

## **Ethno-Religious Factors of Generations Dynamics in the Multiethnic Region of Russia**

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### **Abstract**

*We have conducted study of the ethnic and religious factors in the context of the methodology of generational analysis. The research methodology is based on the works of authors such as K. Mannheim, S. Eisenstadt, M. Mead. Based on empirical data collected upon implementation of the project "Continuity and conflict of generations in the information, multi-ethnic, and multi-confessional society (using the material of the Republic of Tatarstan)" in 2013-2015., we revealed generational features of transmitting the ethnic and religious values in the multi-ethno-confessional region of Russia – the Republic of Tatarstan.*

*The study used quantitative and qualitative methodology of sociologic research - a massive survey of population of the Republic of Tatarstan (N=1450 pers.), in-depth narrative interviews with several generations of the same family (N=30), and narrative essays by students of various universities of Kazan (N=500).*

*Interpretation of the results made it possible to formulate a number of conclusions, indicating general possibility of maintaining a high level of ethnic and religious tolerance in Tatarstan as a multi-ethno-confessional region of Russia managed both at social level in general and in the sphere of inter-generational dynamics. At the same time, we have identified a number of specific generational characteristics, indicating the presence of a certain generational dynamics, being not developing, however, in generational gap.*

*The results can be used at both the regional and the national levels upon developing programs focused on the socialization of young generations in the aspect of maintaining inter-ethnic and inter-religious tolerance in both multi-ethnic and mono-ethnic regions.*

**Keywords:** Generation, generational dynamics, ethnicity, confession, multi-ethno-confessional society.

## Introduction

Macro-social structure of the society is subdivided into a large number of sub-systems (including ethnic and confessional groups), each of which is a carrier of its own, distinctive version of the traditions and values, which effectiveness of intergenerational transmission determines largely the stability of a multi-ethno-confessional society. The process of transmission of traditions between generations is carried out by various institutions that operate within these subsystems. In the case where the ethnic and religious norms and values are transmitted, the institution of family plays a significant role. At the same time, in the post-industrial societies where the family loses its function of a leading socializing agent, an inter-generational gap may occur, which takes an extreme form of conflict of generations or "abyss" (fault) between the generations (Generational gap) [1; 2].

The specifics of generational dynamics in the context of ethnic and religious factors has been studied by the authors in one of multi-ethno-confessional regions of Russia - the Republic of Tatarstan.

Tatarstan is a unique area of intersection of the various ethnic and religious groups. Despite the fact that in the post-Soviet period, at the end of the 1990s, there was a slight rise in nationalist and ethnophobic sentiments, which led to a number of problems, the region has managed in general to maintain traditional inter-ethnic and inter-religious tolerance [3]. To further maintain the achieved stability and prevent proliferation of ethnic and religious conflicts in the region, the relevant trend in research is the analysis of the specifics of the transmission of ethnic and religious values between generations, identification of the specifics of generational dynamics in combination with macro-social trends of social development and micro-social context of intra-familial socialization.

## Methods

The methodology of the research is based on the approach of K. Mannheim, according to which the change of generations is a universal process, based on the biological rhythm of human life, so that new participants appear in the cultural process, and old actors disappear gradually. Representatives of each generation can act only in a limited chronological interval of the historical process, therefore the society needs to constantly transmit the accumulated cultural heritage, which is carried out by a succession of generations.

If the continuity for one reason or another is broken, there occurs a gap between the generations, having a negative impact on the stability of the social system. Intergenerational gap causes formation of so-called "lost generation" in a society, actually falling out of the general social structure. This problem is especially urgent in a multi-ethnic and multi-confessional society, when the individual at the same time acts as a representative of both his/her generation and the ethnic and/or religious group. If there is an interethnic and interreligious conflict in society, it can be transmitted to the relationship both between generations and within the same age cohort. At the same time, according to the results of our research, the age-specific cohorts of modern Russians are the carriers of specific entelechies of their generation, which are formed on the basis of collective historical memory. At the same time a tendency has been revealed that with an increase in age of the respondents, their identification with their own generation becomes more pronounced, while the younger generations show a high degree of individualism [4].

An important role in the succession of generations, according to S. Eisenstadt, belongs to the process of transmission of traditions. While one of the essential characteristics of the tradition is its variability [5]. Social groups forming on various grounds are the carriers of the different variations of traditions, including those within ethnic and religious groups, when it comes to multi-ethno-confessional society. Therefore, the analysis of the dynamics of generations requires to distinguish a separate ethnic and religious factors in this process.

In the methodology of our study, the theory of the gap between the generations (*generational gap*) by M. Mead has played an important role, according to which human history has passed through a change of three types of cultures, distinguished in terms of the nature of transmission of experience between generations: postfigurative, cofigurative, and prefigurative (Mead, 1970).

The maximum degree of the gap (abyss) between generations is common to prefigurative cultures arising from the mid-twentieth century, which form a unique new type of social relation between generations, when the values and skills of the older generation do not prevail any more over the younger generations. A new culture, described by M. Mead in the 1970s as a newly emerging and with unknown future, spread and strengthened more the inter-generational gap in the past decade, in our view. Currently, the principle of separation of the society into generations seems to be debating, because the process of traditional continuity between age cohorts has actually transformed into its opposite. Thus, on the example of the Russian society, we can state that "children" are not only better informed in a dynamic technological environment, but also are more adapted to the new socio-economic conditions, as compared with a cohort of "parents".

However, the methodology of generational analysis, in our view, has undeniable heuristic potential, since being under maximum individualization and fragmentation of social life it allows recording some of the typological characteristics of the socio-demographic groups.

Based on the methodology of generational analysis, the group of authors conducted as a part of the project "Continuity and conflict of generations in the information, multi-ethnic, and multi-confessional society (using the material of the Republic of Tatarstan)"<sup>1</sup> in 2013-2015., a comprehensive sociological study, including the following steps:

- a representative survey of the population of the Republic of Tatarstan (N=1450 people). The obtained data were processed and analyzed with the use of the statistical processing program - SPSS 8.0;
- a series of in-depth narrative interviews with representatives of several generations of the same family (total 30 interviews conducted in the mono-ethnic Russian, Tatar and inter-ethnic families);
- narrative essays of the younger generation - students of various universities of Kazan (total more than 500 essays collected and analyzed).

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<sup>1</sup>The project has been implemented with the support of the Ministry of Education and Science of the Russian Federation, agreement 14.B37.21.0523. Project manager – Cand.Sc. Sociology, A.P., Maksimova O.A.

## Results

According to the results of mass survey, over half of the families in Tatarstan (55.4%) consist of two generations, i.e. the nuclear family type is dominant. Young people under 24 years live with their parents of 35-54 years (over 60% in each of three age categories). Representatives of the older generation - 55 years - often live separately from their grown-up children (47.9%). In general, one-generation families account for 23.4% of the sample. 20.9% of the respondents of different ages live in the families consisting of three or four generations.

The overwhelming majority of the respondents described their relationships in family as very good, either with periodic disagreements (92.1%) - as noted by all respondents, regardless of age.

The main causes of periodic inter-generational disagreements in the family, according to respondents, are the various household problems - 98.8% (no age-specific differences in the responses were found); the discontent of older generation with the behavior of younger one is on the second place (33.4%), which is mainly an opinion of young people under 24 years (40.9%).

It is notable that only 1.8% of respondents named religious issues as the cause of the conflict, and international relations - 0.6%. Thus, we can say that there are no significant disagreements in terms of ethnic and religious factors between generations in the intra-familial interaction.

However, the results of our survey revealed a rather high percentage of residents of Tatarstan with a stable ethnic identity. Almost half of respondents (42.1%) said that they never forget about their nationality, and these are the Tatars a greater extent (52.7%), and to a lesser extent - the Russians (31.8%).

An analysis of the responses of all the array of respondents regarding their attitude to their ethnicity, as well as characterizing the degree of religiosity of different age cohorts, showed that generational differences in this aspect exist at the macro-level.

Thus, characterizing the attitude to the own nationality, the respondents were differentiated by age as follows. 41.8% of young people aged 16-34 years said that they never forget about their nationality; 22.05% - think about their nationality in certain cases; and 29.4% often do not think about what their nationality is. Interpreting these data, we can say that young respondents have generally fallen into three quit equilibrium segments, with a slight predominance of the first group. A similar situation is observed among middle-aged respondents (35-54 years), where the proportion of those who never forgets about their nationality is 40.1%. We shall note that the share of those not thinking about their nationality is higher among middle-aged respondents than among young people. While among older respondents (55 years and older) the number of those who never forgets about his/her nationality is significantly higher than in other age groups and accounts for 50%.

Generational specificity can also be observed in the distribution of answers to the question about what feelings the respondents have in relation to their ethnicity. Nearly 27% of middle-aged and young respondents said they do not experience any feelings, whereas only about 20% of the elderly chose this variant. The share of those being proud of their nationality is 33.3% among the elderly, 27% among young people, and only 18.3% among the middle-age

cohort. As we can see, here is also the spiral dynamics, characterized by the fact that the average age of the cohort shows the lowest level of ethnic identification, and the strongest level is shown by the elderly, despite the fact that the youngest generation demonstrates a certain dynamics of the revival of interest in the ethnic theme.

We think that these trends are determined by the historical context. An older cohort of Russians passed the stage of ethnic renaissance in the post-Soviet period, which led to a renewed interest in their own nationality, while the younger generation have been socialized in the updated conditions of ethnic identification. But the middle-aged generation is the most ethnically indifferent, which is confirmed by the analysis of narrative essays by the students of Kazan universities. The authors of the essays expressed the following points of view:

*"Our grandparents are a separate question. Since I am a Tatar by nationality, my grandmother used to ask me since my childhood "I hope your girlfriends are not Russian?". The older generation of my family demonstrates racial hatred, racism, in relation to the Russian. I do not know what a cause of it is, apparently, life, but all old men over 55 years in the villages of Tatarstan are nationalists. On the one hand, they are certainly right, we must always remember who we are and where we came from. But this, on the other hand, will hinder the establishment of normal relations with other nationalities. That's another paradox". (a man, 19 years old, Tatar);*

*"I have often met the elderly, who thought national strife to be a cause, to put it mildly, of untrusted relationship. Many grandparents, including mine, are strongly against interethnic and interreligious marriages. And, in my opinion, the main reason is the religious strife. The parents are much less categorical in this issue." (a woman, 20 years old, Tatar).*

As can be seen from the above statements, young people point out that it is the older generation of their grandparents who shows the greatest degree of ethnic identification that often borders with ethnophobia and ethnic intolerance, though, as the results of the mass survey show, older people do not see such problem in the world-view of their generation.

According to the results of the mass survey, the prevailing share of respondents (75.5%) do not dislike or hate any nationality, and this answer is often chosen by people older than 55 years (84.2%). 8.6% of all respondents have a particular dislike, among them the 25-34-year-olds (12.7%) have it more often, and the elderly (4.9%) - more rarely. The oldest age cohort of 65 years and older (87%) shows the highest degree of tolerance in the mass survey, which is partially confirmed by the interview data: *"All are the same. I do not know., I have not had conflicts with anyone here, I do not care."* (a woman, 70 years old, Tatar, city of Kazan). This fact, in our opinion, indicates the presence of a certain generational contradiction: younger respondents believe that older people show a lower degree of ethnic tolerance, while the older generation, on the contrary, consider themselves ethnically tolerant.

In general, the results of the study demonstrated at the macro level a high degree of inter-ethnic tolerance in all age cohorts in the Republic of Tatarstan. As noted by one of the respondents: *"My vision is subjective, of course, but I think we [the people of Tatarstan - auth.] a more tolerant to other nationalities, because we have always lived in a mixed society"* (a woman, 40 years old, Russian, city of Kazan).

However, despite a high degree of inter-ethnic tolerance demonstrated by the respondents in the answers to general questions, they have shown a greater tendency to preserve a mono-ethnicity at the level of intra-familial, intergenerational interactions.

Only a third of respondents (36.8%) believes that nationality in marriage does not matter, almost half of them thinks that the spouse must be of the same nationality or will be ethnically assimilated (44.3%), and 14.5% strongly oppose intermarriage. Moreover, as the results of research have shown, there is the generational dynamics on this matter: a negative attitude to the inter-ethnic marriages increases with the age of the respondents.

According to the data obtained, young people are more tolerant of interethnic marriages, while the most negative attitude towards them is shown by the generation of the parents (45-54 years) and grandparents (55-64 years and 65 years) of these young people. Our young informants pointed at this ethnophobia at the micro level in their essays, noting that their grandparents, and often enough their parents are opposed to the relationships and further marriages between their grandchildren/children with representatives of other ethnicities.

Russian respondents are more tolerant of inter-ethnic marriages (40.5% believe that the nationality does not matter in marriage, and 42.8% are willing to enter into inter-ethnic love marriage); Tatars chose this variant less frequently (29.9%). 14.5% of respondents are strongly against intermarriage, which are commonly the Tatars (22.3%), and much less - Russians (6.6%). 6.6% may agree to this marriage only if a spouse adopts the customs and religion, which are commonly the Tatars (8.8%), and much less - Russians (4.2%).

To analyze the ethnic self-identity in correlation with ethnicity of the parents (as a factor of generational dynamics), we selected the respondents, whose mother's and father's nationality does not match. There were a few of such people - only 175. It is not sufficient for a correct statistical analysis (i.e., the findings have not been proved mathematically, the information has been used only as an intelligence). The analysis has shown that the younger generations more often identify themselves with the ethnicity of their father than their mother, and this trend is to a greater extent typical for the Russians: 75.9% of the respondents, born in interethnic marriages and calling themselves Russian, have Russian father; and 51.4% of those calling themselves Tatars have Tatar father.

In general, according to the survey, the residents of Tatarstan have demonstrated absolute solidarity in the fact that the Russian state must support the culture and religion of all peoples living in Russia (90.9%). Moreover, no correlation by age cohorts has been recorded here.

Most of respondents agree with the statement that Tatarstan succeeds in maintaining inter-ethnic harmony thanks to the competent policy of the authorities (63.6%), and to a greater extent this response is common to the older age category (73.2%) and less for youth of 16-24 and 25-34 years (52.4 and 57.5%).

The religious identity of generations of the multiconfessional Tatarstan region was also the subject of our research. During the mass survey, we asked an identification question about whether the respondent considers him-/herself a believer. More than half of respondents (65.7%) consider themselves believers.

Responses to closed questions about religious identity could be interpreted as a trend of growing religiosity in all age groups of the population of the Republic of Tatarstan. However,

the analysis of the respondents' self-evaluation of their own degree of religiosity has found some contradictions. The majority (67%), who calls themselves believers, recognize that they do not virtually or completely observe the rites and canons of their religion. Only 2.7% of respondents, having called themselves believers, observe all religious canons, while less than a third (29.6%) observe only the most important canons, and the majority does not see any need in doing this. We have found some generational differentiation on this issue. For example, there is correlation by age among those strictly observing all religious canons: the largest share is among the most elderly (over 65 years) - 8.1%; further - 25-34- and 55-64-year-olds (3.5% in each group). The lowest degree of religiosity was observed in 45-54-year-olds (2.5%), 35-44-year-olds (1.7%) and 16-24-year-olds (0.9%). The fact that people become more religious with aging is repeatedly confirmed, and a phenomenon of a raising level of real religiosity in a cohort related to the upper border of the youth (25-34 years) is completely new for post-Soviet Russia.

An important feature of the Tatarstan society is mutual intersection of the two main ethnicities - Tatars and Russians, traditionally adhering to Muslim and Orthodox religions. The survey included 42.7% of Russian respondents and 49.1% and the Tatars. Among the Russians, 95.7% of those identifying themselves as believers classified themselves as Orthodox (including those without observing the canons), only 2.9% of Tatar believers were Orthodox. Muslims among Tatar believers account for 93.6%, and among Russian believers - 0.6%.

Such proportional intersection of religions, nevertheless, causes no serious inter-religious clashes in the society of Tatarstan. In general, population of Tatarstan demonstrates a high level of religious tolerance.

To characterize the impact of religious ethics on the dynamics of generations at the micro-level (intrafamilial interaction) we shall turn to the content of narrative essays of students.

According to the young informants, the generation of their grandparents shows the most uncompromising attitude to the religious education of young people, while their parents are more indifferent in this aspect. At the same time, they noted special influence of the specifics of the multi-confessional region, which determines the mutual intersection of two major religions - Islam and Christianity:

*"We live in a country of two nations, two religions. I see in our society that the older generation (our grandparents) is more categorical in this respect, the generation of our moms and dads is more tolerant, but the current generation of young people and children, perhaps, has no thought about this issue. But some families anxiously venerate tradition, and if it happens in any family that Tatars marry only Tatars, then certainly a young girl from this family doesn't have the right to think about mixed marriages, which can also be simultaneously associated with religion. If one is Tatar, then he/she is Muslim, of course. It would be unacceptable for me to marry only the representative of one religion, but I cannot blame this family. Perhaps people want to belong to something. It so happened that I am Tatar, but baptized, and not all the members of my family like it. My grandmother became indignant ..."* (a woman, 22 years old, Tatar);

We shall note it was more common to Tatars to point to the high degree of religiosity of older generations of their families. Also, the assertion is fairly common that young Tatars show a higher degree of religiosity than the Russian youth in recent years:

“As for inter-religious interaction, the generation of my grandparents tried to somehow save their religion, as they had lived through the time of atheists. *But since the religion was suppressed, my parents did not know much about their religion ... My generation can practice any religion. And Islam began slowly to return to us. And those who were looking for a way have found it. Our generation feels easily, because no one will judge us for visiting mosques or churches.*” (a man, 19 years old, Tatar)

According to the survey, family relations are generally characterized by religious harmony. The vast majority of respondents (83.9%) stated that their families have no disagreements between generations in matters of religion and nationality. This opinion was especially common among the people of the older generation - 45 years - more than 88% of responses; a little less - among young people (79%).

We obtained interesting results from the analysis of responses to the question, characterizing a subjective assessment of the degree of religiosity of different generations. The questionnaire proposed the next pair of opposite opinions to the respondents to choose one, which they think more acceptable:

- 1 – The modern youth is less religious than older generations.
- 2 – The modern youth is more religious, as compared with older generations, brought up in the spirit of atheism.

According to the data obtained, young people increasingly identify themselves as less religious if compared with older generations (77.2% among 16-24-year-olds and 70.5% among 25-34-year-olds), while older generations share less this view (61-62% among those over 55 years old). It is interesting that the middle-aged generation has shared its opinion almost equally - just over half (57.6%) of respondents of 45-54 years old believe that young people are less religious, and 40.2%, on the contrary, believe them more religious than older generations.

In general, the respondents demonstrated a high level of religious tolerance on the question of their attitude to the people adhering to strict religious canons in terms of clothing. Against the background of Russian and international scandals around the issue of wearing hijab, which also refers to the girls of school- and college-age, this problem does not cause serious negative in Tatarstan that have been also demonstrated by data from our survey. The majority (68.8%) is indifferent to people who adhere to strict religious canons in clothing, noting that it is a personal preference of people. No significant age-specific differences were recorded in these responses. 17.7% of respondents have negative attitude, who often are people older than 65 years (23.6%), and less often - youth of 16-24 years old (9.7%). 12.5% of respondents, in particular - youth (18.3%), have positive attitude towards such people.

## Discussion

Our results are largely consistent with the findings of researchers from other countries. Alessandro Cavalli notes on the example of the Italian society that the generational characteristics largely manifest themselves in lifestyle, music, leisure preferences, but are virtually absent at the level of religious values [6].

A promising area of research in relation to Russian specifics is the analysis of the latest religious practices in combination with modern mass culture typical of generations X and Y,



similar to the analysis taken by Adam Possamai analysis in his work “Sociology of Religion for Generations X and Y” [7].

With the development of the information society is updated, the problem of the generational digital divide becomes actual and deserves its study in Russia, as a factor of ethnic and religious identification of generations. According to the studies by Western authors [8, 9], confirmed by the materials of our own studies [10], there is a digital divide in modern society between older and younger generations, which is characterized by the absence / lack of skills for working with digital technology in the older generation as compared with the youth, which may in certain circumstances be considered as a factor of intergenerational contradictions. Virtual reality has become a field for construction of self-identity of the younger generation of “digital natives”, whereas their parents, “digital immigrants” are not able to control the process and influence it by traditional mechanisms of socialization. Therefore, it is interesting to analyze how the digital generation constructs its own ethnic and confessional identity in virtual reality by means of interaction in social networks.

The prospects for further research in this direction are also a study of the impact of globalization on the ethnic and religious factors of generational dynamics, including the response of different generations to migration processes, as well as the positive and negative trends in the existence of the Russian society in the international space.

### **Summary**

Results of the study suggest that the generational gap in the transmission of ethnic and religious values in Tatarstan is virtually absent (except for local contradictions existing usually on intra-familial level), and, otherwise, the succession is dominant.

The pronounced ethnic and religious identity is more characteristic of older generation of Tatarstan, while younger respondents show it to a lesser extent, although we have recorded a tendency to decrease in the number of ethnically and religiously indifferent young people as compared to the middle-aged group.

The study showed that the family remains the most important institution of the continuity of generations. At the same time, both ethnic and religious values are mainly transmitted at intra-familial level.

### **Conclusion**

Thus, this study demonstrated in general a fairly high level of continuity of generations of multi-ethnic and multi-confessional region of Russia - Republic of Tatarstan, at both the macro- and micro-levels. Due to the quite competent policy of regional authorities, it became possible in Tatarstan, in the post-Soviet period, to prevent the incitement of ethnic and religious hatred.

Nowadays, the majority of the population in all age cohorts demonstrates a high level of inter-ethnic tolerance, although there are some trouble spots, particularly, in the aspect of the interaction between the local population and migrants, which require special attention of both the authorities and the public and civil society activists.

To further maintain a high level of ethnic and religious tolerance in Tatarstan, it is necessary, in our view, to preserve the socio-cultural continuity of generations in order to maintain an

optimal combination of emerging macro-social and various socially group identifications in both the traditional space of interpersonal interaction and the virtual space of “digital” socialization.

### **Acknowledgements**

The work is performed according to the Russian Government Program of Competitive Growth of Kazan Federal University.

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