employment, which is reasonable, personal security, self-respect and receiving information on their rights and obligations, the other things are less important, interaction with local population in particular. In this case the mechanism "perspectivisation" has also worked.

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It is known that having friends from local population and communicating with them is contributing to successful adaptation of migrants. This fact is not significant for working migrants from Middle Asia, they are more concentrated on communication with countrymen, expecting and getting the necessary help from them. It is possible that limiting interaction with people to communication with countrymen determinates negative attitude of local people, which was noted by migrants in their answers. When analyzing the answers one can ask on the basis of what facts migrants made a conclusion about a negative attitude of local population towards them if they avoid any contacts with local people. One can assume that short-term contacts of migrants and local people on streets, in public transport, trade organizations etc. was the cause of this, or maybe in this case *the mechanism of stereotypisation* works, making working migrants to either limit their contacts with local population or prevent interaction of local people with them by their aggressive verbal and non-verbal behavior, which we can see today in Russia and Europe. This behavior, i.e. assumption about unacceptability in eyes of local people contributes to the feeling of exclusion, not only the mechanism of stereotypisation works here but also *the mechanisms of ignoring current problems in adaptation to local conditions, their concealing, revaluation of opportunities to deal with problems on their own* which also have an impact on the level of formation of social competence and on positive mental representations.

We see a different picture in groups of working migrants from Ukraine (not refugees) and Moldova.

The main reasons of coming to Russia, as in groups of migrants from Middle Asia, were "inability to be employed in homeland" and "lack of finances". As in the previous group, the main difficulties of adaptation in Russia are "difficulties in legal employment" and "difficulties in organization of domestic life". However working migrants from Ukraine and Moldova had "formed" good contacts with local population due thanks to assistance of relatives and, in our view, this is due to the long time of staying (more than 5 years) in Russia and absence of language barrier.

Generally we can note that working migrants from Ukraine and Moldova are engaged in a sociocultural context of the host society. We can note the presence of psychological and sociocultural adaptation in these groups expressed in good well-being, good level of formation of social competence, positive mental representations and also in the formed feeling of personal identity.

However the problems are occurring with the economic

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adaptation, the reasons of which are dissatisfaction with their own job, the level of realization of their professional opportunities and position in society. This result is mostly seen in the group of migrants from Ukraine. We can assume that the factor of failure of realization of expectations and ideas about the participation of society and state services in helping them in life played a role here.

Thus, results of the research suggest the migrants from Ukraine and Moldova are included in the sociocultural process of the host society, they have formed mental representation and they are psychologically and socio-culturally adapted. According to the results of our research, such cognitive mechanisms as integration with the culture of their homeland and with the culture of Russia; positive life scenarios and attitude; ethnic identity; good level of formation of social ideas; presence of positive mental programs. External and internal conditions of Russia obstruct the adaptation (including the economic adaptation) on some level, and if talking about cognitive mechanisms - economic and psychological expectations ("they must help") concerning the new place obstruct the adaptation.

Thus, cognitive mechanisms frequently obstruct the formation of social competence of migrants and stop the adaptation process. In this respect, actively developing in Russia and abroad *constructivist approach* can become relevant for the practice of social-psychological support of migrants, of help in solving occurring problems in the process of social adaptation to conditions of the host society, of formation of social competence, of viable and adaptive behavior, as one of directions of cognitive psychology.

Constructivist approach aims to design the world picture, value orientations, ways of activity and viability of migrants.

When defining the opportunities of the constructivist approach in helping migrants it is worth noting that migration requires hard psychological work from a person: self-correction, self-change of own settings, creation of new systems of social representations, changes of mental maps, environmental workloads that constitute the world picture of every person and define his social behavior and individual way of constructing social reality, creation of adaptive constructions of the definition of the world, which the person lives in, and his place in it.

As I.T. Kasavin notes, the term "constructivism" became widely used in the late 70-s of the XX century. According to the methodological principle of constructivism in philosophy, psychology, sociology (G. Kelly, J. Peaget, A. Schutz, K.Gergen, P. Berger, T. Luckmann, V.S. Stepin, U. Maturana, F. Varela, E. von Glasersfeld), knowledge is not contained in the object (in objective

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reality) and is not extracted when transferring from subjective to absolute truth, but it is built by a learning subject in form of various models, which can be interchangeable and mutually additional [5].

Currently constructivist approach is considered to be one of the most influencing approaches in social sciences. There are many constructivist approaches. V.A. Yanchuk (with reference to J. Portera) notes the following approaches: reasoning analysis (Atkinson, Hertrage), discourse analysis (Potter, Wetherell), ethnomethodology (Button), ethogenics (Harre), feminist researches (Radke, Stam), poststructuralism (Culler, Holway), postmodern political researches (Derian, Shapiro), rhetoric (Billig), reflexive ethnography (Clifford Markus), sociology of scientific knowledge (Latour Woolgar), sociocultural psychology (Wertsch), symbolic interactionism (Hewitt) [6].

4. Conclusion

For a migrant to be able to form an ability to adequately perceive conditions and opportunities that are provided by a host society, to efficiently react and solve life challenges, to set and reach real goal, to build positive interaction with other people, we need to note the following states of the constructivist approach in the practice of support of social adaptation of migrants:

1) the presence of cognitive prerequisites for successful adaptation, which are presented in a person's mental map, which allow a person to (or "make a person") restructure his ideas about life, motivation, needs, settings, behavior, to include constructive elements in his life script, in the basis of which are mental representations, system of knowledge and ideas designed in form of an individual world picture. Formed social competence, adaptive and viable behavior will be the results of this hard work;

2) use of constructivist psychology in formation of social competence and adaptive behavior of a migrant under conditions of adaptation to life in another country will allow to design (or redesign) his world picture as a system of knowledge and ideas, to add in it such important for positive adaptation and viable behavior qualities of a person and social-psychological abilities as constructive coping, activeness, self-regulation and self-determination;

3) formation of both social competence of a migrant and his adaptive (viable) behavior requires focused control, as from a person himself and from a psychologist (if he is asked for such help). The essence of such control is in managing the process of formation of social competence and adaptive behavior. Ideology of the constructivist approach and cognitive psychology has clear

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technologies that influence the mentality of a person, his personal constructions and social representations.

4) difficult life situation, which a migrant often finds himself in, can be considered as a construction of a personal mind, based on the processes of cognitive evaluation. E.V. Bitutskaya, basing on the results of the empirical research, highlights the following criteria of cognitive evaluation of a situation, that a person experiences as "hard": significance for a subject, increased consumption of resources, lack of control, uncertainty, lack of predictability, necessity of a fast response, lack of internal resources, difficulties in making a decision [7]. We need to note that E.V. Bitutskaya fairly considers cognitive evaluation an "anti-protection" mechanism: a person should see a situation as a hard one, either wise he would not overcome it.

Very often a person that is under a stress condition, which almost always is accompanied by an adaptation process, can experience anxiety, uncertainty, lack of choice and can't act according to resource model of behavior, which leads to person's perception and interpretation of a situation as hopeless, hard, uncertain, a situation that needs to be solved [8]. In case of inability of a person to make a decision and realize it such cognitive evaluation leads to distancing and aggression. A person that has formed social competence, adaptability, viability, means of self-realization, self-regulation, activeness, constructivist coping and self-determination in his personal structure is able to see and understand the situation as a hard one more quickly (it is important for solving problems) and to independently, or with help of a psychologist, accept a hard situation as a life challenge, to construct different ideas and models of behavior, to motivate himself for solving the problem.

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