

SOCIO-MENTAL GROUPS IN THE SOCIAL COGNITION

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Abstract:

New possibilities to study social processes that appear in the differentiation of respondents on the sociomental groups are covered in the article. This differentiation is based on cleavages in understanding intentionality (semantic dominants) holistic, completed communicative acts. The author examines a structure of the communicative act and mechanisms of understanding and interpretation in the case of a) adequate b) partially adequate and c) inadequate perception.

Keywords: understanding, socio-mental groups, communicative skills, intent, meaning, semio-socio-psychology

Multi-level and occasionally multidirectional information flows, that every person is engulfed by, serve as a basis for differentiation of people not only according to traditional socio-demographic and psychosocial groups, but also socio-mental characteristics – symbolic groups differing by the level of development of communication skills.

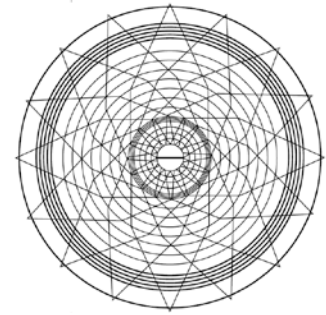
The basis for such differentiation is linked to the empirically supported differences in the levels of understanding by various people of the significant meanings (meaning) of the perceived works of art, texts and each other in the process of communication and interaction. The observations and assumptions about the existence of such differences can be found in the works of thinkers and scientists of all historical eras beginning with antiquity (Heraclitus, Pythagoras, Plato, Aristotle, Leonardo da Vinci, Francis Bacon). However, the possibility of operationalizing the evidence-based way to obtain such a result has only emerged fairly recently.

We refer to the methods and approaches employed by the interdisciplinary Semio-Socio-Psychological theory of social communication [Dridze, 2000; Adamyants, 2008]. It focuses on «the iconic communication as a process of exchanging textual, meaningful information» [Dridze, 1984:45]. It is about the understanding of communicative intent during an interaction, i.e. the concrete goal of each speaker's statements.

[Scientific Articles]

Adamyants T.

Socio-mental groups in the social cognition



The basis for a Semio-Socio-Psychological theory. According to a paradigm specificity of this theory, a hierarchically organized structure of cognitive frameworks oriented towards the communicative (authorial) intent (intentional and motive-target structure on the whole) is always invisibly present in any completed communicative act.

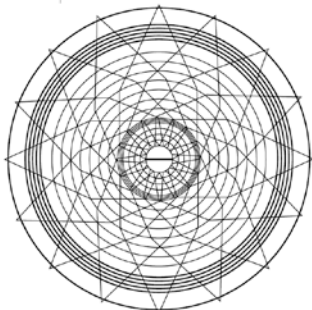
There are an extension and clarification of «intent» in addition to a common interpretation of this term as the focusing of consciousness and mind on a particular object out of a desire to fulfill some aim or plan. In semio-socio-psychology «intent» does not just mean the attempt to realize some aim, but is interpreted as «the equilibrium of motives and purposes of people’s communication and interaction» [Dridze, 2000: 16]. Another important point is linked to the assertion of the equivalence between the communicative intent and the meaning of a communicative act – both are the most significant aspects of the latter. It is something a communicator (an author) wants to say, convey, express, make clear to other people – the result one aims to achieve by entering into dialogue, both at the level of sometimes unrecognized motives and unconscious aims.

The method of motive-target analysis of the communication process developed as part of the theory mentioned above lies in singling out the hidden hierarchically organized motive-target structures, the pinnacle of which is the intentionality («the equilibrium of motives and purposes») of the concrete communicative act, i.e. the meaning of it (*Picture 1*). Given that the process of such an analysis is operationalized, the result appears to be relevant and reproducible.

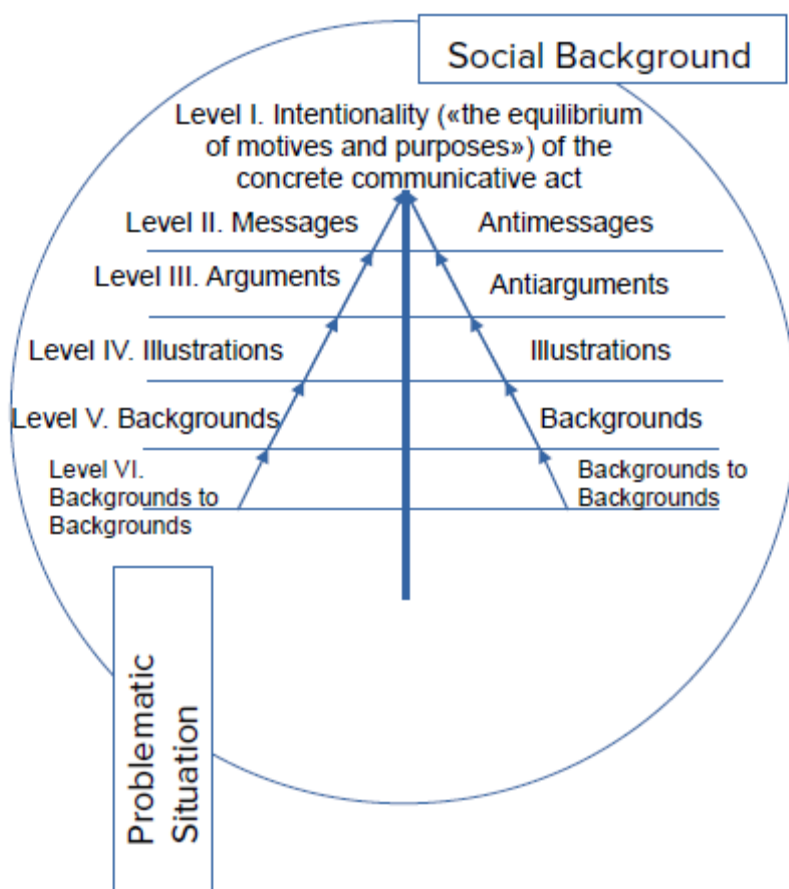
The same method permits the evidence-based definition of the level of understanding of an author’s intentionality (meaning) in the works perceived by a respondent. It serves as a basis for differentiation of people according to the level of development of their communicative skills or socio-mental groups.

This process of differentiation consists of several steps: firstly, the hidden multi-level structure of communicative-cognitive frameworks oriented towards an author’s intentionality must be singled out in a studied work; secondly, the structure of perception of this work by a respondent is developed based on analysis of interpretations of the work in question obtained through questionnaires. A comparison of the results of each of these steps permits a conclusion about the degree to which respondents understand an author’s intentionality (meaning) [Adamyants, 2009]. The findings of previous long-term research studies show that not all respondents demonstrate an adequate understanding of an author’s intentionality. It should be emphasized that it is not a question of agreement between a reader and a listener with a communicator (an author), but only of the adequacy of understanding of the essence of what an author (a communicator) wanted to express, convey, share and make clear to recipients.

Thus, the level of development of communicative skills is an intrinsic characteristic of the degree to which one understands the intentionality (significant meanings) of the perceived works. It is telling that this characteristic has proved to be significant in understanding the peculiarities of one’s interaction not only with traditional kinds and



forms of communication, but any other socially important spheres that cannot function without communication – for example, the nature of interaction between a particular group and governing bodies, between members of the group and the wider society that provides guidance on general norms, values and the particulars of behavior and response. In essence, this characteristic appears to be the universal bridge that connects communicative processes of varying degree of complexity and formalization.



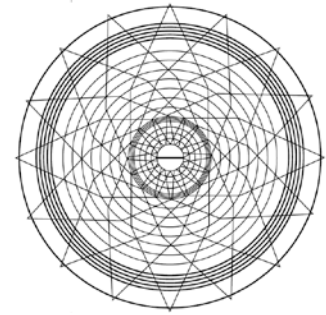
Picture 1. Typical intentional (motive-target) structure of a concrete original communicative act

In contemporary research on the perception of meaning three socio-mental groups are traditionally singled out: the adequate perception group (the high level of communicative skills), the partially adequate perception group (the average level of communicative skills), the inadequate perception group (the low level of communicative skills) [Adamyants, 2009]. The importance of the phenomenon of socio-mental groups (they are synonymous with «consciousness groups», «the level of development of communicative skills groups», «the interpretational groups») in understanding the socially important processes will be discussed below.

[Scientific Articles]

Adamyants T.

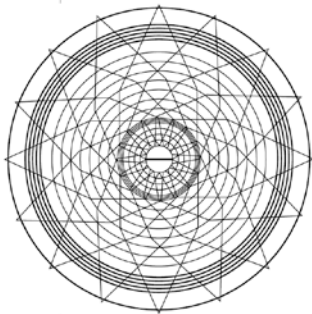
Socio-mental groups in the social cognition



The adequate perception group (the high level of communicative skills). The representatives of this group independently comprehend an author's intentionality, recognize the main logical-compositional and emotional components of the perceived work, and understand the peculiarities of hierarchical relations inside the motive-target structure (picture 2). Skills of adequate perception almost always go hand in hand with independent thinking and decision-making and correctness, even when a person does not agree with an author's stance. When it comes to the perception of the socio-political content (by an adult audience), the number of the adequate interpretations is 13-14 %, in the case of the informational content – 9-18 %, depending on the form of presentation and organization of materials [Mass... 1980; Dridze, 1984; Zhavoronkov, 2007; Adamyants, 2009]. In the case of works of art, the number of adequate interpretations appears to be relatively higher. According to all characteristics, a group with the higher level of communicative skills is in a more advantageous (socially important) position. Based on the results of various studies using semio-socio-psychological methods, currently we have solid grounds to talk about the advantages of such aspects of the worldview of the representatives of a group with the high level communicative skills as a personal understanding of the desirable and the undesirable as well as the optimal course of action when a conflict arises in a group, the characteristics of characters' qualities in the literary works they like, the emotional perception of the world around them, the level of socio-cultural interests, an understanding of the current problems facing modern Russia, the level of tolerance (friendliness) towards people of a different nationality, religion, school students' academic success, the attitude towards one's professional role [Adamyants, 2012; 2013; 2014; Garmazhalova, 2009].

The partially adequate perception group (the average level of communicative skills). The representatives of this group tend to be less able to understand the meaning of the works (materials). In their case, the intentionality and the message level usually end up in «a vacuum of meaning». They merely ignore both, get confused when it comes to the understanding of the hierarchy of relations between the elements of the structure of the original communicative act (picture 2). Such people tend to firmly remember the arguments, the problematic situation, the facts provided as illustrations. A well-informed standpoint, however, does not guard them against all kinds of influences and manipulation. In the perception of the socio-political and informational content (by an adult audience), the number of the partially adequate interpretations is 30 %, depending on the form of presentation and organization of materials [Adamyants, 2009].

The inadequate perception group (the low level of communicative skills). The representatives of this group tend to experience the total discrepancy between the most significant parts of the original material and its imprint in their mind. They either remember nothing («something about economy», «something about politics») or «snatch» from a material certain facts that are provided as illustrations of the



messages and the arguments, while ignoring the messages and the arguments as well as the motives and the purposes of a communicator (picture 2). Very often before and instead of trying to turn their attention and understand the essence of what an author wanted to express in the transmitted materials, people with an inadequate perception display listlessness and boredom or explosive emotional reaction, especially when they have already formed a certain social attitude (positive or negative) towards the subject, the problem, the author in question, the character, etc. Like the representatives of the previous group, they are susceptible to external influence. In perception of the socio-political and informational content the proportion of people inadequately interpreting it (in an adult population) is not less than 30 %, with insignificant variation depending on the form of presentation and organization of materials [Dridze, 1984; Adamyants, 2009].

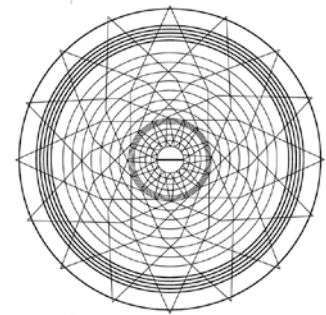
Dates and numbers. The characteristics of the mass media audience's psyche began to be studied as part of the project «Public opinion» realized in 1969-1974 in Taganrog by a team of young and then lesser-known scientists, including T.M. Dridze, led by B.A. Grushin. This was when the term «consciousness groups» was introduced [Dridze, 1984; Mass..., 19080] and the properties of a group of people able to adequately interpret socio-political press reports, making up 14 % of all readers of the press involved in the study, were named (while by answering specific questions of the survey 12 % of respondents demonstrated adequate knowledge of vocabulary, clichés, biographical notes, etc., and 2 % of those surveyed, despite not demonstrating such knowledge, managed to grasp the meaning successfully). In the 1980s A.V. Zhavoronkov conducted similar research on the perception of «Pravda» reports, using the same methods and the reference text as the project «Public opinion». The result turned out to be the same – 14 % of adequate interpretations [Zhavoronkov, 2007]. In the 1990s 13,6 % of TV viewers involved in a study on the characteristics of interpretations of socio-political TV programmes consistently demonstrated adequate perception of their content [Adamyants, 1998]. Such consistency in figures, despite the considerable time spans between surveys and the increase in opportunities for obtaining information that occurred during that period, points to stability and constancy in how socio-mental characteristics manifest themselves.

In the project of Russian Foundation for Basic Research «The development of individual communicative skills depending on the extent to which the socio-cultural environment is conducive to communication» (800 people were interviewed during 2008-2010) the properties of socio-mental groups with respect to the perception of works of art, consisting of the audiences of all ages, were first defined – the high-level perception figure was 25 %, the average – 47% and the lowest – 28%. It was observed that communicative skills tended to improve slightly with age: a share of respondents demonstrating the adequacy of perception aged 5-6 years was 12%, aged 7-10 years – 15%, aged 15-17 years – 23%, aged 18-25 years – 25%, aged 26-35 years – 29%, among people aged between 36 and 40 and 41 and 49 – 30% and in the group of 60 years and above – 38% .

[Scientific Articles]

Adamyants T.

Socio-mental groups in the social cognition

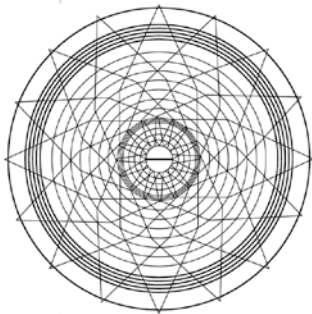


The obtained results generally confirmed the findings of other studies showing that neither age nor gender, a place of residence or even an occupation and a level of education can guarantee a high-level understanding of communicative intents (meaning). Such understanding requires special skills (communicative skills), and if these skills are not a natural gift, they may develop only under certain conditions, either through life experience or special learning.

The adequate perception group		
Levels of motive-target structure I - intention II - messages III - arguments IV - illustrations V - backgrounds VI - backgrounds to backgrounds	Motive-target structure of original communicative act 	Specifics of interpretation of original communicative act in perception of the individual
The partially adequate perception group		
Levels of motive-target structure I - intention II - messages III - arguments IV - illustrations V - backgrounds VI - backgrounds to backgrounds	Motive-target structure of original communicative act 	Specifics of interpretation of original communicative act in perception of the individual
The inadequate perception group		
Levels of motive-target structure I - intention II - messages III - arguments IV - illustrations V - backgrounds VI - backgrounds to backgrounds	Motive-target structure of original communicative act 	Specifics of interpretation of original communicative act in perception of the individual

Picture 2. Understanding and interpretation with adequate, partially adequate and inadequate perception

The process of understanding. An understanding of (the coherent, completed communicative act) stems from an understanding of an author's intentionality, of the



[Scientific Articles]

Adamyants T.

Socio-mental groups in the social cognition

essence of what an author wanted to say, convey, express with regard to his conscious aims and sometimes unrecognized motives (for example, creativity is mostly intuitive). For this to happen, a virtual multi-level structure of intersubordinate communicative-cognitive frameworks must «take shape» in an individual's mind, similar to the one invisibly present in a perceived (coherent, completed) communicative act.

This structure is not only hidden but non-linear. In the real-time sequence of the perception elements of the structure are largely distributed in a random way, determined by an author alone. For example, secondary, tertiary details may come first, overlapping each other, followed by the elements of the fourth and fifth degree, etc., while the intent itself is hidden between the lines (words, frames) – it has to be guessed. What is essential to an understanding is the analysis of another level – the social background, i.e. knowledge about historical, socio-cultural and other realities in which an author's (communicative) intent was realized.

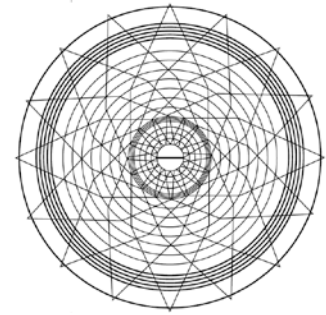
Therefore, a mental «roadmap» for an understanding should also be non-linear, extensive, and multi-level. Successful understanding involves the repeated «movement» along the structural elements, establishing the specifics of their intersubordination and the interaction between them, taking into account the social background and, finally, constructing the motive-target structure emanating from an author, the pinnacle of which is the authorial intentionality (picture 2), in a recipient's mind. The main steps in this search for understanding are the upductive (from «upduction» meaning upward) [Pierce, 1956] putting forward and refutation of the hypotheses of an author's «equilibrium of motives and purposes». Since the hypotheses are put forward and refuted, it generally takes several attempts (movements along the motive-target structure) to get an understanding equal to the revelation, the insight. Although it should be reminded that such an understanding is not always.

There is another mental process often associated with an understanding. It is linked to a reflection of the perceived material (work) or its components present in a person's worldview (a set of social beliefs, emotional and behavioral reactions). It is clear that the specificities of such reflection stem from multiple factors and circumstances, including age, gender, social status, education level, the state of health, life experience, traditions, aims, desires, interests, the level of understanding of an author's (a communicator's) intentionality, agreeing or disagreeing with it. Such reflections can be as diverse and numerous as people, but these are not «the new meanings» of a given communicative act as argued by the adherents of the hermeneutics. Rather, they are the new meanings resulting from the perception, which are part of the numerous individual worldviews. That is not surprising, given that people always learn, create, and interpret something without worrying about what mental process their perception takes place within, particularly because these processes are quite natural, both of them have the right to exist, i.e. to be made public, to be broadcasted, etc. However, it is important to differentiate them from each other and not to use them interchangeably: a common ground of understanding can be

[Scientific Articles]

Adamyants T.

Socio-mental groups in the social cognition



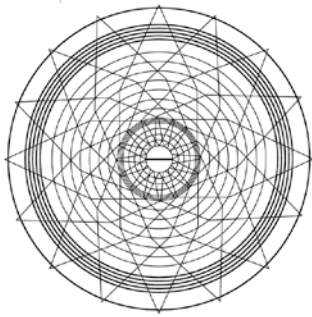
reached only if there is no discrepancy, no double standards in how laws, judgments, moral values, historical and modern events, authors are interpreted. It is also important to have a widespread development of communicative skills – the ability to make informed, independent decisions and resist manipulative techniques is possible only with the developed skills of the adequate understanding of a communicator's intentionality [Adamyants, 2012].

About a concept «socio-mental». Research findings about various levels of the understanding of a motive-target structure emanating from a communicator and, consequently, about various levels of the understanding of an author's intentionality permit to introduce and explain, in addition to a concept «mental» (coming from the Latin «mens» meaning «mind») , a concept «socio-mental». It denotes the specificities of navigation in a socio-cultural environment which manifest themselves in a degree of understanding of a communicator's (author's) intentionality, an ability to get across one's own motives and purposes during communication and interaction, taking into account the dynamics of social background, historical, political, socio-cultural and other realities and tendencies. The term «socio-mental» has a broader meaning than the traditional interpretation of the term «mental». It implies not only substantive and functional but also technological aspects of a mind, in relation to a mind, which are linked to a person's or a group's habitual techniques (practices, methods, means) of understanding of the intentionality of the perceived works, material, events, etc. The technology employed by one's mind converts the perceived works, texts, events, materials, etc. into some kind of virtual forms of varying degrees of complexity. The level of understanding is linked to the well-known form familiar to a mind.

Therefore, this is not only a matter of the content of mental processes but also of their form, according to which the perceived «folds out», the degree of complexity and the multi-level nature of these «well-known» forms. An analogy can be aptly made here in more than one sense to the bed of Procrustes not always fit for a traveler if we take «a bed» for a mind and «a traveler» for the perceived works which are not always interpreted adequately (in the myth travelers were often too short or too tall to fit the size of an iron bed) and, conversely, «a bed» for the work in question and «a traveler» for a mind not always ideally comprehending the perceived materials.

The observed phenomenon appears to be similar to the meaning with which Carl Jung imbued the term «archetype». He defined «archetypes» as common symbols, a priori constructs, perceived instinctively, they are «not determined as regards their content, but only as regards their form and then only to a very limited degree» [Jung, 1998]. According to Jung, an archetype is an empty, pure form, «an indeterminate structure» that can only take shape when projection occurs and it becomes filled with the content.

Bringing concepts together, one can argue, metaphorically speaking, that in society there «exist» (are sustained) certain stable mental forms, determining not only the particular manifestations of the «collective subconscious» (according to Jung), but also the specificities of navigation in a socio-cultural environment of large groups of



people (socio-mental groups), differing by the level of their mental abilities as well as the ability to adequately grasp the meaning of the perceived works and each other during communication and interaction.

In the social sciences the following approaches to social differentiation are widely known – a cognitive approach (it is based on such characteristics of the respondents as shared values and interests, the existence of the general rights and obligations, the awareness among the members of the group of its boundaries and their belonging to it, the recognition of the existence of a group by external observers), social identity and social categorization (it is based on the acknowledgement by some individuals of belonging to a particular group, i.e. the adoption of common identity such as race, gender, ethnicity, occupation, a certain label), interactional (in this case the differentiation is based on roles and social statuses of the interacting individuals, with processes of interaction leading to the emergence of unique features that cannot be reduced to individual characteristics). Socio-mental differentiation is the most similar to the differentiation according to cognitive characteristics, but is distinct from it – the willingness to follow certain norms and values may emanate from the representatives of different socio-mental groups due to various causes and circumstances. Moreover, it is known that the processes really taking place do not always match declarations and cognitions.

About new possibilities for scientific knowledge. As is known, a new knowledge of the studied object together with research findings obtained using traditional methods provides more comprehensive, extensive insights into the problem, situations, developments trends, etc. How the introduction of such concept as «socio-mental groups» can enrich research on social processes? First of all, it turns out that it is now possible to establish a pattern, at least at the level of tendencies, of differences in interests, preferences and reactions within socially homogeneous groups, and, when a situation is reversed, of similar reactions of people belonging to different socio-demographic groups.

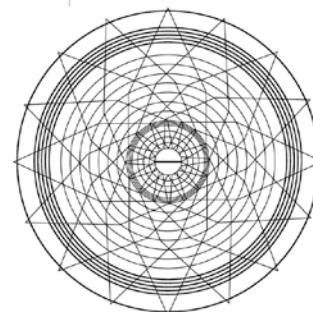
For example, the search for the patterns in the way audience reacts to the mass media materials, public figures, politicians, significant events, etc. becomes successful only when another differentiation factor, additional to the traditional ones, is incorporated into analysis – a group to which a respondent belongs according to his or her level of communicative skills (a socio-mental group). As it turns out, the degree to which a person is able to navigate the processes of communication (i.e. the level of development of communication skills), considerably influences the characteristics of emotional and behavioral response to events and processes that are significant for the social progress and sustainable development of the society. Moreover, while we are talking only about the possibility of tracking trends, trends in values, motivations and attitudes of people often define the vector of social processes, enable them to understand, predict and design.

The effective way to meet the management, psychological and educational challenges appears to be the comprehensive study and comparison of socio-mental,

[Scientific Articles]

Adamyants T.

Socio-mental groups in the social cognition



socio-demographical, socio-psychological and, if necessary, socio-metrical characteristics of respondents.

Table 1. *Dependance of quality of processes of self-organization on socio-mental characteristics of the learners*

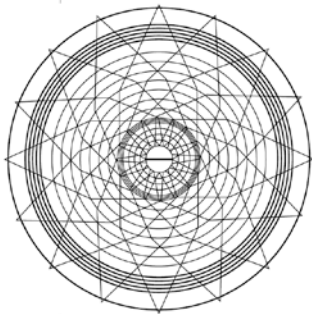
Perception	Description of a collective by theachers							
	“close-knit” collective		Non-conflict, but not a “close-knit” collective		Not a “close-knit” collective		Total	
	abs.	%	abs.	%	abs.	%	abs.	%
Adequate	37	24	34	15	2	5	73	17
Partly adequate	64	41	109	47	9	22	182	43
Non-adequate	54	35	89	38	30	73	173	40
Total	155	100	232	100	41	100	428	100

We will give one of the examples of such an analysis. The comprehensive study of the modern school and university students found that the findings about the options of socio-mental groups in a particular group (society) can serve as numerical indicators for a social analysis of the processes of self-organization and self-identification within that group [Adamyants, 2013]. For example, it turns out that the indicators of adequate perception are considerably better in groups of students characterized by teachers as «close-knit» than in the ones described differently (see a table).

After factoring in the distribution of people according to the social groups they belong to, researchers start to see social actors as a non-homogeneous body, even if they represent the same socio-demographic group. Therefore, it becomes possible to detect which socio-mental group and to what extent support (approve) one or the other scenario as well as evaluate the degree to which these potential scenarios are socially reasonable, and the likelihood of tensions and risks and ways to prevent them.

In essence, it becomes possible to find similarities and/or differences among the significant elements of people’s worldviews (social views, emotional and behavioral reactions towards the world around them and their place in it). And given that the socially essential events and phenomena, problematic situations and points of tension appear time and again, develop and evolve, metaphorically speaking, it is a matter of «the pupillary response», i.e. the possibility of quick, timely and scientifically justified responses.

«The phenomenon of the «consciousness groups» is significant for an understanding of the socio-cultural processes – these are... imperceptible at first, but objectively existing «symbolic» sets of people, making decisions and acting, which interpret not only information, but also observed events and phenomena in accordance with their mentality, i.e. their intellectual and socio-cultural potential, intentionality (a trajectory their consciousness takes), attentive skills (characteristics of



[Scientific Articles]

Adamyants T.

Socio-mental groups in the social cognition

their individual attentiveness), values, character, morals, interests, the established way of assessing their life situation, etc.» [Dridze, 1994].

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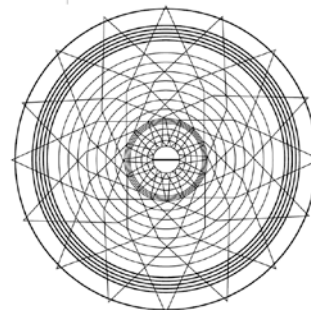
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Adamyants T.

Socio-mental groups in the social cognition



СОЦИОМЕНТАЛЬНЫЕ ГРУППЫ В СОЦИАЛЬНОМ ПОЗНАНИИ

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Аннотация:

В статье идет речь о новых возможностях изучения процессов восприятия людьми смыслов передаваемых сообщений, открывающихся благодаря дифференциации респондентов по социоментальным признакам, основанной на различиях в качестве понимания интенциональности (смысловых доминант) целостных, завершенных коммуникативных актов. Рассматривается структура коммуникативного акта и механизм понимания и интерпретирования в случаях а) адекватного, б) частично адекватного и с) неадекватного восприятия.

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Ключевые слова: понимание, социоментальные группы, коммуникативные навыки, интенция, смысл, семиосоциопсихология

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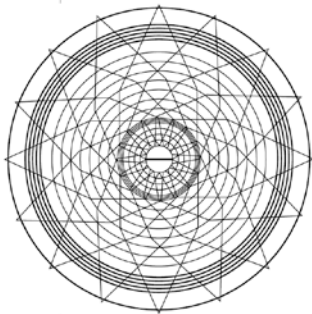
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