

# Civic Education and Citizenship in Modern Russian Society

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## Abstract

**Background/Objectives:** The study of the problems related to the formation of citizenship in modern Russian society, one of the main forms of which is civic education, leads to growing cognitive interest. **Methods/Statistical analysis:** Within the framework of conceptual scientific thinking, the article deals with the problems of civic education as a way of forming the citizenship in Russian society with account to its socio-cultural and political specifics. Identity is seen as a result of the impact of information and cultural actualization. In the study of the identity, an important place is given to the analysis of its universal and particular traits. **Findings:** The authors reveal the binary nature of the legal consciousness of schoolchildren and contradictions existing between its cognitive, axiological and connotative components. In Russian society, on the one hand, there are two types of relationships between the man and the state, having formed two opposite faces of citizenship: official, allegiant and loyal citizenship and the oppositional, critical and rebellious one. On the other hand, there has been an active citizenship formed in Russia, which is competent, responsible and moral in terms of its social significance. **Application/Improvements:** The article is useful in terms of helping young people to learn how to live in the real Russian society, gain citizenship and civic subjectness.

**Keywords:** Citizen, Civic Education, Civic Identity, Patriotism

## 1. Introduction

At the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, modernization efforts of the Russian reformers were aimed at changing the vector of social development in a liberal direction. Project of formation of civil society was proposed, in which the problem of civic education and citizenship in post-Soviet Russia acquired special significance.

Civic education has long existed in western European countries, where the preparation of new generations for independent living in the community is compulsory<sup>1-3</sup>. In the US, the federal government provides funding to “Civic Education Center” which co-ordinates the entire country activities related to the implementation of educational programs such as “We the People” and “Citizen Project”<sup>4</sup>. However, it was quite problematic to use in Russia the experience of civic education and the formation of citizenship acquired in Western countries. First, this was due to the fact that someone else’s experience gained in

different socio-cultural environment is difficult to be adopted in general, and secondly, in Western countries the civic education is carried out in the civil society environment, which is in Russia still unrealized project. Therefore, in the final count, the mission of civic education in modern Russia is to help young people to learn how to live in the real Russian society, gain citizenship and civic subjectness. In this regard, the study of the problems related to the formation of citizenship in modern Russian society, one of the main forms of which is civic education, causes increased cognitive interest.

## 2. Literature Review

In real life, citizenship is determined by the civic identity of the individual. In scientific discourse, the civic identity is often equated in Russia with all-Russian identity or national identity<sup>5</sup>. There are also various ideas about civic identity in respect to the specifics of its formation in the

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Russian society. While some researchers believe that such an identity is a matter for the future as there is no civil society in the country, others believe that the two models of formation of civic identity can be distinguished in the modern Russian society: state civil and national civil. According to the researchers, the basis of the state civic identity comprises the state consciousness of individuals and statist culture presupposing loyalty to the state. The bases of the national civic identity are the citizenship and civic culture, which involves the identification of the individual with the civil society as a civic political nation. The researchers emphasize that the Western European tradition of state civic identity and national civic identity at some point become the same, so in relation to the West they often talk about civil political nation. In the Russian tradition, the concept of the state consciousness and the civic one are not the same, so the Russians when responding to a question about citizenship and civic identity have in mind the very belonging to the state. The researchers noticed that there is no impenetrable wall between the state identity and the civic one, and what is more, our people do not always distinguish between these two their identities<sup>6</sup>.

In scientific discourse, there are also different ideas about citizenship in the Russian society. Some of these ideas are based on a scientific thesaurus that has been developed in the West European social and cultural context. Others are interpreted considering the Russian socio-cultural tradition, in the framework of which the citizenship acquires particular significance. Some researchers believe that citizenship can be regarded as a person's ability to perform a certain role in accordance with the established societal model, and in this case the citizenship can be considered as a personal quality<sup>7</sup>. Other researchers consider citizenship as a social institution or a "set of internalized social norms regulating the relations of society with government institutions"<sup>8</sup>.

In this regard, the purpose of the article is the reconstruction within the framework of conceptual thinking of citizenship in the modern Russian society, formed as part of civic education in view of its socio-cultural specificity.

### 3. Methodology

In methodological consciousness there are different views about what is identity in general and civic identity in particular, due to different paradigmatic preferences.

In the 90s of the last century, in research practices there was a competition of a «hard» concept of identity and a «soft» one, established respectively in the framework of essentialist approach and constructivist one. In terms of the «hard» concepts, the identity was reduced to the attribution to an individual of permanent set of natural qualities and properties. In terms of the «soft» concepts, the identity was regarded as discursive constructs, very flexible, ambiguous and context-dependent<sup>9</sup>. The researchers emphasized that «identities are flexible, not only in time and space, but even when they relate to the same subjects in the same point of time and space»<sup>10</sup>. Furthermore, as noted by constructivists, «identities are created during the process of beliefs, rather than beyond it»<sup>11</sup>.

«Hard» concepts of identity and the «soft» ones, because of their paradigmatic unilateralism are heuristically insufficient, and therefore, according to researchers, it is necessary to extend the field of possible strategies for the scientific study of the real identities by means of diverse theoretical and practical tools<sup>12</sup>. New possibilities for studying the identities are currently associated with interdisciplinary scientific research<sup>13</sup> involving a transition from one-dimensional to multidimensional identity interpretations based on the principle of constructive realism synthesizing methodological possibilities of essentialist approach and constructivist one. In terms of the constructive realism, some scientists when considering identity as «the process of construction of meaning on the basis of a certain cultural property», identify the so-called project identity created by social actors that based on available cultural material are building a new identity redefining their position in society<sup>14</sup>.

In this regard, the identity is considered as the result of cultural influence and information actualization<sup>15</sup>. In the study of the identity, an important place is given to the analysis of the universal and particular in it<sup>16</sup>. Thus, in the structure of all-Russian identity it is possible to identify as a universal component the national-state identity being constructivist, and as particularistic components the «natural» ethnic identity and «artificial» civic identity can be identified.

Civic identity defines citizenship of individuals, which can be considered as the subjective personality's way of being in society. Citizenship as an ideal type can be characterized by such features as integrity and responsibility; freedom of individual choice and the

creative directionality; pro-active attitude and the critical attitude towards reality; subjectivity and humanism; desire to elicit one's potential and ability to live in harmony with oneself. In this context, citizenship must be distinguished from loyalty and self-devotion, typical for virtuous nationals, rather than for free citizens. Citizen has sovereign rights and freedoms, in contrast to the national whose rights and freedoms are granted by the State. The condition of civic engagement of first is his personal voluntary and conscious choice; the condition of the citizen activism of second is coercion and social status. Despite the peculiarities of national citizenship determined by the specifics of socio-cultural and political development, it is possible to identify some general trends in the formation of citizenship. First, it is the creation of conditions for the development of the essential powers of man who cares about the common good, and the mastery of methods of conscious activity for the benefit of others or for the sake of their common good. Secondly, it is the readiness of the individual for self-restraint in order to attain social ideals. Third, it is the ability of the subject to discover non-standard methods and design new forms of civic activities making it possible to effectively meet the challenges that faced constantly by people in modern society.

## 4. Results and Discussion

One of the main forms of citizenship construction in modern Russian society is civic education. Currently, there are three civic education paradigms in Russia. In terms of one of these paradigms, the civic education is understood as social and public, socially-oriented system of continuous training and education aimed at the formation of civic competence, democratic culture, meeting the needs for socialization in the interests of the individual, civil society and the law-governed state. The objective set before this civic education is the formation of a civic personality, capable in the future to live in a civil society and a rightful state. In terms of another paradigm, the civic education is considered as a system of education and training of the individual, providing for the creation of conditions for the formation of moral civic position, civic competence and gaining experience in socially useful civic activities. The aim of the civic education in this case is the formation of the citizen personality experienced in socially useful civic activities. In terms of

the third paradigm, the civic education in Russia is the preparation of law-abiding citizens, statist patriots. Lately, civic education in Russia is becoming more and more civic and patriotic, the aim of which is the formation of such a civic, in the structure of which an importance is given to patriotism.

Goals and orientation targets of the object field of civic education are defined first by a concept such as "citizenship" in the context of the current state of Russian society. The Council of Europe declared the year 2005 the European Year of Citizenship through Education. The "Concept of a special committee of experts on the European Year of Citizenship through Education" stated: "The purpose of the year is to acquaint people with the fact that citizenship is a comprehensive concept, not just legal and political one. On the one hand, citizenship implies that all citizens, women and men, fully enjoy their human rights and feel themselves protected by the democratic society. On the other hand, citizenship also implies that everyone needs to get involved in issues relating to life in society and to act throughout their lives as active and responsible citizen respecting the rights of others"<sup>17</sup>. The "Concept" is permeated with the idea of the need to learn through education to live together, developing critical thinking and respecting democratic principles and human rights.

In the Russian discourse, the concept of citizenship has a slightly different meaning, which is caused by the different connotations of the word "citizen" in socio-cultural context and political one of the Western Europe and Russia. In the West, a citizen identifies himself at the same time with the political nation (community of citizens having the political and legal bond with the state) and the civil nation (civil society) the base values of which are the autonomy of the individual from the state, the freedom as the possibility for responsible choice, human rights, activity and involvement in solving social problems.

In Russia, there is no civil society in its Western European meaning, so the word "citizen" has a different meaning. For example, in 1818 the monument to Minin and Pozharsky was erected on the Red Square in Moscow. What was unusual about this monument? It was the inscription on the pedestal saying: "To Citizen Minin and Prince Pozharsky from grateful Russia". This was the first time that a monument in Russia was raised to a citizen, and the citizen's "title" was declared as socially significant, although the Russians in political and legal terms were not

citizens but nationals. Therefore, the words “citizen” on a pedestal had primarily a moral meaning: Prince Pozharsky defended the country in the call of duty, and the citizen Minin saved Russia answering the call of heart. However, not everyone in Russia was fine with it. In particular, according to researchers, A. S. Pushkin in his “Walks through Moscow” (1836) noted that “the inscription to Citizen Minin, of course, is not satisfactory.” This was due to the fact that the A. S. Pushkin’s vision of the citizen in Russia was not in line with the social position of Minin as the bourgeois. For A. S. Pushkin the citizens were representatives of the nobility, noblemen serving their Fatherland (state). However, A. S. Pushkin was biased not only by the “Bronze Horseman”, which established a regular state in Russia, but also by the “spirit” of European freedom: from the poet’s point of view, a citizen is at the same time a homeland servant, and a man “with a noble, sublime and ardently free soul”<sup>18</sup>.

The question about who was a citizen in Russia was also asked by N. A. Nekrasov, who answered it as follows: “It’s the Fatherland’s worthy son”. The poet associates the concept of the citizen not with the state service, but with a homeland duty. By his slogan “You may not be a poet, but you must be a citizen” N. A. Nekrasov underlines that for the Russian society in the context of its socio-cultural tradition an important thing is not so much the legal definition of a citizen as his spiritual and moral meaning. However, it should be noted that the imperative of N. A. Nekrasov “must be a citizen” refers not to the common people, but to critically thinking individuals. The poet considers the citizen as “a worthy son” for whom the fate of the Fatherland is a deeply personal and moral matter. Thus, there has been a conflict in the Russian literature and Russian life since the 19<sup>th</sup> century: the citizen is the one who serves the fatherland, and the citizen is the one for whom the serving the fatherland is a moral duty. Many people have tried to overcome this conflict in a variety of ways. One such attempt was an appeal to the state not as to a political system, but as to its “spiritual essence”, and then the concepts such as “state”, “motherland”, “fatherland”, “Russia” are in line with each other in terms of meaning. According to this number of concepts, as regarded by I. A. Ilyin, the state must live in the soul of the citizen, but the citizen must live by the interests of his state as well. “The essence of the state, - he wrote - is that all its citizens have and recognize in addition to their various and private interests and goals also a common interest and a common goal, because the state is a certain spiritual community”<sup>19</sup>.

However, this is a kind of ideal. In practice, the people in Russia did not really want to participate in the affairs of the state, most of all, it was silent. In addition, throughout the history of the Russian state, despotically looming over the people and arousing its paternal feelings did not give to the people the impetus for active civil activities. Therefore, two types of relationships between the man and the state have been developed in the Russian society, and, accordingly, two opposite faces of citizenship have been formed: official citizenship being allegiant and loyal, and opposition citizenship being critical and rebellious.

In modern literature, there are different ideas about citizenship in the Russian society with account to its socio-cultural specifics. Some authors, considering citizenship as a personal quality, believe that it is based on the idea of civic duty and concern about the public good, and is manifested in the person’s understanding of his rights and responsibilities in relation to society, as well as in his willingness to voluntarily follow its legal and moral rules. Others associate the citizenship with an active participation in public life; a person’s feeling of being implicated in the destiny of the Fatherland and the availability of his socially significant moral guidelines that define his readiness to accept the moral responsibility for the past, present and future of Russia. For the thirds, the citizenship, being manifested in the social activity of the person, is expressed in his willingness and ability to actively participate in the affairs of society and state, deliberately exercise his rights and freedoms and perform his duties<sup>20</sup>.

The practice of formation of citizenship in Russia through education is characterized, as shown by the results of sociological research, by contradictoriness of value systems in this area. These studies were carried out by the Research and Education Center for Regional Studies and Communication Technologies of the Southern Federal University in general education schools of Rostov-on-Don in 2014-2015 by polling school students on issues of civic education and citizenship. Survey tools meant for identification of three components of citizenship: cognitive component, the indicator of which is the understanding of the essence of the rightful state and human rights; axiological component, including the interpretation of the concepts of state, law and patriotism in Russian society; connotative component, including attitudes in the field of interaction of the citizen and the state, an important indicator of which is the individual’s opportunity to oppose the government agencies, the

readiness to be included in the civil communities<sup>21,22</sup>.

The results show a fairly high level of awareness of school students in the field of the essence of rightful state and human rights. In particular, one third of respondents correctly identify the main features of the rightful state: the rule of law, principle of separation of powers and respect of human rights and citizen rights. More than 40% of respondents are familiar with the content of the “Universal Declaration of Human Rights”; about 60% are aware of the content of the “Convention on the Rights of the Child”; more than 70% know the content of the Constitution of the Russian Federation. However, it should be noted, that the school students poorly know the history of the formation of the Institute of Human Rights. Thus, only 20% of respondents are able to indicate the year of adoption of the “Universal Declaration of Human Rights”. Fewer yet who know that the protection of human and civil rights in Russia is provided by the international law priority.

Answers of pupils indicate also a mismatch between legal knowledge and understanding of the functioning of the law in real life. Thus, the answers to the question “what the aims of the law and the rights in our country?” show that only a third of pupils are sure that the aim of law is the protection of civil rights and freedoms; 30% believe that the law protects the oligarchs, about 19% of school students believe that the law protects the state. The survey has showed that statist component dominates in the legal beliefs of schoolchildren. So, when answering the question “What subject in contemporary Russia has the most important legal status?” over 52% of respondents indicate the state, about 16% mention the people and

approximately 14% believe that it is the person.

The survey results also show contradictory legal concepts of school students. For example, more than 80% of them agree with the inalienability of human rights that are given by birth, but at the same time, more than 57% believe that the person is endowed with the rights upon reaching the age of majority. About 80% believe that human rights are what make people equal; at the same time, more than 31% believe that human rights depend on the material or social status (see Table 1).

The survey results indicate that a significant part of school students do not interpret the legal knowledge in terms of the value of the law, its derivative from the value of human dignity at the protection of which the law is aimed. The content of the concept of “human dignity” caused great difficulty: almost half of high school students were not able to answer it at all, and those who was associated it primarily with the moral achievements of the individual and the nature of the relationship between human beings, but not with the person’s status as a human being, at the inviolability and protection of which the law is aimed. However, almost 43% of surveyed school students believe that people deliberately obey the law in order to follow the general rules ensuring the well-known order of life, i.e. the main function of the law was considered as regulative rather than repressive. Repressive mindset (“people comply with the law because they fear punishment”) is supported by 37% of respondents.

The high school students’ responses to questions about interactions of citizen and the state were of great interest as well. There were three alternative judgments proposed with the possibility to choose only one option

**Table 1.** Distribution of answers to the question: Do you agree with the following statements?

Statements	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Person is endowed with the rights upon reaching the age of majority	37.0	21.4	15.1	26.6
Human rights depend on the material or social status	15.9	15.9	19.7	48.5
Human rights make people equal	49.3	29.3	14.2	7.1
Human rights are inalienable and given by birth	57.8	25.8	10.1	6.3
No one can deprive a person of his rights	69.6	17.5	8.8	4.1
Human rights determine the rules of conduct	29.9	39.2	19.7	11.2
Human rights do not exist without responsibilities	54.0	31.5	11.2	3.3
Human rights protect the person	51.8	27.1	17.8	3.3
Person must be able to defend his rights	76.7	17.0	6.0	0.3
Rights are important and not very important	12.1	25.8	34.5	27.7
Human rights make it possible to live with dignity	38.9	38.9	15.9	6.3
Human rights is a myth bearing no relation to my life	6.6	7.9	20.3	65.2

**Table 2.** Distribution of answers to alternative questions regarding "state-centrism" and "anthropocentrism" positions

State-centrist position	%	%	Anthropocentrist position
Criticism of the government is undesirable because it derails the stability of the country	27.9	72.1	Criticism of the government is necessary because it improves the lives of all people
To maintain the order the state can control the media (press, TV, radio)	47.7	52.3	State should not control the media, the people need all the information
For the good of society the state can control the private lives of citizens	13.4	86.6	Private life of a person is inviolable, if the person does not violate the laws

(see Table 2).

Most high school students (86.6%) believe that the private life of a person is inviolable unless the person violates the laws, however, almost 27.9% of respondents agree to the restrictions of human rights for the purpose of ensuring the maintenance of order; 19.4% tolerate the restriction of the rights, if it is necessary for the crime investigation; 10.7% consent to the restrictions of human rights if it is necessary to improve the material conditions of life. Almost 48% of respondents believe that to maintain the order, the State can control the media. Thus, human rights are not regarded as an absolute value, but rather a tool: the government can limit the rights if it is required to ensure the safety of society as a whole. The contradictory of the legal consciousness of pupils is also evidenced by the fact that when knowing about the right to participate in social and political processes, only a quarter of them believes that all citizens should participate in the discussion and solving of social issues; three-quarters believe that this is the prerogative of deputies, and citizens' participation should be limited to the sphere of their competence.

In general, the school student survey results indicate that there is isolation and even a certain dissonance

between the valuable component and cognitive one in their legal consciousness. This, in particular, is shown in the students' vision of patriotism. Their answers made it possible to determine the rating of its main characteristics. The students were given the possibility to choose several options. Most of the respondents marked four options in different combinations: "unconditional love and serving the state" (53%), "willingness to work for the prosperity of the motherland" (47%), "love for the national culture, following the traditions" (46%), "readiness to make sacrifices to protect the state" (42%). We shall also note that such options as "active participation in the political life of the country" (16.6%) or "well-reasoned criticism of his state for the good of people" (4.1%) are rarely associated by students with patriotism. At the same time, not all respondents share the view that all country's citizens must feel patriotic. But most of them reject the possibility of manipulation with this feeling. On the contrary, most of the respondents consider patriotism as a feeling, which is based on the social responsibility of a citizen for the state life (see Table 3).

Identified opinions explain, in particular, the polarization in the mass of polled students regarding the issue of political emigration: 47.1% of respondents believe that the political emigrant, i.e. a man who was forced to

**Table 3.** Distribution of answers to the question: Do you agree with the following statements?

Statements	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree
• Every citizen of the state must be patriot.	31.5	41.4	27.1
• Patriot is a romantic image, novelistic fiction.	8.5	24.4	67.1
• Patriotism as a feeling making the people and every person responsible for the state life.	44.4	44.1	11.5
• Patriotism is an inexplicable sense of loyalty to the native country.	52.3	37.5	10.1
• Patriotism is a tool of politicians who make people act in the interests of the ruling elite.	15.1	34.8	50.1
• Patriotism is a good mask for the fight against the representatives of other nations.	16.7	25.2	58.1

leave the country because of his political views, can be a patriot; 52.9% deny him this right. Thus patriotic feeling is clearly associated with residing in the territory of the Motherland and serving it. Almost half of respondents (48.5%) understand the purpose of the state's activity in the sphere of formation of patriotism in strengthening the unity and communion of people in the country.

The above replies on questions concerning citizenship must be complemented with the views of the school students of social activity. Most schoolchildren connect social activity with participation in meetings, demonstrations, elections (28%), volunteering (27.3%), nature protection activity, and animal protection activity (20%). At the same time, only a quarter of respondents (26.4%) think that people need promote and implement their initiatives being united by themselves. The vast majority transfers the responsibility for the mobilization of the social activity of the population on the state authorities, local government, business leaders and political parties. This explains the attitude of almost all respondents considering the implementation of various individual initiatives and activities primarily in the context of sports, art and education, and having no interest in social activities and participation in youth social movements. Only about 10% of school students are members of some youth social organizations.

## 5. Conclusion

In scientific discourse, there are different views about the mission of civic education, civic identity and citizenship in the Russian society.

Civic education is one of the main forms of construction of citizenship in the modern Russian society, which has special meaning due to the different connotations of the word "citizen" in socio-cultural context and political one of the Western Europe and Russia.

In Russian society, on the one hand, there are two types of relationships between the man and the state, having formed two opposite faces of citizenship: official, allegiant and loyal citizenship and the oppositional, critical and rebellious one. On the other hand, there has been an active citizenship formed in Russia, which is competent, responsible and moral in terms of its social significance.

Surveys of schoolchildren show that civic education in Russia has not yet become an effective form of citizenship

construction taking into account the socio-cultural specificity and the political one of the Russian society. This is evidenced by the binary legal consciousness of high school students, manifesting contradictions between its cognitive, axiological and connotative components. Lack of supporting of the "Law" subject matter by such courses as "History", "Social Science" and "Literature" explains much of the abstract state of the legal concepts of schoolchildren; they do not always correlate with the value and connotative segments of their legal consciousness.

The students are consistently identifying the state as a powerful institution and an object of emotional commonality, i.e. Motherland. In their legal consciousness an important role is played by state-centrism principle associated with the dominance of statist values, focusing on loyalty to the state and giving priority to the state over human rights.

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