

## THE CRISIS OF PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY IN RUSSIAN SOCIETY

Oxana Yuryevna Posukhova\*, Oxana Avedikovna Nor-Arevyan\* and  
Ludmila Vladislavovna Klimenko\*

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This article analyses the methodology of construction of professional identity in the Russian society. The article examines the criteria for loss of professional identity and related risks of de-professionalization in the main socio-professional groups. The authors conclude that, in spite of the formation of new identities in innovative sectors of the economy, professional identity matrix is being deformed, and the risks precarisation of labour relations are developing. Fragmentation effects of professional identity lead to the formation of new professional groups in Russian society. But despite its pronounced integrative potential, professional identity in the Russian society does not have features of group solidarity.

**Keywords:** professional identity, professional groups, matrix of professional identity, professionalism, de-professionalisation, risks of precarisation

### INTRODUCTION

The Russian society has undergone a period of social transformations and institutional changes (Volchik, Shiryayev 2013). An obvious result of that is new social structure which is described by T. Parsons as societal level associated with integrative function and issues emerging within social interaction (Parsons 1998).

It can be stated that studies of the dynamics of professional identity give an opportunity to identify the borders of social stratification, describe professional differences as significant criteria of social differentiation which can influence public discourse at the social macro level, as well as everyday practices.

Many authors stress that the notion of “professional identity” in its full meaning is only related to the category of people (or epochs and cultures) whose identification is mainly based on professional labour. Thus, amid the crisis professional identity serves as a basis and criterion for personal choice only for societies and individuals focused on professional labour. Higher or lower status of professional identity in personality structure as a self-determination factor depends to a great degree on the role of profession institution in this society and value of profession in social consciousness. Professional identity acts as a leading factor of psychological well-being giving a sense of environmental stability and self-confidence in societies with traditionally high social status of profession.

Therefore, professional identity is a topical subject of sociological research on the scientific and practical level. Genesis, formation of professional identity as highly complicated processes, within which established identification structures

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\* Southern Federal University, 344006 Russia, Rostov on Don, Pushkinskaya 160

are transformed, are closely connected to the context of personality development, organization of professional experience, comprehension of one's place in social environment, social interaction. Being a subtype of social identity, professional identity acts as an individual category, however related to a set of roles and statuses, values and standards of professional society. World precarisation tendency also brings into focus the need to consider specifics of construction and dynamics of professional identity development in the Russian society. This defines the goal of this research which consists in identifying the relation between labour and professional identity and defining integration potential of professional identity.

### **METHODOLOGY**

We presume that professional identity is a product of continuous personal and professional development. This idea is presented in full in E.P. Yermolayeva's profession genesis ("professiongenez"). Professional identity is formed only on rather high levels of mastering the profession and acts as sustainable agreement of basic elements of professional process. Professional identity serves as a regulator performing stabilising and transformative functions, combination of which is secured by professional self-determination and development of a professional (Yermolayeva 2008).

Stabilising function of professional identity consists in securing professional centrism and sustainable professional and mental position to the required extent. The latter is characterized by: constancy (ability to resist changes), adaptivity (ability to destroy inadequate professional stereotypes), distance (idea of the place of profession in semantic, informational and cross-cultural professional space) (Ivanova 2007). Professional identity is a professional personality development criterion. Two interconnected subject areas are singled out among the issues of professional training: "identity" and "development". Identity presupposes attention to the question "Who am I?" which accompanies a person during all their life. Development means being focuses on professional growth. Professional formation is attended by change in self-concept and finding one's identity (Ivanova, Mazilova 2012).

Assessment of the state of professional identity is distinguished by methods of social space categorization, by approaches to research of professional identity formation mechanisms. From the perspective of cognitive approach (Tajfel H., Turner J., 1986), professional identity in the Russian society is defined by emergence of new social groups, collective and individual experience is brought into focus at the same time. Within this approach, professional identity is defined as a result of growing publicity of professional life, managerial discourse is established, and formula of professionalism is brought into correlation with quality and efficiency criteria. Such pattern has explanatory meaning when this refers to professional and identification strategies within the context of profession prestige influence

scale, image policy, creation of public image of a profession. As a result, professional identity is constructed, which leads to reduction of its integrative potential.

It can be considered an important methodological assumption that introduction of identification matrices (Shibutani 1969) allows detecting dynamical aspect of professional identity, its meaning for institutionalisation of social norms and values put into life by certain groups and roles (Parsons 1998). According to the logic of intergroup and intragroup interaction, the point of research pattern is that professional and identification matrix has regulative and selective meaning for description of professional identity and is aimed at interpretation of identification preference strategies.

### **OVERVIEW OF STUDIES ON THIS TOPIC**

Analysis of recent scientific publications showed that large-scale research was conducted in various professional fields. Lately a great number of scientific papers revealing the issues in focus have been published. For instance, influence of education and academic discourse on professional identification was examined in the works by Holmes C.L., Harris I.B., Schwartz A.J., Regehr G., as well as in a large-scale international project of scientists from the Great Britain, Canada, Spain: Rodriguez C., Lopez-Roig S., Pawlikowska T., Schweyer F., Hüge S., Spencer S., Tellier P. (2015).

There are also a number of works examining some factors which have influence on the formation of professional identity through understanding of one's own professional status in social stratification of particular professional groups. Issues of interaction between professional identity and competence of performed functions/basic models of profессиограммs of those studying in institutions of doctoral candidacy are considered in the works of Hancock S., Walsh E.; professional identity of teachers is examined by Brown E.L., Horner C.G., Kerr M.M., Scanlon C.L., of librarians with great experience – by Sare L., Bales. S., between trainees and employees with work experience – by Prosek E.A., Hurt K.M.; dependence of career goals on professional identity in women under crisis situation in the society was examined in the works by Simosi M., Rousseau D.M., Daskalaki M.; Boudreau J.D., Fuks A. studied the role of socialisation of professional formation and professional identity in the medical field.

Russian sociologists made a significant contribution to development of the issue, among them are: Zaslavskaya T. (2004), Kravchenko A. (Kravchenko, Scherbina 1998), Toschenko Zh. (2005) and Yadov V. (1993).

### **RESULTS**

Trust is a favourable basis for social bonds which strengthen any social organism making it integral. The level of trust of an individual to agents of socialization through interaction with which professional choice is made and professional

formation begins also becomes significant in the formation of professional identity. Successful professional socialization and formation of professional identity depend on how high the level of trust is. Today the level of institutional trust in Russia is lower than in other countries (Antropologiya professiy..., 2012). Lack of confidence to socially valuable and significant professions having prestige in the society points that the matrix of professional identity as a method of social self-determination and orientation at the level of intergroup interaction is influenced by dysfunctionality.

In the Russian society professional identity is associated with production of new social effects – first of all, with loss of traditional labour identity, belonging to a group characterized by productive skills and abilities, activities in primary social sphere. We see a “revolution” of social consciousness, shift in social significance priorities from comprehension of labour contribution and labour motivation to high income, social autonomy, prestige. This specific feature is stressed by V.A. Mansurov and L.A. Semenova when they are analysing new trends in the development of new professional groups in the Russian society. Without claiming that labour identity has disappeared, the authors, having chosen engineer-technician employees as test subject, record the washing out of social and professional stratum, erosion on service to the public, degradation of adherence to professional code of ethics, lack of perception of one’s own professional group as a reference one (Mansurov V.A., Semenova 2001). Upholding the position that the Russian society is dynamic and unstable and that labour identity may be considered as a self-determination model within routine social order, the authors define professional identity as the one associated with loss of previous professional activity and previously unclaimed experience under low-level expectations.

Focus on new “market” professional identity is related to active adaptation strategies, to the trend of competing professional mobility. As a result, public professionalism values cease to be a personal and group social resource, and a significant role in the process of adaptation is given to the values of social relation (informal social asset), while under conditions of property and social inequalities of the Russian society income level plays a critical part as the main indicator of professional status. Such dispositional configuration leads not only to the change in regulation of labour behavior, but also to activation of market orientation, to the ability to make a decent living and be well accommodated.

Under the circumstances, professional identity is measured by adaptive potential, profession satisfaction becomes irrespective of job satisfaction. Identity as the belonging to a certain socially professional group starts to form as a presentation of dominance of power, wealth and prestige demonstrative effect. Representatives of low-prestige professional groups are forced to be content with good earnings potential as compensation for job and professional activity dissatisfaction and limited career opportunities. E. Durkheim claimed that

professional identity directly depends on a person's place in the system of differentiation of labour, professional standards and values characteristic for a particular socially professional group. In the present context professional identity takes the symbolic meaning which is classified by a French sociologist P. Bourdieu as a procedure of social nomination, as an instrument of ensuring social and symbolic assets with the help of the "club effect", closed socially professional space (Bourdieu 1993). In this context, professional identity has socially exclusive influence which can be proved by an example of the youth's attitude to profession and labour activities. The dynamics of attitudes of the Russian youth shows that they mostly value an opportunity to do the work they are fond of (98% of respondents) (Gorshkov 2011). However, this is the effect of a declared position. At the same time, 76% of respondents expect success in life and material wealth (Gorshkov 2011). One might assume that social goals of young Russians include opportunities of success in life, and such position correlates with their professional preferences, with their choice of "market", advanced professions. When social reality finds incompatibility with expectations of the youth, mechanisms of self-protection, active adaptation, focus on good earnings regardless of the sense of professionalism and prestige of a profession come into action. This means that a resource of optimism compensating for unfulfilled social expectations is actualised. Therefore, labour identity when adopting adaptive strategy can only be associated with weakly adapted, low-status population strata, with the idea that labour is the destiny of people with limited range of life and career opportunities, if not social outsiders. Labour collective for Russians ceases to be a space for implementation of social ambitions and reproduction of the sense of co-belonging. High competitiveness and the need for professional identity consist not in its "exterritoriality", in the idea of belonging to a particular socially professional group which is not connected to group responsibilities, to group duty.

Shared (integration) professional identity under the present Russian society is conditioned by at least two factors. First of them is an ability to fulfil oneself in profession, second is satisfaction from personal life depending on "synergetic effect" (Rossiyskoye obschestvo...Book 1, 2015).

Thus, today professional identity includes the process of self-regulation, which can have self-isolation effect if it does not correlate with satisfaction in family relationship, presence of friends and leisure activity. Professional identity does not necessarily include job satisfaction, while routine activity which does not bring professional satisfaction is compensated for with corporate leisure activities, communication with colleagues, being involved into "trendy" public initiatives. An example of that is volunteer movements. The fact that in Russia volunteers are recruited from the representatives of new "market" professions explains recession and boom in activity and self-mobilization ability under irregularity of volunteer practices. It also explains why volunteering is in fashion.

From this point of view, professional identity becomes possible as corporate one, showing person's belonging to community and regulated by mutual obligations subordination system, by voluntary disciplinary effect. Professional identity is mainly constructed through adoption and transfer of foreign corporate patterns and standards, from the experience of high reputation business structures in the first place. That said, approved patterns are adapted to the conditions of a particular professional environment, are learnt by the person as a structuring method for one's actions.

### **DISCUSSION**

Such conditions of professional identity construction and its correlation with labour identity bring up the following question: is it possible to say that, according to the conclusions of T. Parsons, professional identity becomes metamotivation? In the current context of professional identity formation in the Russian society, particularly under the conditions of growing labour precarisation and professional field, the effect of motives aggregation is mostly present. This is conditioned by the fact that Russian people see professional identity as instrumental in comparison to other types of group identities and are not focused on accepting professional identity as the main form of self-determination in the Russian society. Social micro-identities (a circle of friends and relatives) are of higher-priority for them, and personal interest hierarchy is constructed according to this. Sociological studies of the Institute of Sociology of the Russian Academy of Sciences indicate that 44% of respondents can provide for themselves and their family and do not need support of the government (Rossiyskoye obshchestvo...Book 1, 2015). But it is doubtful that shown self-sufficiency is a display of professional self-identity, although prestige of professions may be a method of overrating social self-esteem. This position is characterised by paradoxicality: on one hand, it is a formula of self-confidence in action, on the other hand, displayed independence from the state indicates social uncertainty related to the fact that faith in one's own professionalism turns out to be weaker than perception of wellbeing and success guaranteed by the state as results of professional activity. Heightened interest of Russian youth in work in state structures indicates that professional identity is in transition state. Professional identity can be characterised as unstable, aiming at self-sufficiency and independence and at the same time having lowered potential of social and shared activity.

As Russian sociologists note, the problem of "survival, which puts deep crisis on an agenda, immediately activates the lower informal level of adaptation to market requirements, as a result, employment strategies are formed, and they bring into action informal networks and exchange transactions which imply the abandonment of current qualification, getting new occupations which can be used in new sectors of economics, in those areas of market which tend to develop" (Nayomny rabotnik..., 2015). In other words, professional identity becomes diffusive and transforms into a marker of success or unsuccess, there is no more influence of the

stimuli associated with attitudes making professional identity dynamic and integrative for professional groups – professional creativity, professional growth, acquisition of new professional skill and knowledge.

Therefore, it should be stated that despite the formation of new professional identity in innovative economy sectors, the dominating claims are the ones for professional identity and inflated professional self-esteem attitude, but professional de-identification matrix does not become universal, it is deformed under the influence of precarisation and reduction in attractiveness of professionalism values. Sustained reduction in the employees of semantic “complicated” activity, which is contradictory to the idea of “permanent modernization” is taking place now.

The point of integrative function of professional identity is binding social fields in the society. And in this aspect the most interesting thing is the answer to the following question: how is this function implemented under the precarisation of the Russian society?

As a social risk group, precariat, irrespective of self-identification, level of income, education, enters into informal social relations (Nayomny rabotnik..., 2015). It should be noted that under conditions of precarious work of 30% of able-bodied Russians (Afanasyeva 2013), one cannot expect referentiality of professional identity. In shadow economy it is not individual’s identification with professional community, but understanding of relative social deprivation and competition for access to material wealth that has most priority. Professional identity no longer defines the behaviour of individuals as professional actors, as social agents. Behavioural orienting points are related to neutralization of social risks, especially to the threat of descending social mobility. In this context micro-level identities become significant, since under conditions of precarisation it is impossible to work out the sense of solidarity as protection of professional rights and interests.

In Russia those who can be classified as precariat are focused on economic independent action, on informal activity to a greater degree. The experience of “anarchism” assimilated by the Russian society during early post-Soviet period also has its influence. As Russian philosopher V.G. Fedotova notes, anarchism is a destroyed identity structure (Fedotova 1999). As a conclusion, the author concedes that there can emerge self-protection based negative identity. The deviation from social integration is obvious, as negative identity in the form of self-protection, self-help and in the pattern of exclusion of obligations to others does not need social bonds. More precisely, they parasitize on social bonds, using familiar bonds and markers, but the process of group self-determination on the professional level is not activated.

## CONCLUSION

Formal standards and rules create setting limits for acceptance of professional identity, and since the group of professionals in the Russian society is

inhomogeneous and unconsolidated on the inside, we should not expect professional identity to become a competitive identification matrix. If take as a basis the fact that stratification is based on labour market stability, full legal employment (Nayomny rabotnik..., 2015), belonging to the class of professionals becomes a single-option instrument of social self-determination in the context of innovative economy growth. However, as the experience of modern developed countries shows, growing number of part-time or temporary workers employed in unskilled or seasonal activities is defined by the logic of post-industrial economy development where the use of high technology, making an individual free, makes it difficult to return professionals in the mass.

Since institutional factors are poorly developed, logic of informal social relations (also when job hunting) suggests that values of professionalism are interpreted in the context of success achievement. The abovementioned growth trend in self-fulfilment needs cannot be reduced to the authority of professional identity. One might assume that the stated position is a special form of self-protection, comprehension of one's dignity and self-confidence under conditions of limited social and labour right and unstable employment. Therefore, against the background of disappearing labour identity, professional identity in the Russian society has not become a powerful socially compensating and socially oriented form of social self-determination. Within the context of established social structure of the Russian society, professional identity has found elite meaning and positioning of new social classes as professionals on one hand and is becoming an integration criterion for entering narrow sectors of innovation economy on the other hand.

It can be stated that growing significance of professional identity in identification strategies of the Russians is characterised by increased professionalism reputation asset, by perception of professional identity as the one ensuring confidence in future. Paradoxically, at the current education level the processes of de-intellectualisation in the Russian society carry on. In the context of subjective experience, the Russians perceive professional identity as the desired state, excluding structural aspects, which reduces the influence of professional identity on the choice of integration methods in the society, finding self in a group and legitimation of professional's position in public consciousness.

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