SCENARIO FOR PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT IN THE INSTITUTIONAL ENVIRONMENT OF RUSSIAN MEGAPOLISES (USING THE EXAMPLE OF 'WHITE COLLAR' WORKERS)

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Abstract: Scenarios for professional identity development are studied using level-based sociological analysis, i.e., at a social micro-level in a group of peer professionals and at an institutional macro-level in a social and professional structure of a megapolis. Based on the research, in which 'white collar' workers were chosen as a reference group, the authors conclude that a professional identity in a megapolis experiences multidirectional influence of imitative professionalism. In addition, an identification model matrix is formed that focuses on professional identity as a self-identification that self-attributes to a group of professionals as a power with active social and civil position. The discovered trends are reviewed at macro- and micro-levels.

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Introduction

Russia experienced a long and convoluted passage to urbanization up until the middle of the 1980s. Now, its megapolises are characterized by a segmented structure. Although Russia remains a country of medium-sized cities and towns, during the post-Soviet period, megapolises were the center of social and professional mobility and influenced the direction of territorial mobility within the country. Given the social, territorial, and regional disproportions, the megapolises, on the one hand, serve as centers of economic, social, and cultural development. On the other hand, the megapolises have a 'material' impact, in the destruction of social and ecological environments, and lead to reduction and stagnation of populations within Russian provincial regions.

Notably, under present circumstances, the official policy encourages the development of megapolises in terms of both the optimization of social policy and financial transfers and the development of social infrastructure. At the same time, as noted earlier by Chicago School sociologists (Park, 2007), megapolises form a specific social background. That is, they are anonymous in terms of social communication, are regulated through informal social control, and the lives of different population strata are segmented.

In the context of this apparent theoretical and practical interest, this study examines the professional identities of the megapolis population.

Literature Review

There are a number of studies by foreign scholars that analyze the professional identity. These studies have focused on whether there is a shift in professional identity in career advancement and how these changes affect attitudes towards interprofessional cooperation (Bayne-Smith et al., 2014). The foreign researchers have concentrated on the professional identity construction, which is applicable to the general process of personality development and requires a certain identification effort (Brianna et al., 2016).

Regarding the formation of professional identity in the higher education establishments, a description, *inter alia*, was suggested for a conceptual basis of the factors that influence professional self-identification at college or university. Several factors were singled out, that, as the scholars believed, influence the professional self-awareness of college students by strengthening or weakening their professional identity (Molinero & Pereira, 2013).

Works by foreign scholars also include the professional identity peculiarities of the European population (Simosi et al., 2015, Meier, 2016, Spînu, 2013) and the populations of certain Asian countries (Ming-zhon, 2014).

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The issues of professional identification understanding in the Russian society were studied by, Gorshkov (2016), Kozyreva (2012), Konstantinovskiy and Cherednichenko (2017), Tikhonova (2014) and Shneider (2001).

Shneider (2001) discusses the structures, genesis, and dynamics of professional identity. This author is of the opinion that professional identity:

...is not only the awareness of one's sameness with a professional community but also its evaluation, psychological importance of such membership, shared professional attitudes, particular mentality, the feeling of one's professional competence, independence, and self-efficacy, i.e. experience of professional integrity and definiteness. (P. 158)

Tikhonova (2014) identified a disadvantage in the gradational approach and also analyzed the essential characteristics of professional identity in a megapolis population. This author mentions that such an approach requires analyses of the population by parameters such as income level, professional career, and educational potential, but excludes professional identity (Tikhonova, 2014). Thus, professional identity remains a part that requires study in the forming and development of the megapolises and their institutes, and the research team and authors of this article aim to fill this gap in knowledge.

Data and Methodology

The theoretical and methodological construct of this research refers to professional identity in a megapolis population under precaritization. It is based on the authors' understanding of professional identity, which is defined as a connection that secures an appropriate level of professionalism, preventing social and professional imitation. Generally, mass media provides the space for forming, strengthening, self-analysis and retranslation of a professional identity in today's society. Therefore, giving prominence to media education becomes a key factor because the forming of professional identities that are stable and appropriate for present day informational experiences will delay the precarization and facilitate its demise by the Russian society (Frolova & Posukhova, 2016).

At the same time, the common logic of studying a megapolis population suggests that without defining the parameters of a professional identity, achieving acceptable results in behavioral strategies, adaptive potential, and stratification is difficult. For the megapolis population, characterized by individual life paths, the professional identity becomes the key criterion for self-identification and self-attribution to a particular social or professional group. This helps to accurately define the structured deviations among various layers of citizens and avoid the pattern of a megapolis population opposed to 'the rest of' Russia that confounds the representation of social and professional differences across diverse types of settlements.

This study used Bourdieu's 'practical groups' (Bourdieu, 2007) to analyze the professional identity of the megapolis population. According to Kachanov and Shmatko (1996), practical and constructed social groups are defined as having objective or subjective pre-conditions and practices performed by individuals. The social differences among them are produced or reproduced as a relatively stable system.

Based on this theory, the researchers recorded the objectivization of social and professional positions of the group and the subjectivization of social capitals. This helped define the potential for professional identity development, in other words, 'the group's concept of themselves' and the level of the group's readiness to act for the sake of common interests and a common professional future.

With this view, the scientific research was performed with secondary analysis of sociological data from the Institute of Sociology of the Russian Academy of Sciences. The focus was on the social positioning of various groups and strata of a megapolis. Data were obtained from results of two sets of the whole of Russia monitoring (October 2014 and March 2015), performed by the Institute of Sociology of the Russian Academy of Sciences. The total study population was 4000 respondents, representing a sample of the adult population of Russia. Respondents were defined by gender, age (grouped by birth cohorts), education level, and type of residential settlement.

Results and Discussion

The statistics of the social and professional structure of the Russian society showed that megapolises have a higher than Russian average of 'white collar' workers with higher education (37%). These professionals represent the most qualified group. The share of 'white collar' workers without higher

education was 17%, and the share of highly qualified 'blue collar' workers was 21%. People employed in sales and consumer services was 13% and entrepreneurs and self-employed was less than 1% of megapolises' population (Gorshkov & Petukhov, 2015).

According to research by Institute of Sociology of the Russian Academy of Sciences, the representatives of various professional groups exist in different economic realms. Nevertheless, today over two-thirds of 'white collar' workers of varying qualification levels are concentrated within state-owned enterprises. Other professional groups are distributed as follows: 59% of sales and consumer service employees and over 60% of 'blue collar' workers work in private sector, regardless of their qualification level (Gorshkov & Petukhov, 2015).

The established social and professional configuration of the Russian megapolises indicates a clear trend of deindustrialization and a phasing out and closing down of major plants. This contrasts with the growth of the banking, insurance, and mediator services, and the service sector as a whole. Thus, the social and professional hierarchy of Russian megapolises is not so much related to quantifiable parameters, such as the share of social and professional groups in the adult population, but rather to the volume of economic, social, and political capital.

Two consequences are evident. First, among the representatives of the most qualified group of 'white collar' workers, a sufficient portion comprises office workers, sales network representatives, and representatives of intermediary services. These social and professional layers are influenced by competition within the labor market and by the devaluation of social capital. The activity of these social and professional layers is defined by 'precarization', i.e., the dominance of routine activities, execution of superiors' instructions, and such activities do not require professional self-fulfillment. They suggest an unstable social and professional position and high turnover with people tending to change profession or job position.

This conclusion is supported because, in a Russian megapolis, the social position of 'white collar' workers does not necessarily reflect higher education. In other words, educational, professional and qualification potential is not sought-after with preference given to highly skilled 'blue collar' workers that display professional ethos and a higher level of job stability.

While the professional identity correlates with social and professional well-being, it also corresponds to the way representatives of a particular social and professional group form their self-esteem and their public image. Therefore, a situation of cognitive disagreement exists because 'white collar' workers, the highest concentration of professional identities in Russian megapolises, are characterized by a complicated approach towards professional identity where social positioning (objectivization of social capitals) is based on income level and thus, restricts other forms of social capitalization.

Furthermore, an important factor for forming a professional identity is the self-esteem based on financial standing. However, such a position encourages a lower interest in social and professional patterns, with professional identity becoming neither the focus of social self-esteem nor associated with professional career prospects. The results of the research discussed above suggest that the concept of forming a professional identity is stimulated by reproducing social resourcefulness that can be qualified as a decent wage and a stable job. It is revealing that the objectivization of the social position of 'white collar' workers in Russian megapolises is noticeable at a social micro-level. This position could be characterized by the intra-corporative ethos and the development of certain behavioral codes that focus on adaptation in the professional environment.

Such a position hinders subjectivization of social capitals as it results in an individual's perception of each personal situation and does not help people strengthen professional attitudes and comprehension of professional interests as a whole social and professional group. It should be noted that the situation with the professional identity of 'white collar' workers is a paradox in its dualism. On the one hand, people declare they strive towards obtaining an interesting job and realizing their potential (25%), and on the other hand, their actual position (28%) is one leaning towards having status in society (Gorshkov, 2016).

Although these positions seem similar, each has a different practical consequence. Because status in society for a megapolis population is linked to financial standing and to the way 'acquaintances' view and assess a person, their status ambitions may remain unrealized within the professional identity.

Where the professional identity is influenced more so by the possibility of realizing one's potential in a profession, the criterion of 'occupational situation' becomes important (Gorshkov, 2015).

It is clear that a professional identity is not a starting point for self-esteem or self-perception of status or an occupational situation. Satisfaction in various aspects of every-day life is differentiated in 'white collar' workers by the criterion of positive and negative estimation of all occurrences. It is clear that most concern about non-satisfaction with life is typical of 'white collar' workers in professions that do not require higher education. This represents 17% of 'white collar' workers (Gorshkov & Petukhov, 2015). Structural positions of this sub-layer are competitively weak and lack potential for successful adaptation at a new workplace.

The stability of this sub-layer is also affected by peculiarities of their professional motivations, i.e., the dominance of adaptive attitudes over achievement-based attitudes and low strive for learning new occupations. It is important that in megapolises, with the exception of Moscow and Saint Petersburg, 'white collar' workers remain employees of the public sector where their structural positions are linked to budget resources and depend on official policies in the sphere of employment and salaries regulations.

At the same time, the conditions of a protracted social and economic recession can result in a decreased focus on professional identity. The priority becomes the estimation of income for dynamic living. In other words, a worsening of financial standing is correlated with 'grudges' caused by underestimating one's professional potential.

Under the current conditions, the resource of professional patriotism and sacrifice that was typical for budget institution employees in crisis 1990s has almost disappeared. For the present-day situation, the views of Mansurov and Semenova (2001) about a position of most popular 'mass' profession specialists are hardly applicable. According to the scale that they developed, a 'job' is ranked second after the 'family' (3.3 out of a maximum of 4 points; Yadov, 2001). Nevertheless, today's employees of the public sector mainly focus on how key professional activities affect adaptive strategies that allow them to work until retirement and to not lose their job. In both cases, there appears a lack of demand for a professional identity.

A professional identity may not be perceived as a hindrance to adapting to another professional and cultural environment. Importantly, a professional adaptation may entail the risk of self-attributing to a non-competing group that allows members 'to work only within one's profession'. Thus, the professional identity grows dependent on the way prospects of professional activities and career are estimated, on the risks of discrimination 'by profession', and the limits of one's mobility in case of a change in profession.

The above creates a certain tendency towards professional segregation, which means that individual employees with similar professional potential may experience 'double standards' based on inequality of options for professional career and professional self-fulfillment.

The context for forming a professional identity in a megapolis population suggests that qualifications and professional potential are not of major importance compared to personal, social, and cultural ones. This is confirmed by professional attitudes of 'white collar' workers that show that personal (career) considerations, to a larger extent, define social positioning rather than a professional one. In other words, in the value system of 'white collar' workers, the professional values do not make the central core compared to pragmatic goals and what could be classified as the phenomenon of instrumental activity. Sociological research shows that 'white collar' workers primarily estimate their financial standing as satisfactory. This was observed in 54% of highly qualified 'white collar' workers and 64% of 'white collar' workers without higher education (Gorshkov & Petukhov, 2015).

A conclusion could be drawn that the prospects of forming a professional identity as a formula for the collective self-identification lags behind the strive for a position of civil identification and demonstration of one's capital of reputation. This appears to arise because the forms of citizen participation as 'white collar' workers are unstable and unrelated to professional preferences. Also, civil identification may compensate for any deficits in having a professional identity.

Clearly, the incomplete process of professional identity and social and professional groups forming with qualities of professionalism and that of the professional conduct code results in professional imitation in the large cities and megapolises. At the same time, at the level of individual professional

groups, a professional identity is considered a marketing one with the ability to sell goods and services 'at a higher price' without proper professional value.

In exploring the complex process of developing a professional identity among the population of a megapolis, 'white collar' workers are a reference group for professional identification. Also, in terms of combining capital, 'white collar' workers focused on economic resources while the group that had no professional identity reproduced the cultural (professional) ones.

In addition, a research of this group revealed it consisted of highly qualified 'blue collar' workers and entrepreneurs. Although highly qualified 'blue collar' employees 'compete' with 'white collar' workers in terms of quantitative parameters, this social and professional group may be declining in size due to the rapid aging of its members who are leaving a socially active life. Another reason is the current trend of converting megapolises into centers of financial, commercial, scientific, and cultural activities.

Constructing positions for highly qualified 'blue collar' workers means a secondary layout of positions in a megapolis environment because highly qualified 'blue collar' workers are not a group that forms a prospective professional matrix. Highly qualified 'blue collar' workers have high professional potential. Compared to 'white collar' workers without higher education, they have sound opportunities to secure a stable job and are less subject to precarization.

However, Russian society rarely shows a trend towards a professional identity that is related to continuity of identification strategies. This is because highly qualified workers residing in major cities and megapolises are positioned as 'hired labor'. Another factor is the rather weak identification structure of the modern 'working class' (trade unions) and a tendency towards individual strategies among highly qualified workers.

For 'white collar' workers, their distorted professional identity does not lead to their disintegration. They form a practical social group acting on the basis of financial success, i.e., positive estimation of financial standing. In comparison, the highly qualified 'blue collar' workers experience destructive effects of individual strategies under the existing values of professionalism in this environment and lose their importance in work relations with the employer. On one hand, employers are interested in exploiting professionalism as a factor of economic profitability. On the other hand, they are averse to realizing professionalism because it results in social claims from highly qualified 'blue collar' workers, especially, at a group level.

The situation of having a professional identity as a 'white collar' worker might not be universal in a megapolis population, but it becomes modal. As the attitudes, voluntarily or involuntarily, show, reproduction of pragmatic patterns is defined, not so much, by estimating professional contribution and possibilities for professional self-fulfillment, but by associating an individual with income.

At the same time, striving for aggregation of 'free' time as a resource is typical of 'white collar' groups. Hence, unequivocally concluding that this group is the bearer of post-materialistic values is naive. To a greater degree, the diffuseness of a professional identity, which is often a declarative position regarding professional self-fulfillment, results in considering 'free' time as both an attribute of personal independence and a symbol of the professional group being an environment for 'making money' but not for strengthening a professional identity in a trend towards a new corporative ethos.

Also, many commercial and banking institutions try to implement corporatization relying on foreign standards. However, this process has some hidden pitfalls with the focus on rituals of foreign institutions often used only to 'cover up' strict subordination and dominance of 'white collar' workers in a group where policy is defined by the 'boss'. This pattern is reproduced through an extensive layer of employees whose task is only to follow the instructions of the superiors.

The above suggests that a professional identity has a lower status than the group that is summoned to implement common interests as a collective. The prospects of equal professional and career opportunities are unfavorable in the modus operandi of such systems. In other words, becoming a professional identity is neither a prize nor a guarantee of potential achievement nor does it act as a group resource.

Therefore, establishing a professional identity in Russian megapolises is characterized by a deficit of a professional identification matrix that serves as the core for identification strategies of the main groups

that are self-regulatory in economic and social terms. Traditional identification patterns, characteristic of the previous Soviet period, were aimed at selflessness and one having pride in their profession. When these become practically nonexistent, society witnessed the growth of interest in meaningful 'demonstratory' identities (as in the case of social volunteering).

However, the shape of the identification situation shows displaced, irregular, and casual alternative manifestations of a professional identity. Volunteering has not become a mass phenomenon. This is explained not only by negative attitudes of authorities but also by those of the community. Accepting a volunteer identity in place of a professional identity entails an adverse effect on the professional identity. Volunteering is considered popular. It also gives the volunteer a higher social position compared to that of a professional identity. Indeed, a professional identity requires a time consuming and complex professional socialization process. Given the risk of unemployment, willingness to change jobs and professions, and the precarization effect, the professional identity remains undefined as an identified trend in the attitudes of people within large cities (megapolises).

Conclusion

There are two main conclusions to this research. First, results showed the formation of fairly stable social and professional groups. This was especially the case in the banking and 'high-tech' spheres, which are not 'trend-setters' for a professional identity but rather push megapolis population towards accepting a professional identity formula that focuses on aggregating personal resource and provides more confidence in the future. Second, the first finding is important, given the growing demand for social security and improved structural positions for public sector employees, and that major city populations have become a reference point for identification strategies of 'the rest of' the Russian population.

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