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Social Well-Being and Expectations of the Youth in the Industrial Region*



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Abstract. The article covers the social expectations of young people in a large industrial region of Russia in relation to their social well-being. The information framework of the article consists of results of a sample study conducted by the sociologists of Ural Federal University supervised by Yu.R. Vishnevsky in 2016 in the Yekaterinburg and Sverdlovsk oblasts. The survey sample includes 2,512 people aged 15–30, target quota sample was used, with quota signs such as employment (working, studying, and unemployed youth), age (young people of three age groups – under 20, 21–25, and 26–30) and type of settlement (residents of Ekaterinburg, other large cities in the region, medium or small towns, villages and urban-type settlements). The present paper raises the problem of studying the social well-being of young people, with a key factor being their focus on the future, their expectations and life strategies. Based on analysis

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of scientific concepts devoted to the population's social well-being, an important feature of the youth as a socio-demographic group is revealed: their focus on the future and a vast planning horizon. A reasonable assumption is put forward, which is partially confirmed by the survey results: the social well-being of young people largely depends on the established image of the future and assessment of their life prospects. Respondents confident in their future tend to be more positive about the present. Based on the survey data groups of young people are classified in terms of their attitude towards their life prospects: "the nowists" ("now"), "the optimistic", "the pessimistic" and "the patient". The problem of discussion the authors identify for the in the future is the following: young people with a clear image of their future who arrange their lives according to their life strategies demonstrate a better ability to social adaptation.

Key words: social well-being, life prospects, social expectations, socio-economic status, image of the social future.

Introduction. One of the indicators of effective socio-economic development of a region and assessing the quality of life is the well-being of various social groups and population strata. The choice of young people in the industrial region as the object of research is explained by several circumstances.

First, a shift from an industrial development model towards the post-industrial one had an extremely negative impact on the regions with highly concentrated industrial production and a large number of major enterprises [1, 2].

Second, the social damage paired with economic costs turned out to be significant. The traditional values of the youth such as receiving a degree in engineering and working in industrial enterprises became irrelevant [3]. In general, the risk of socio-cultural deformations increased, the mechanisms of cultural transmission were broken. As a result, young people faced the need to adapt and independently search for life priorities without relying on the positive experience of the older generation.

Third, young people are considered simultaneously as one of the most vulnerable social groups, at the same time having the potential to be a resource for the development of the whole society [4]. Consequently, the success or failure of the public policy has a direct

impact on the well-being and expectations of young people.

In foreign social studies, studies of social well-being are traditionally conducted on the basis of the concepts of "social well-being" [5, 6, 7, 8], "quality of life" [9, 10, 11], "social happiness" [12, 13, 14]. English literature sources mainly contain the terms welfare, which is synonymous with the Russian equivalent of "well-being", and well-being. They are referred to as positive (joy, satisfaction, happiness) and negative (fear, anxiety, concern) states, but – most importantly – at the same time the social component of well-being is highlighted: a person's assessment of their life in relation to the situation in the society.

Despite the fact that social well-being is considered a subjective phenomenon within western concepts, it reflects people's real living conditions. Therefore, we can confirm the fact that the use of results of social well-being in social cognition in the West has already "become a social standard, and the basis of the methodology of social research is not just a description of vital problems, their layering, people's anxiety and concerns, but analysis of government performance and domination of priorities approved in the society" [15, p. 11].

Russian literature on Sociology contains a significant number of works devoted to the

study of social well-being and expectations of young people [15, 16, 17]. The central research topics of social well-being are aspects such as social adaptation [18, 19, 20], social activity and tension [21, 22], as well as factors that form deviant behavior of low-resource subgroups of the younger generation [23, 24, 25]. In an attempt to group the author's concepts one may come to a conclusion that all of them are based on analysis of people's subjective assessments of their position in the system of social inequality.

However, despite the variety of research works, there is still no holistic concept that would reflect the relations between social expectations and the well-being of young people, as well as explain the degree of their mutual influence.

In light of this, the purpose of the article is to conceptualize the relations between the expectations of young people and their social well-being. The applied objective is to study the degree of satisfaction of young people with various aspects of social reality, their living conditions, as well as to track the relations between young people's focus on the future and their current state of health on the example of the industrial region.

Theoretical and methodological framework of the research

In modern science there are two theoretical approaches to the study of social well-being: sociological and psychological. For a long time the methodology of "social well-being" was dominated by the psychological approach (Gritsenko, Kolomiets, Krupets, Shalamova). It is based on the study of social well-being as an individual or group phenomenon. Social well-being is considered a socio-psychological state of an individual or a group. Although it arises the influence of objective life circumstances, the measurement of the subject's sensory-

emotional and cognitive spheres remains the center and subject of analysis [34].

Drilling through the theory of social well-being was the result of the development of sociology in the post-Soviet period, the search for new grounds explaining the turbulent social processes. "The subjective perception of a person's own life has ceased to be the focus of solely psychological research due to the significant influence of objective factors largely determining the life of both the individual and social communities" [26, p. 50].

The analysis of the interpretation of the concept "social well-being" in the framework of the sociological approach shows a wide range of interpretations of this phenomenon (Rubina, Toschenko, Kharchenko, Petrova). In one of the first sociological works dedicated to this issue E.V. Davydova defines social health as "satisfaction with individual aspects of life: family, household, employment, leisure, socio-political, socio-economic, and socio-cultural" [27, p. 14]. This definition was later specified and expanded depending on the author's vision and the subject field of a particular study, but its basis – the category of satisfaction – remained unchanged [28, 29, 30].

N.I. Lapin, defining social well-being from the axiological approach draws attention to its correlation with the context of the present conditions and the focus on the future: "Social well-being is people's subjective perception of meanings of their life here and now, in the context of the past and the expected future. It is their value-emotional attitude to their social status and degree of satisfaction with their needs and interests"¹. However, Lapin considers the degree of optimism in assessing the future only

¹ Yasin E.G. (Ed.). Lapin N.I. Basic Values, Social Well-Being and Trust in Government Institutions. *V International scientific conference "Economic Modernization and Social Development"*. In 3 volumes. Moscow: GU-VShE, 2007. Volume 2. Pp. 210–219.

as one of the components of social well-being, while the image of the social future of young people as a holistic phenomenon is closely linked with their subjective perceptions and sense of events and conditions of the present.

In our opinion, the essence of the sociological approach to studying social well-being is revealed through analyzing this category at the macro- and micro-levels of the social system simultaneously, namely, in the interaction of objective factors and conditions of life and their subjective perception (refraction) in the consciousness of an individual and a social group. The second important point determining the specific features of sociological analysis of social well-being is consider a social community or group, in particular, young people as a subject of well-being.

It is known that the status of young people in the system of social inequality is considerably uncertain [31]. For a young person the position in the life cycle is associated with the ability/inability to successfully accumulate and realize their potential. Therefore, subjective assessments of youth satisfaction with certain aspects of life are of a projective nature. Social expectations and the image of the future formed on their basis play a significant role in these evaluations.

Thus, our understanding of social well-being comes from the fact that for young people it is largely determined by the image of the social future formed in their minds, the most important component of which being social expectations. Social expectations are formed based on young people's assessment of opportunities to apply their potential in the current and specific social situation. Therefore, we can assume that there is feedback between well-being and expectations: young people's strategic behavior, that is, behavior focused on the future, is developed taking into account

their satisfaction with specific living conditions here and now. Respectively, young people's choice of life, professional, educational and other strategies depends on their current state of health.

Based on the correlation between social well-being and expectations we can distinguish several types of young people's social attitudes according to their attitude to the future and their position in the present. Traditionally, sociology and social psychology distinguish a group with an optimistic attitude – the so-called “optimists” characterized by a positive perception of these events and a high assessment of life prospects. The group with the opposite mood – “pessimists” – is susceptible to negative feelings towards the present and future [32]. We believe that this classification is not complete and does not cover the whole range of young people's possible attitudes. Today, a number of sociologists refer to the spread of “nowism” as a rejection of thoughts about the future, an attempt to live in the moment [33]. Moreover, we also distinguish another type of sentiment – the “neutral-patient” youth characterized by a fundamentally different emotional state: they accept the events as they are, willing to tolerate their negative consequences.

The research is based on the understanding of social well-being as a system of young people's subjective assessments of their prospects and opportunities for implementing life strategies. The structure of social well-being includes both objective factors and living conditions, and people's subjective states.

Objective factors include environmental, political, economic, socio-cultural parameters of the living environment. They act as an institutional context for the functioning of subjective states and largely determine these states, being refracted in the system of values of social actors.

Subjective states include young people's satisfaction with the current conditions of their life: socio-economic status, including financial, housing and living conditions and prospects to improve them; the opportunities for education and raising its level; opportunities for employment, career and self-realization. According to the main hypothesis of the research, these components are associated with the social expectations of young people. These subjective components of social well-being determined the main blocks of our empirical research.

Data and method

The article uses materials of an empirical sociological research "Social well-being of the youth in the Sverdlovsk Oblast" conducted in November 2015–January 2016 and supervised by Yu.R. Vishnevskii and with the participation of the authors. 2,512 people aged 15–30 were surveyed using the method of questionnaire, the target quota sample was used, quota characteristics being employment (working, studying and unemployed youth), age (young people of three age groups: under 20, 21–25 and 26–30) and type of settlement (residents of Yekaterinburg, other large cities of the region, medium and small towns, villages and urban settlements).

The age quotas are based on the key aspects of young people's self-identification: under 20 – the period of primary self-identification at work or education (high school graduation, admission to educational institutions or going to work); 21–25 – for most young people it is the period of graduation from a college or a university, entering the labor market (job search, primary employment), 26–30 years – the period of accumulating social and professional experience, starting a family, self-identification in the family and household, changing life priorities. Age turned out a significant factor

determining the social well-being and young people's image of the future.

The survey covered young people living in Yekaterinburg (44%); in other large cities of the region (25%); in medium and small towns (24%); in rural settlements (7%). It actually repeats the distribution of young people in the Sverdlovsk Oblast by residence. When forming the sample, it was assumed that apart from age, the respondents' social attitudes and expectations will be influenced by the place of residence. However, there was no statistically significant correlation between the respondents' place of residence and social well-being and expectations.

Empirical data were processed and analyzed through Vortex 10 program for processing and analysis of sociological and marketing information.

Research results

The research demonstrates that optimism is predominant among the respondents: 45% believe that the situation in the country will improve in the future. Young people generally have a positive view of the social future and therefore there are no age differences in responses. However, it is not wise to interpret such responses as a purely positive assessment of the current state of affairs. On the contrary, it indicates a request for change, yet delayed. Young people, on the one hand, show that they expect changes, on the other hand, they still have a certain amount of patience (*Table 1*).

Although optimistic young people predominate, it is worth saying that the youth environment is highly differentiated based on the attitude to future prospects.

The next group of respondents has completely opposite optimistic expectations of the future. They are tired of waiting for changes (14%), their sentiment is determined by fears that the situation will only get worse. Neutral

Table 1. Sentiment and expectations of young people of different age groups, %

What are your current moods and expectations?	Age			
	Under 20	21–25	26–30	TOTAL
I think the situation in the country will improve (“optimists”)	42	51	48	45
I do not expect any significant changes, I can wait a bit more (“the patient”)	12	17	16	14
I am tired of waiting for changes, I fear that the situation will only get worse (“pessimists”)	15	9	17	14
The best thing is to live for the present, not to worry about anything (“nowists”)	29	19	17	25
Undecided	2	4	2	2
TOTAL	100	100	100	100

Table 2. Satisfaction with financial status among various age groups of young people, %

To what extent are you satisfied with your financial status?	Age			
	Under 20	21–25	26–30	TOTAL
Completely satisfied	15.0	6.1	4.5	11.5
Rather satisfied than not	37.7	25.7	28.5	33.2
Rather dissatisfied	29.0	47.7	45.5	35.6
Not satisfied at all	15.4	20.5	21.1	17.5
Financial satisfaction index*	+0.08	-0.36	-0.33	-0.08
TOTAL	100	100	100	100

* The index is calculated as the difference between respondents' positive and negative responses divided by 100.

estimates are typical for the same share of respondents – 14%. At the same time, it should be borne in mind that this group does not have any clear feelings about the future and can join the group of “optimists” of “pessimists” depending on the events.

A phenomenon of special attention is the nowist attitudes of young people. The life focus on “here and now”, without obsessing about the future, building life plans, are quite typical for all age sub-groups of young people (25%). However, they are particularly evident among younger age group (29%). They are least common for young people aged 26–30 (17%). Apparently, as young people grow older, socialize and form more complex social relations they overcome the nowist attitude and gain the necessary experience in life planning. Accordingly, with age young people move from the category of “nowists” to groups with other social attitudes and expectations concerning the future.

The core of social well-being is the satisfaction with various aspects of life. Material well-being and socio-economic status form the basis of satisfaction (*Tab. 2*).

We can trace a trend: in the younger age group (under 20) the satisfaction with financial status is higher than among older ones. The socio-economic status (SES) of this age group of young people is still determined by the current socio-economic status of their parents. As a rule, the respondents of this group live in a parent family, hence, a more relaxed attitude to the material aspects of life. In turn, young people aged 21–25 who enter adulthood are forced to build their own SES, competing in the labor market. At the same time, we assume that they still enjoy the financial support from their parents and, in some cases, living with them. Dissatisfaction with the financial status among young people aged 26–30 is associated with marriage, starting a family, the need to provide for it. They do not possess enough professional

capital to achieve the desired income level. In professional terms, they are at the beginning of the road facing the challenges of career development.

The study reveals that the satisfaction with the current financial status of young people is associated with their sentiment and expectations of the future (Cramer's V – correlation between the corresponding variables was 0.125, significant). The results of correlation are presented in *Table 3*.

The highest degree of satisfaction with financial status is marked in the group of young people who believe that it is better to live for the present. The nowists are satisfied with their current financial status and do not want to think about the future, which is probably due to their relatively carefree existence.

Young people who expect the current situation on the country to improve also demonstrate high assessment scores, yet they are somewhat lower than those of “nowists”. Young people who do not expect any changes in the future but are ready to wait a bit more are not satisfied with their financial status (in this group, the answer “rather dissatisfied” prevails – 62%).

Pessimistic respondents are the least satisfied with their socio-economic status. They are not at all satisfied with their financial status (33%) and do not see any prospects for its improvement, on the contrary, they expect reduced opportunities for improving their socio-economic status in the future.

In addition to satisfaction with the financial status we measured parameters of social well-being such as satisfaction with education and training (*Tab. 4*).

Table 3. Correlation between sentiment and expectations of young people and satisfaction with their financial status*, %

To what extent are you satisfied with you financial status?	Predominant sentiment and expectations			
	Optimists	Nowists	Patient	Pessimists
Totally satisfied	10	15	6	12
Rather satisfied, than not	36	37	15	24
Rather dissatisfied	39	35	62	31
Totally dissatisfied	15	12	17	33
TOTAL:	100	100	100	100

* Cramer's V [0..1]: 0.125, significant.

Table 4. Satisfaction with quality of current (acquired) education and professional training of different age groups of young people, %

Are you satisfied with the quality of your current (acquired) education?	Age			
	Under 20	21–25	26–30	TOTAL
Totally satisfied	27	16	19	23
Rather satisfied, than not	52	45	53	49
Rather dissatisfied	17	31	24	22
Totally dissatisfied	4	8	4	6
TOTAL	100	100	100	100
Are you satisfied with the quality of your current (acquired) training?	Age			
	Under 20	21–25	26–30	TOTAL
Totally satisfied	22	14	16	19
Rather satisfied, than not	45	45	50	46
Rather dissatisfied	19	33	23	23
Totally dissatisfied	5	6	3	5
TOTAL	100	100	100	100

The degree of satisfaction with the quality of current or acquired education reflects age-specific features. The representatives of the youngest age group (under 20) are the most satisfied, that is, they are mostly respondents who are in the process of acquiring education (high school students, college and junior college students). In this case, their satisfaction/dissatisfaction with the quality of education is associated assessing the opportunities for admission to colleges and universities. The satisfaction of the older age group (26–30) is somewhat lower: these respondents already work, have experience in employer–employee relations and compare their education with the requirements of production and business.

It is no coincidence that the least satisfied with the quality of education are young people aged 21–25 who are at the stage of transition from the educational stage to the labor stage. For them the issues of job search and employment, first experience of applying knowledge and skills acquired in an educational institution are most relevant. The respondents of this group are “face to face” with the problem of the employer’s assessment of the quality of their education. According to a number of sociological studies, the major claim of young people is that the content of education does not correspond with the employers’ requirements [4, 17].

The satisfaction with the quality of education significantly correlates with the satisfaction with the quality of training (Cramer’s V – 0.135, significant). This confirms the conclusion that young people assess the quality of education in the context of its applicability on the labor market.

The satisfaction with the quality of current or acquired training has similar age peculiarities (see Table 4). Young people under 20 who do not yet have professional experience are the most satisfied; the least – young people aged 21–25 who are actively searching for their place in the labor market. Our study once again confirms the fact that the “gap” between vocational education and the labor market, which has long been talked about by sociologists [32], is still relevant.

Both variables (satisfaction with the quality of education and satisfaction with training) correlate with the sentiment and expectations of young people (Tab. 5 and Tab. 6).

In general, the respondents, regardless of their sentiment about the future rather are satisfied with the quality of the current (acquired) education than not satisfied, although the share of those whop are dissatisfied with education in varying degrees is significant: it ranges from 23% among young people who want to live in the moment to 43% among the pessimistic young people. The satisfaction with

Table 5. Satisfaction with the quality of current (acquired) education depending on social attitudes and expectations of young people*, %

Are you satisfied with the quality of your current (acquired) education?	Predominant sentiment and expectations			
	Optimists	Nowists	Patient	Pessimists
Totally satisfied	23	24	9	16
Rather satisfied, than not	51	53	63	41
Rather dissatisfied	21	22	22	28
Totally dissatisfied	5	1	6	15
TOTAL:	100	100	100	100
* Cramer’s V [0..1]: 0.123, significant.				

Table 6. Satisfaction with the quality of current (acquired) training depending on social attitudes and expectations of young people*, %

Are you satisfied with the quality of your current (acquired) training?	Predominant sentiment and expectations			
	Optimists	Nowists	Patient	Pessimists
Totally satisfied	20	26	9	14
Rather satisfied, than not	48	49	54	49
Rather dissatisfied	26	23	34	25
Totally dissatisfied	6	2	3	12
TOTAL:	100	100	100	100

* Cramer's V [0..1]: 0.112, significant.

the quality of training is approximately at the same level: the share of dissatisfied (fully or partly) is 25% among nowists young people and 37% among pessimists and young people who are ready to “wait”.

However, further analysis of satisfaction shows differences according to the identified attitudes and expectations of young people.

The nowists are most satisfied with the quality of education, just like in the case with financial status. The group of optimistic young people is close to it. More cautious assessments of the quality of education is expressed by young people who are patient: their answers are shifted to the middle of the satisfaction scale (“rather satisfied than not” or “rather dissatisfied”). Young people who are pessimistic about the future assess the quality of education more radically: they have the highest share of those dissatisfied with the quality of education (15% are not satisfied at all and 28% are rather dissatisfied).

It is interesting that a similar pattern is observed in the assessment of satisfaction with the quality of current (acquired) training (see Table 6). The nowists are also the most satisfied with it (nowists – 26 and 49%).

The optimistic youth are to a lesser extent, but quite substantially satisfied with it (20 and 48%). In two other groups of young people the satisfaction with the quality of training is much lower.

If we divide the answers of “pessimistic” and “patient” young people into two poles – positive and negative – the number of those satisfied and dissatisfied is equal in both groups: the share of satisfied to some extent in each group is 63%, and dissatisfied – 37%, respectively. But those who fear a negative scenario of the future tend to extreme estimates (they answer “totally satisfied” or “totally dissatisfied” more often than “patient”), while young people willing to wait a bit more, again, as in the case of satisfaction with the quality of education, takes a somewhat uncertain position: they choose answers from the middle part of the scale – “rather satisfied than not” or “rather dissatisfied” more often than respondents from other groups.

Thus, based on empirical analysis of the correlation between social well-being and expectations we confirm the existence attitudes for the future and positions taken in relation to the present among young people such as “nowism”, “optimism”, “pessimism”, and “patience”. Let us provide a generalizing characteristics of these groups.

1. “Nowists”. There were quite a lot of them – a quarter of respondents. Nowists are a group most satisfied with their financial status, quality of education and quality of training. It would seem that they form a group of people with the most adaptive social well-being. However, the refusal to plan reduces

the transformation activity of this group. Given that nowists' attitudes are most evident among young people under 20 it is reasonable to assume the marginal nature of this group. In the process of their self-identification – social, educational, professional, and family-household – it is possible that it will “shift” towards groups with other attitudes – “optimistic”, “pessimistic” or “patient”. Here, the result will largely depend on objective opportunities for self-identification provided by the society.

2. “Optimists”. This group has a positive attitude, which is quite typical for young people so they constitute a great share in the sample – 45%. At the same time, optimists are characterized by a high degree of satisfaction with indicators of social well-being. Although their assessments of the present is not as positive as those of nowists. Some expectation takes place, the intention to change the social reality for the better. This is where the potential of this group lies.

3. “Pessimists” (14%) are afraid that the situation will become worse in the future, they do not see any positive prospects and therefore they are the most dissatisfied of all groups. Nevertheless, their negative potential can be a source of activity to change it for the better. It is known that critical attitude is the first step to change the situation.

4. “The patient” is a special category of young people (14%). On the one hand, they are characterized by negative assessments, dissatisfaction with the current situation, although it is somewhat “smoothed” compared to “pessimists”. On the other hand, they focus on preserving this negative situation. In our view, their willingness to wait reduces the transformation potential of this group of young people.

Conclusion

Summarizing the analysis, we come to the following conclusion. The social well-being of young people in the industrial region measured by three parameters – satisfaction with financial situation, satisfaction with the quality of current (acquired) education and training – is interrelated with their social expectations and sentiment. Thus, the theoretical hypothesis about the dependence of social well-being and expectations is confirmed.

The correlation between expectations and well-being is rhizome or reversible. On the one hand, young people's vision and perception of their prospects, positive or negative, or refusal to see any prospects determines their subjective perception of their current socio-economic, educational, and professional status. On the other hand, young people's emotionally colored assessment of the current situation, their current self-perception in the society can influence, or rather, enhance the positive or negative attitude to the future.

Studies show that young people's assessments of prospects for the future and the current state of affairs are heterogeneous. We were able to distinguish four groups of young people with different sentiment and expectations associated with different levels of satisfaction with the current situation, different social well-being: “nowists”, “optimists”, “pessimists” and “the patient”. Such types are typical for the youth of the industrial region. The location of research objects is the Sverdlovsk Oblast which is among typical industrial regions of Russia with a large number of industrial enterprises, operating educational engineering centers, and a significant share of young people engaged in industrial production. We assume that the presence of the selected types and their share

may vary depending on the regional economic and social characteristics. From our point of view, this subject can be the core of further comparative regional studies.

The most favorable assessment of social well-being by “nowists” involves lack of any focus on the future, refusal to assess the prospects and the desire to live the moment. The two distinguished groups, optimists and pessimists, are opposite in their assessments of both their future and the current situation. However, in our opinion, what they have in common is their transformation potential based on a caring attitude to reality and the desire to change and improve social reality. The negative attitude of “the patient” combined with the willingness to tolerate the existing state, on the contrary, reduces their value as a resource for constructive change.

The distinguished types help both to fix them as a theoretical model and promote further discussions and studies devoted to the image of young people’s social future. Nevertheless, the highlighted categories of young people can serve as a framework for further theorization in personal sociology and deepening of the axiological aspect of the subject.

Of course, comparing the various parameters of young people’s social well-being with their expectations, we understand that social well-being includes a wide range of characteristics and is not limited to parameters covered in the article. We see analysis of social well-being as a complex phenomenon and a complex nature of its correlation with young people’s sentiment and expectations as a further prospect for research.

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