



# Constraints of Social Consolidation of Urban Communities

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**Abstract.** The paper examines probable constraints on the process of urban community's consolidation. By social consolidation, the authors understand a purposefully organized and regulated process of strengthening interpersonal and inter-group communications, achieving mutual understanding regarding the solution of common urban problems on the basis of dialogue and cooperation. The empirical basis of the paper is the results of two sociological studies: 1) conducted in the Belgorod region in January - April 2021, and included a mass questionnaire survey of the population using the quota sampling method ( $n = 500$ ) and an expert survey ( $n = 30$ ); 2) conducted in the Belgorod region under the guidance of prof. Valentin Babintsev in 2014, and included a mass survey of residents of the Belgorod region ( $n = 1000$ ) using the quota sampling method. Based on the analysis of theoretical and empirical sources. Three groups of constraints on the consolidation process have been identified: due to the peculiarities of the external environment of the life of urban communities; associated with the specifics of their self-organization; due to the peculiarities of the concept of consolidation and the process of its practical implementation.

**Keywords:** Social consolidation · Urban communities · Social solidarity · Belgorod region · Regional solidarity society

## 1 Introduction

The problem of consolidation and the underlying principle of solidarity has been one of the topical issues of scientific discussions in recent years, which are based on a rather long tradition of its theoretical analysis, since, as G.D. Kovrigina reasonably writes, “from the very first steps of social reflection, almost every thinker paid attention to what, in fact, makes society possible – social solidarity” [1, p. 5]. But, no less importantly, it becomes the subject of practical decisions and actions in the field of social management. The President of the Russian Federation has repeatedly (directly or indirectly) addressed the topic of consolidating society [2]. The idea of solidarity is present in the public speeches of Patriarch Kirill, who literally declared the following: “And today, as well as 400 years ago, the ideas of solidarity and concern for the general, and not only the private, can and should become the bond of our society. No matter what financial capital a person possesses, no matter what high positions he occupies, he will not be fully happy without

serving his neighbors. The more people will feel the social meaning, the social benefit of the deed, the stronger the society will be, the less the distance between different social strata will be”.

At the regional level, there is still a unique experience of the Belgorod region in the development and implementation of the Strategy “Formation of a regional solidarity society for 2011 – 2025”. In the course of its implementation, some consolidation practices were formed and tested, primarily at the micro level (the level of settlements). This experience provides a basis for reflection on the process of consolidation of territorial communities, which is far from unambiguous. Its contradiction, in particular, lies in the fact that for all the attractiveness of the idea, its implementation meets with a kind of passive resistance of the population. The key, but not the only reason for this, in our opinion, is an unreasonably simplified view of the consolidation process, the necessary conditions for its implementation, objective and subjective constraints. As a result, the idea of consolidation begins to be perceived in its transformed, reduced to primitive representations, forms. Against the background of a lack of in-depth studies of the phenomenon of consolidation, they fill the space of public discourse, causing a natural reaction of rejection among critically-minded people.

It should be noted that the problem of social consolidation has almost not been considered in relation to a modern city, in which this process is especially in demand due to the need to create favorable for reproduction, overcome the alienation between residents, which is typical, especially for large cities, and create conditions for a joint solution of problems arising in the process of functioning of the urbanized environment.

## 2 Materials and Methods

The aim of the paper is to conceptually substantiate the prerequisites and constraints of the process of consolidation of urban communities.

The empirical basis of the paper is statistical data characterizing the dynamics and main components of changes in the urban population of the Russian Federation for 2000–2018, as well as the results of sociological studies:

- “Renovation of socio-cultural constants as a factor of reproduction and development of regional communities”, conducted by the authors of the paper in the Belgorod region in January – April 2021, and which included a mass questionnaire survey of the population using the quota sampling method (500 residents of the Belgorod region were interviewed, the main parameters of the quota: gender; age; place of residence, statistical error – no more than 2%); expert survey (n = 30);
- “Assessment of the efficiency of the implementation of the Strategy “Formation of a regional solidarity society”, conducted in the Belgorod region under the guidance of prof. Valentin Babintsev in 2014, which included a mass survey of residents of the Belgorod region (n = 1000) using the quota sampling method.

The paper is based on the theory of social risks, according to which risk is increasingly becoming a leveling norm of everyday existence in an unstable social environment, as well as the theory of social anomie (a state that is expressed in the value instability of society).

The works substantiating the concept of social and ecological metabolism [3–6], as well as the modern city as a complex socio-biotechnical system (SBT-system) [7, 8], are of particular importance for the systematization of the prerequisites and constraints for the social consolidation of urban communities.

Conceptual understanding of the phenomenon of social consolidation, its constraints, requires the formulation of a definition of the underlying principle of solidarity. It is known that it received and receives different interpretations in the works of researchers and practitioners, often contradicting each other [1]. The presence of different points of view is explained not only by the peculiarities of the authors' methodological positions, but also by the multidimensionality of the object itself. Analysis shows that solidarity can manifest itself in various forms.

In particular, even E. Durkheim distinguished between mechanical and organic solidarity, linking the first with unification, a low level of specialization and coercion, the second – with the division of labor, specialization and collectivist values.

A. Kolars notes that different types of solidarity can be distinguished: human, expressed in love for all of humanity; civil – in the support of their fellow citizens; class – in class cohesion; racial and ethnic – in support of representatives of an ethnic or racial group [9, p. 5, 6].

Domestic authors O.A. Karmadonov and M.K. Zverev write: “Social solidarity is realized in two main vectors: vertical (macrosocial), in which the consolidation process or flow rushes from power to society and back; horizontal (microsocial), in which the flow of consolidation makes a cycle within communities and between communities from which society as a whole is formed [10, p. 122].

We consider it possible to define solidarity as a principle of self-organization based on the establishment of group identity, a sense of social justice and trust of interpersonal and intergroup communications, relations of mutual loyalty, the consequences of which are: achievement of mutual understanding between people, appropriate to various interest groups and subcultures, readiness for civil dialogue on problems affecting generally significant problems and for constructive participation in the process of their solution.

Taking into account the key definition of solidarity, we consider it possible to define the consolidation of the urban community as a purposefully organized and regulated (including self-regulated) process of strengthening interpersonal and intergroup communications, achieving mutual understanding regarding the solution of common urban problems on the basis of dialogue and cooperation. Consolidation leads to the establishment of solidarity as a principle of the life of the urban community. O.A. Karmadonov and M.K. Zverev emphasize that “consolidation is used to characterize the process aspects of social integration, and solidarity is used to determine the achieved state or the result of such processes” [10, p. 120].

### 3 Results and Discussion

#### 3.1 Constraints of Social Consolidation of Urban Communities

Social consolidation has a number of constraints. In this case, a constraint is understood as a factor whose influence either reduces (up to complete elimination) the possibilities

of consolidation, or replaces this process with its transformed forms. It is advisable to divide the constraints into three groups:

- constraints due to the characteristics of the external environment of the life of urban communities;
- constraints associated with the specifics of self-organization of urban communities in an unstable environment;
- constraints due to the peculiarities of the consolidation concept and the process of its practical implementation.

### **3.1.1 Constraints Due to the Characteristics of the External Environment of the Life of Urban Communities**

Any urban community, like the city as a whole, is an open system in a state of dynamic equilibrium with the environment. It is quite natural that global (occurring both at the global and regional levels) trends that determine the evolution of this environment will influence the process of developing and implementing the concept of consolidation. Some of them will act as its constraints. The analysis performed allows us to single out the following among them:

- transformation of the idea of intensive exploitation of human capital into a strategic orientation of the ruling elites at all levels of social organization. In the context of the reduction of all other types of resources, it is considered as the main means of maintaining their status and increasing material well-being. This strategic orientation is justified by the statement that “the 20th and 21st centuries have become the era of human capital, due to the fact that, firstly, the economic return on human capital exceeds the return on physical capital, and secondly, possession of human capital greatly enhances the competitive position of its owners in the labor market and raises their social status” [11, p. 53]. This thesis is the leading one in the theory of human capital, the design of which took place in the 50-60s of the last century (G. Becker, J. Mincer and a number of other researchers). In elite circles, the implementation of this theory in the form of technologies for managing human capital forms a special attitude towards consolidation, which, directly or indirectly, is expressed in considering it as one of the mechanisms that ensure voluntary and conflict-free participation of the population in the appropriation of their resource capabilities by oligarchic groups.

In this regard, it cannot be denied that there is truth in the assertions that the idea of consolidation is in some cases manipulative in nature. Thus, in the course of the sociological research “Formation of a regional solidarity society for 2011–2025”, conducted by us in the Belgorod region in 2014 ( $n = 1000$ ), 22.45% of respondents stated: the implementation of the Strategy for the formation of a regional solidarity society is hindered by its imitation by the power;

- autonomization of society, expressed in the isolation of people on their individual (often selfishly formulated, mainly consumer) interests, unwillingness and inability to constructively interact with others outside the family environment. The universal

tendency of the autonomization of society has been realized for several decades. Recently, however, it has brought society to a state of bifurcation. “Humanity,” writes D.I. Dubrovsky, - still maintains a fragile balance of egoistic and altruistic intentions in interpersonal and social communications. However, there is a process of rapid growth and prevalence of egoistic intentions both among individual and especially among institutional subjects, which is connected precisely with the consumer race, the deepening global crisis of our consumer civilization” [12, p. 193].

Autonomization is further stimulated by the instability of the social space. The situation of “turbulence” produces breaks in social communication, contributes to the disintegration of public relations. The growth of social mobility, the acceleration of social time, powerful migration flows, the unifying influence of globalization — all these factors blur and make amorphous traditional and previously stable social structures (communities) in which identity was built, conditions for trust were created, values and norms were reproduced, solidarity, mutual assistance and cooperation were nurtured, the basis for existential communication was formed. “In fact, we are dealing with a total marginalization of society, a modern person is not seriously attached to anything, he is temporary everywhere. He has almost no “friends” left, and he himself is “a stranger” everywhere. He proudly cultivates his individuality, self-sufficiency and independence and at the same time suffers painfully from value-semantic disorientation, relativism and loneliness” [13, p. 108].

Human (individual) selfishness is undoubtedly a significant barrier to the consolidation of any community. However, not to a lesser, but to an even greater extent, it becomes a fiction if selfish motives predetermine the actions of the authorities, which is especially typical for authoritarian regimes. One cannot but agree with the opinion of M. Ridley, according to which, “where power replaces reciprocity, the sense of community disappears” [14, p. 295];

- the spread of the so-called “postmodern” attitude to the world, the characteristic features of which are: the idea of the falsity of social reality (according to J. Baudrillard, it is filled with simulacra – signs that are no longer exchanged for the “signified”, are closed in themselves [15]); refusal to search for truth, since there are infinitely many truths; devaluation of “great ideas”, “which promised to finally explain the world and even bring it closer to the desired ideal” [16, p. 260]. The hypertrophied worldview and cognitive relativism of postmodernism actually negates the ideas of solidarity and consolidation, based on the idea of them as some solid foundations (constants) that allow a person not only to navigate in life, but also to participate in the formation and implementation of societally oriented collective strategies. Solidarity, as a principle that presupposes the integration of social subjects, therefore, a certain universalization, conflicts with the ideological complex of postmodernism. And it is significant that J. Baudrillard warned: “One should be wary of solidarity campaigns in all areas of solidarity, both electronic and intra-worldly. Any strategy for the universalization of differences is the entropy strategy of the system [17, p. 113]”.

Of course, one cannot overestimate the scale of the influence of postmodernism on spiritual processes in urban communities. However, in any case, they influenced the

dispositions of representatives of the intellectual elite, stimulating some of them to be skeptical about consolidation projects.

### **3.1.2 Constraints Associated with the Specifics of Self-organization of Urban Communities in an Unstable Environment**

It is advisable to include the following to this group of constraints:

- significant discrepancies in the dispositions of the main “players” of urban space, controlling resources and having a decisive impact on the definition of the development strategy, the inadequacy of their target settings for the consolidation strategy. These “players” include: city (municipal) authorities; business community; the population of the city; civil institutions. Their dispositions contain attitudes that are incompatible with the strategy of consolidation. In relation to power, they are manifested in the administrative-distribution orientation – the desire to control and distribute resources, limiting public control over them. O.N. Yanitskiy emphasized that in this case, “urban mechanics works primarily for itself, i.e. for its creators and users, and not for the population. As the famous politician used to say, “everything to friends, to the rest – according to the law”. Such a “metabolism” is not the result of self-organization of the urban community, but of external control over it” [17].

For business – in an egoistic-consumer attitude towards the city as a source of profit. For a significant part of the population – in a passive-parasitic desire to receive a share of resources, regardless of their participation in their creation. For civil institutions – in a declarative and selective presence in the urban discourse without taking on a share of responsibility for the development of the urban environment (of course, these characteristics do not exhaust the entire content of the dispositions of the main actors of urbanized systems, in addition, in relation to the situations of specific cities, they have different severity).

Real consolidation is possible if other features dominate in the dispositions of the urban environment actors. The authorities have a creative-partner orientation, in the presence of which the priority becomes not the distribution of resources, but the creation of conditions for their reproduction in interaction with other actors. Business has social responsibility. The population has an interest in discussing and solving urban problems. Institutions of civil society have constructive and competent involvement in solving everyday issues of urban life;

- hypertrophied social stratification with an insignificant role of the middle class, which is the main social base of the consolidation process. Although, as studies by A.A. Alekseyonok showed, the situation in cities in this case is noticeably better than in rural areas, the urban middle class still does not make up the majority of the population [18]. The development of cities, as well as of Russian society as a whole, is characterized by a high level of social inequality, which “distorts the “social gravity” of groups and the relations between them,... The real power of inequality lies in the fact that, to put it only a little pompously, it invades human nature and distorts it, creates impenetrable and sometimes insurmountable boundaries within societies, which impede not only

social mobility, but also a solidary understanding of the basic truths of morality and rationality, and sometimes simple empathy and sympathy” [19, p. 170]. According to I.A. Vershinina, social inequality in an urbanized environment often leads to segregation: “Segregation is a widespread manifestation of urban inequality. However, it is necessary to understand that a large number of different barriers in modern cities indicate an unfavorable state of society, general mistrust and the expectation of threats and attacks” [20, p. 5];

- significant and constantly increasing subcultural differentiation. The city has always been characterized by a variety of subcultures, each of which acts as a special value local world opposed to the basic – “mother” – culture (“socialist”, “liberal”, “Christian”, etc.); including individual and collective stereotypes of behavior and activity, embodied in specific sign-symbolic manifestations, sociocodes, forms of consciousness and structures of personal identity; it is a subsystem of styles and style behavior; the group form of cultural standards and specific products of spiritual production (including mass culture) [21, p. 45].

Subcultural diversity undoubtedly creates significant barriers to consolidation, since, as a number of authors emphasize, it is the achievement of agreement on priority values that is the basis for consolidation [22, p. 256; 23, p. 37]. At the same time, I.N. Trofimova concludes: “Uncertainty and inconsistency of value orientations of various groups and strata, the absence of stable institutions designed to embody common civic values in life determine the formation of a conflict-generating environment” [24, p. 61]. In recent years, the importance of subcultural differentiation as a constraint on consolidation has significantly increased due to the growing influx of migrants;

- the bureaucratic nature of the management of a modern city. The “barrier status” of this factor lies in the specifics of the thinking of the majority of municipal leaders and officials. In modern conditions, it is increasingly acquiring features typical of managers, regardless of their field of activity. As N. Taleb reasonably notes, this is the habit of thinking statically, not dynamically; thinking in low rather than high dimension (inability to distinguish multidimensional problems from one-dimensional problems); operating in terms of action, not interaction [25, p. 26–27]. The experience of working on the draft Strategy “Formation of a regional solidarity society for 2011–2025” allows us to assert that in relation to the formulation and solution of the problem of consolidation, these features are manifested as: a) insufficient consideration of the social perspective, which leads to underestimation of the significance of the problem; it is considered primarily in a situational plan as the basis for specific activities and does not imply long-term planning; b) focus on the use of administrative methods for managing the consolidation process; c) underestimation of the possibilities of self-regulation of the consolidation process by the efforts of the citizens themselves.

### **3.1.3 Constraints Due to the Peculiarities of the Consolidation Concept and the Process of its Practical Implementation**

They are associated with the following circumstances:

- difficulties arise even when trying to interpret the content of the idea of consolidation. Taking into account the cultural and historical context, it is often perceived as either another utopia (a society of universal harmony and happiness), or as a revival of the coercive collective building practices of the Soviet era. In both cases, this causes rejection of the consolidation project;
- it can be stated with a high degree of certainty that the attitude towards solidarity and consolidation is far from always rationally motivated. G. D. Kovrigina shows that, according to a number of researchers, especially those working in line with the neurocognitive approach, it is often “based on intuition and unconscious processes” [1, p. 182]. Due to these circumstances, in the course of regulation of the consolidation process based on its rational comprehension, it becomes difficult to “translate” irrational ideas into rationally justified target orientations;
- practice shows that the need for consolidation is usually limited to a “short” distance –mainly family-related environment and does not apply to the entire local, and even more so - the regional community. Until now, there is no clear idea of how the “consolidation space” can be maximally expanded, at least to the scale of a small town, and whether it is possible at all;
- experience shows that the subjects of government (in cities - it is the municipal government) have a temptation to use the attractiveness of consolidation for a significant part of citizens as a slogan when organizing election campaigns, i.e. for purely manipulative purposes. It also provokes a negative reaction from the population;
- finally, the basis for rejection of the idea of consolidation is a reaction to acquaintance with the experience of destructive consolidation of certain groups and communities, in particular, criminals, the level of solidarity of which is formally very high.

## 4 Conclusion

In conclusion, it should be noted that within the framework of the urban community, a system of social practices can be built, focused on its reproduction and participation as an active subject of social processes. However, this potential can only be realized under a number of conditions. The main ones are: real concern (up to apocalyptic sentiments) with the quality of life organization and, especially, life prospects for oneself and descendants; the presence of a core of activists (leaders) capable of mobilizing those around them for constructive interaction; the wisdom of the authorities, which consists in understanding the limitations of their own capabilities and the need for public consensus.

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