Subject of Public Opinion: Theoretical and Methodical Aspects of Determination

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Abstract

The article presents theoretical and methodical grounds for identification of the subject of public opinion. The author finds out that functional features of public opinion determine the features of subjects too. These features tell about the subject range, structure, how it is organized, how it exerts influence on human behavior and activity of the social institutions which have the status of public opinion object.

Determination of the subject of public opinion is the necessary step to make prognoses about its impact on human behavior and activity of various social institutions. Opinion polls confirm that this determination is considered as rather simplified and sometimes even ignored. The polling routine makes this happen, because they think that just to indicate who expressed the opinion and about what could be enough to think that the subject of public opinion has been identified.

At the same time, after studying the polling data, we can say that the problem has not solved and it could not be so easy as may be thought. In reality, a set of respondents' opinions presenting a group of people who assess the social reality from the point of their interests rarely could be unanimous. On the contrary, they vary widely including all the possible answers: from radical and having one meaning to partly or absolutely uncertain. As an example, we can take the data of the All-National Poll of 1999 on the attitude of Ukrainian population towards private entrepre-

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neurship development. According to the data, it is totally approved by 23.3% of respondents; rather approved by 23.0%; rather disapproved by 27.7%; totally disapproved by 11.2%; 27.7% of respondents have no answer [1].

The same differentiation, with some variations in figures, can be seen for the groups of respondents chosen from the sampled population in accordance with various socially important group-forming features, such as economic, political, etc.

Undoubtedly, the main reason of different opinions roots in differences among criteria for these opinions development. First of all, we talk about the interests that have to ensure integrity of a group, consolidation and coordinated behavior of its members. Different interests certainly cannot provide integration and consolidation and consequently do not support a real (not statistical) group even if it is formed according to a socially important feature. So, the groups of respondents that are often represented in polls cannot be subjects of public opinion, and this principle for grouping cannot be a methodical tool for their determination.

Taking into account the above-mentioned, we decided to study our problem in the context of identification of public opinion. We based on the fact that the public opinion is a form in which the subject reveals himself. Due to this, the features used for the public opinion identification can be features of its subject or at least contain information about him.

In this regard, the functional features of public opinion (in other words, its functions) could be the most essential. In polls, the majority of these features are revealed in the emotional and evaluative statements, analytical judgments, related to orientations or facts, in which we can see human assessments, opinions, dispositions, and behavioral actions. These activity forms of the public opinion subjects are of similar feature: they reflect the subject's attitude towards the events and phenomena of social reality that are important from the standpoint of his interests.

However, the functional features of the public opinion do not reflect all the possible activities of the subject, because they cannot explain what imparts to this attitude collective strength of will and makes people coordinate their opinions and actions. We can get answers to these questions if we study another function of public opinion that is directed inside a group (unlike the previous one directed outside), this function deals with those who express their opinions and realize these opinions in behavior. We talk mostly about regulation of individuals' behavior in order to support their unanimous reactions towards an object of opinion. This regulation is achieved due to sanctions: negative, if opinion or behavior deviate from the necessary or desired, positive, if they coincide. This activity form

of the public opinion subject is mostly registered in the social and legal studies and is determined as a kind of informal social control [2].

The first interpretation of the public opinion as a combination of the above-mentioned functions made E. Noelle-Neumann [3]. She took into account R. Merton's recommendations on evident, visible and latent functions of social formations and determined the deliberate impact of the opinion subject on its object as an evident, while the social control was determined as a latent. The latter is not all-sufficient; it is only a tool for re-alization of the first one. That is why, in polls, the latter function is often out of researchers' attention or even is not connected with public opinion. Sometimes this situation leads to different approaches in the public opinion studies presented in some scientific disciplines. For example, sociologists tend to determine the public opinion as to its impact on various social institutions, especially on the power bodies, while social psychologists mostly deal with its role in determination of human behavior [4].

The dual nature of the public opinion viewed in two directions of its functions results in two directions in search for the subject identification criteria. As to the first direction, we have to analyze the kinds of subject's activity reflecting a group attitude towards the events and phenomena infringing on their interests. As to the second direction, it should be the mechanism of informal social control due to which there exist the group integrity, concerted assessments and intentions of its members towards the opinion objects.

We return to the first direction of our search and would like to say that its subject — attitude — is not enough to furnish us with the necessary information. Strikes and pickets, meetings and demonstrations, appeals and statements depicted by the mass media and registered by polls can be used by different groups as to their scale and social organization. Only in the specific context, as a link between the public opinion subject and its object, these attitudes display the features of informational value. And the informational potential of attitude is an inverse relation to the scale of the subject (community). For example, when miners picket the management office and demand the director to be fired, this fact totally describes the opinion as well as the subject. We get less information if miners come to Kyiv and demand to pay them wages, because it is difficult to understand who organized these actions and whom they represent. It is even more difficult to understand the subject (as to nature, content and kind of attitude) when we talk about the data of referendum, elections or polls. Variations in opinions and electoral choices are rather rules than exceptions; they confirm existence of different assessment criteria and consequently different opinion subjects that manifest them-

selves in these assessments. In this situation, taking into account that we are limited in determination of the opinion subject by basing on the object or attitude towards it, it would be better to analyze inner psychological regulators of attitude: beliefs, interests, preferences that play a role of criteria for assessment and perception of the opinion subject.

We can confirm this idea by a number of reasons. First of all, the above-mentioned psychological formations are the inclinations that could be structured as a system of personal dispositions in accordance with their general or specific characteristics. Every level of the system corresponds to a complex of social conditions. That is a number of groups of certain scale, in which these dispositions are being formed and realized. If we determine a level of dispositions (criteria of attitude), then we can determine the features (scale) of social group represented by them.

The base for such analysis, processing of conclusions and hypotheses about opinion subject can be a dispositional conception of personality's social behavior developed by V. Yadov [5]. According to the concept, the first, lowest level of disposition hierarchy consists of elementary orientations. They appear in the simplest and short-term situations related to physical existence of people. These orientations mean readiness to act supported by previous experience; they have no modality and are unconscious. They can hardly influence an individual's attitude towards events and phenomena of social reality. Moreover, connections between these elementary orientations and surrounding (in more or less stable forms of social organization) have not been revealed or registered.

The second level of dispositional structure consists of social orientations that determine assessment and perception of social objects as well as situations according to social existence of individual. First of all, we talk about needs related to existence of individual in small (or contact) social groups. Group communication obliges to direct attention towards group values and norms, to take into account not only personal but also group aims and interests. At this level, connection between orientations and social conditions that promoted their formation can be easily seen if we remember that content of social orientations corresponds to social functions of these groups reflected in their aims and activity directions.

The next dispositional level consists of basic social orientations. If previous dispositions did not overstep the limits of small social groups and their interests, then wider social needs and interests form basic orientations. They take place in social activity structural elements of which are big social groups (industrial collectives, political parties, public movements, etc.). Connections between their members are mostly impersonal and controlled by corresponding instructions, statutes or, if we

talk about informal organizations, by conventional norms, customs or traditions. When people take part in these organizations, they realize their own interests and at the same time become a tool for realization of the group interests, so, their participation forces to accept the group interests as their own. The outer manifestation of this situation can be seen when respondents express their belonging to the group. This fact, along with the declared orientations, we should regard as a criterion of the opinion subject identification at the level of basic orientations.

The highest level of disposition hierarchy is a system of value orientations, it reflects the direction of personality and aims determined by general social conditions of his/her life. Dispositions of this level are formed according to the highest personal needs in which one can see the nature of individual being a representative of nation, country, territorial community, so, these dispositions can be used as activity indicators for the groups as the public opinion subjects.

We highly appreciate the heuristic potential of dispositional conception but, as to determination of criteria for the opinion subject identification, we would like to say that there is no clear "disposition–community" connection at all levels of the disposition hierarchy. In particular, at the level of social orientations that reflects interests of the nearest social environment, this connection is rather clear because the structure of this space is typical for all people. Moreover, beliefs, preferences, needs, and interests dominant there are well-known and connected with corresponding communities, such as families, friends, student group or colleagues, and this fact essentially facilitates the opinion subject identification. However, at the level of basic and value orientations, connections between dispositions and groups (interests of which are reflected by these dispositions) are not clearly seen. This can be explained by a big number of these groups, their multifunctional character and (as a result) a variety of interests. So, the two ways can facilitate the opinion subject identification: first, its structuring according to the spheres of social activity, second, approaches to criteria structuring that are adopted in the corresponding branches of sociology.

We take examples from political sociology having a good experience of polls and their theoretical analyses. This sociological area studies citizens attitudes towards political institutions (of legislative and executive power in particular), political parties and movements, public leaders with certain ideological and political principles, and it deals with a number of conceptions on electoral behavior that try to explain this behavior.

One of these conceptions explaining why people vote for certain parties and their candidates is the so-called theory of electoral behavior [6].

The authors of this conception think that a choice of individual is determined by his/her social and economic status. Giving "vote" or expressing position, an individual demonstrates his solidarity with a certain social group that traditionally forms an electoral base of corresponding party or its candidate. Essential role in the choice and its motivation plays a kind of settlement where a respondent lives, his belonging to a certain ethnic, cultural or religious community [7].

Other positions are taken into account for electoral behavior by the so-called theory of "party" voting. Basing on elections conducted in democratic countries with a stable party system, this theory states that preferences of voters, their intentions to vote for a certain party or its candidate are motivated by real membership in this party or support of its platform, that is by "psychological" membership [8].

The next conception of "ideological" voting is close to the party voting theory [9]. Its objective prerequisites are formed by the fact that many parties are similar as to their ideological directions; these directions more clearly then party programs express interests of classes, social layers, and groups to which people easily understand their belonging. That is why the ideological voting is determined not only by ideological orientations of voters but also by their social status feelings, and this is the most popular kind of electoral behavior.

Theories of rational choice try to explain that electoral behavior is based on rational grounds. According to the main idea of these theories an individual making his/her choice tries to get as much benefit as possible in this situation. Rationality of this choice is based on understanding of personal and group interests by voters, on formation of corresponding aims, on understanding which choice would promote their realization to the greatest extent [10].

While previous explanations of electoral behavior dealt with the only factor, this approach suggested by A. Campbell, Ph. Converse, W. Miller, D. Stokes can be called complex [11].

Studying political consciousness of Americans, their attitude to political parties and candidates for the president in particular, the authors determined four levels of political orientations according to the kind of general assessments.

The most abstract level, "ideological", is characterized by ideological preferences of voters who assess parties and candidates. Distribution of these preferences is usually stable and mostly is limited to the three decisive (for political consciousness of the US citizens) orientations: liberal — centrist — conservative. However, political choice of a certain part of electorate can be based on values that have no ideological character. We

talk about rights and principles declared and supported by the law as national or even common to all mankind values. If an individual supports these values, they go out the limits of ideological differences. He can be considered, first of all, as a person realizing himself to be a representative of society but not a class or ideological group.

The level of "group benefit" explains by even its name what orientations determine individual's attitude towards political parties and candidates. The content of these orientations shows the interests and what groups they represent.

The level of "time nature" does not differ from the "level of group" benefit as to the content of orientations and represented interests. The only difference between them is that the level of "time nature" takes into account the time component, that is the objects of political choice are comprehended and assessed according to their activities in the past, their efficiency in solving social or political problems.

At last, the level of "no problem approach" has no correlation to socially important problems. Its orientations are mostly based on needs and interests of individual and his nearest social environment. There are considered individual's sympathies and antipathies, family traditions, requirements and expectations of friends, colleagues, and other people with whom the individual communicates in his everyday life.

The hierarchy construction of orientation systems dealing with attitudes of respondents to an object of choice or assessments is used in economic sociology too. For example, while studying connections between economic interests and socio-economic orientations of Ukrainian population, O. Karevina determined four kinds of these orientations: 1) orientations towards the ideal kind of economic model and attitudes towards economic reforms taking place in the country; 2) attitudes to certain aspects of reforms (privatization of the state ownership, private entrepreneurship development, etc.); 3) orientations to the employment (an active involvement in social production or excluding of this sphere, to be a hired worker or self-employed, to work for a private employer or in the sector of national economy); 4) orientations to consumption (a wide choice of goods and services even if prices are very high or to shortage but with stable prices).

Further analysis of empirical data confirms that economic orientations of Ukrainian population are closely connected to economic interests, and public popularity of the orientation object corresponds, as a rule, to the level of interest presented by respondents [12]. This correspondence facilitates a search for the initial point — social structure being a subject-bearer of this interest.

Along with wide opportunities for the opinion subject determination (looking for interests-criteria that determine attitudes to the object, finding social groups that have these interests-criteria), this approach has some limitations. First of all, it is an indirect — without participation of respondents — determination of the opinion subject, and the features that are taken into account not always can be clearly interpreted as features of this group but not other one.

In order to make this determination more reliable, we add to the procedure for determination of criteria (motives) of respondents' attitudes to the object a routine to reveal their social identity. We make respondents to manifest their identification with communities which members they feel while determining their attitude to the opinion object. As a result, we obtain information that makes it possible to compare the hierarchy levels of attitudes with the levels (scale) of communities named by respondents. This correlation would show us to what extent our conclusions on possible opinion subjects could be reliable.

The goal of this procedure is to determine identity between an individual and community, so, it has to be supported by the current ideas about content, form, and functions of identification phenomenon as well as methods for its empirical study.

In sociology and social psychology the notion "identification" is used mostly to describe the process of personality self-determination when people (consciously or unconsciously) identify themselves with others or with a group and by doing this they determine their value-normative orientations and the corresponding way of behavior [13].

Identification can be in various forms, including identification with somebody else — real or imaginary. According to genesis, this kind of identification belongs to the primary identification. It appears in the early childhood and manifests itself in introjections of parents' images by a child [14]. Later this identification transforms as to its object (parents are substituted by other people) and to its function (for example, protective function replaces an adaptive one).

More detailed descriptions of self-determination can be obtained from the classification of answers to the question "Who am I?" by T. Markpartlend [15]. He divides answers into "objective" and "subjective" self-determinations. Among the first group, there are those representing an individual as to physical features in the time, space, and psycho-physiological characteristics (age, height, sex, etc.) as well as those representing him as to his activity in various social groups. The latter deals with identification with social roles and statuses determining a

place of individual in the system of interpersonal, group, and social relations (I am a leader, I am a student, I am a citizen).

"Subjective" self-determinations include those reflecting participation of an individual in situational interactions without stressing his/her belonging to a certain social structures (I like football, chess, etc.) or take him out the structure, situation and interaction certainty (I look for truth, I do not know what for I live, etc.).

If the above-mentioned means self-determination in the terms of physical, psychological or moral features of a person, his/her status and role characteristics, then social identification means self-determination of individuals in socially conditioned forms of their common activity. This can be seen when an individual accepts group interests and values irrespective of scale and way these groups were organized.

In addition to real groups, among objects of social identification, there are nominal groups, or so-called statistical. They are usually chosen according to the features necessary for analysis; direct relations between members of such groups are absent. These aggregates called social categories if the features due to which they were chosen are socially important [16]. They differ from other similar groups because they can be bearers of certain social functions, structural elements of society or lesser social communities. Among such social categories, there are groups chosen by age (young people, seniors), sex (women, men), profession (doctors, teachers, servicemen), education, social and cultural or political and ideological preferences or orientations. Under some conditions, these nominal groups can transform into real or at least by a number of features become close to them. One of these essential features is a relation that forms between people of a social category. The main prerequisite of this is an understanding of common features and characteristics by these people. The next step is to understand a social function of this category, determine strategic goal and tactical tasks providing realization of the goal. These steps clarify organizational grounds for control and coordination of relations between individuals who belonged to a certain social category and now becoming members of community with all characteristics of social group. As an example of such transformations we can take organization of political party by people who have realized that they have similar political and ideological orientations and felt the necessity to put them into life, or organization of a trade union by representatives of professional category in order to fulfill their social function and defend their corporate social and economic interests. Among such organizations, there are groups of people who support healthy life-style

when they transform into public movement with the corresponding ideology, organizational structure, and behavior of members determined by certain values and norms.

We also would like to differ social categories from very popular mobile groups, like crowd and mass [17].

As a collective and psychological phenomenon, the crowd is a group of directly (psychologically and practically) interacting people. Its activity scale is limited by a number of participants (from several persons to several thousands), time (minutes or hours), and space (street, stadium, square, etc.). A crowd smooth over individual and status differences, forces people to act in the same way even if they breach social norms and taboo.

Like a crowd, the mass forms in every specific situation as a reaction of people to a certain problem. It appears and works for the specific activity and breaks up after terminating this activity. There is no formal organization in the mass and crowd, although people use the same behavior standards and can feel simultaneously the same moods. Contrary to a crowd, the mass is a group of all-sufficient individuals; every of them solve their problem on his/her own without communication and relations with others. That is why there are no common aims or interests; people do not realize them as common. As a result, the mass cannot be an object of social identification. One more reason that takes the mass and crowd out of social identification objects is their situational existence, rigid connection to specific problems, places, and times for their solution.

The most obvious objects of social identification are social categories and social groups. In order to identify themselves with these formations, people need certain knowledge, ideas about these formations that describe them as integral phenomena but not only a number of features or structural elements. Among these integral characteristics, there are, first of all, group interests, goals, sometimes functions that performs this community in a wide social context.

Determination of social identification context, its rational and cognitive aspect is principal because it is a place where we make most mistakes while clarifying its status. One of such mistakes happens when we interpret social identification too widely. We include into it social roles played by individual in a group, norms and values that are to control their relations with other members of the group. Sometimes, for example, we consider orientations and other characteristics of typical member of social category but not the features of the whole category. In both cases, it is rather personal identification than social because the identi-

fication object was chosen as a member or his typical features but not the community.

Socially identifying himself, an individual not only realize his identity with a community but also can experience it with strong emotions. This emotional aspect of identification reflects a sensual character of connection with community and his attachment to it. Such emotional experiencing of identity can be positive and manifest itself in the feelings like pride, confidence, joy, or, in bad circumstances, cause dissatisfaction, worry, and fear. An integral indicator of complete social identification is a feeling of "us" closely correlated to solidarity with community, ability to feel it's past and present as one's own.

Social identification may be displayed as a disposition that means inclination of its subject to certain actions describing not only the identification content and structure but its completeness, intensity, and degree to which people identify themselves with the community [18]. If we talk about the completeness, then identification can include separate features of community or all those determining the community as a whole. As to intensity, there can be a degree to which the identification is realized and the corresponding feelings.

Important characteristics of identification are described by a degree to which an individual identifies himself with community. It could be complete if he determines and controls his behavior according to positions (aims, interests) of the community or partial if he feels a distance between himself and community, if he accepts the community aims and interests proceeding from his own.

The features of social identification and the identification as a whole manifest themselves only under certain conditions that should be taken into account while discussing the identification character and its object. Conditions promoting social identification are the following:

1. Conflict, confrontation or collision between the group, which an individual belongs to or identifies himself with, with another group.
2. The group of identification (real or imaginary) is separated from others, it is very special.
3. A number of group members taking part in group's everyday life.
4. Requirements to appearance of group members, their behavior and orientations (unification character).
5. Similarity, common aims, and interests of group members.
6. Actualization of important norms common to the whole group.
7. Situations in which an individual has to act as a group representative.

8. Situations when an individual being separated from the group determines his behavior according to group interests and value-normative orientations adopted in the group [19].

The above-mentioned conditions contribute to de-personalization when social identification substitutes the personal one. In this case an individual seems to become unable to differ himself from other group members, he understands himself as a social category different from other "strange" communities. De-personalization makes people perceive themselves and others as representatives of common typical characteristics describing the same group or category but not as unique personalities, although this does not mean that they have lost their own "self", their personal identity. It rather shows that in this situation, in this social context there happened a transition from personal identification to social one and self-perception became of higher abstraction. And due to this fact, if social identification is necessary, people can go from an "individual" state to a "group representative" state while understanding, evaluating and controlling their behavior according to values, norms and interests of their communities [20]. For example, there could be behavior of a strike committee member and a representative of administration during a conflict, actions of a diplomat representing his country during negotiations at the international level, etc.

As it was mentioned, the social identification process, formation of "us" feeling, becomes complete due to coexistence and interaction of an object with other social communities reflected as "they" in the consciousness of individual. Depending on the kind of determination and interaction between "us" and "them", the identification can focus on outer features of community, on its organizational and functional aspects or on its "ideology".

If social identification depends on the nature and interaction of communities forming its subject field, a researcher must be absolutely sure about principles of their selection and classification. He must determine criteria according to which the community aggregation (potential objects of social identification for respondents of sociological studies) is formed basing by the aim of the studies. For example, in the project "Social and Social-and-Psychological Mechanisms Forming Social Identity", being conducted by Russian sociologists in 1992–1993, respondents were given a list of 18 various objects of identification. Criteria used for their selection reflected features of social communities, on the one hand, and determined analysis of corresponding identification

mechanisms, on the other [22, pp. 35–51]. The list included both social groups and social categories.

Social groups:
1. Family, relatives, friends.
2. Colleagues, schoolmates.
3. People living in the same city, town or village.
4. Russians.
5. Soviet people.
6. Citizens of CIS.
7. All people living on the planet.

Social categories:
8. People of the same generation, age.
9. People of the same ethnicity.
10. People of the same profession, occupation.
11. People of the same beliefs, attitudes to life.
12. People of the same well-being standard.
13. Those who still believe in the future.
14. Those who do not wait for manna from heaven.
15. Those who do not like to thrust themselves forward.
16. Those who believe that good luck is the most important.
17. People with close political beliefs and positions.
18. Those who are not interested in politics.

We can see that the social groups presented to respondents include communities forming social space of modern people throughout their life. Results of the social identification study revealed that the most important features according to which we can differ communities were a community scale and communication ways between its members. Being asked to name the groups of people about whom they could say "we", two thirds of respondents named groups of the nearest everyday communication: family, relatives, friends, colleagues, classmates; there are communities forming a direct field of individual's social identification.

Significant number of respondents identify themselves with communities that formed at the place of residence, although such communications are mostly formal, anonymous and rather business-like than personal. Over 70% of respondents identified themselves with people who live in the same city, town or village.

As to bigger communities, like "Soviet people", "citizens of CIS", "all people of the planet", only one third of respondents accept them as "us". Such communities give rise to identifications that can be called sym-

bolic because they are formed by the mass communication influence and have no real grounds. However, this does not prevent them from being rather serious elements of social space [22, p. 42].

The list of social groups describes rather completely all social conditions needed for support of physical and social human existence, so-called "social minimum", and enables to determine basic life identities of personality. However, if we analyze it according to the selection of communities being the subjects of public opinion, its imperfection, like lack of communities determining a level of civic society development, become obvious. We talk about political parties, trade unions, public movements, and other public associations (for support of former soldiers, consumers union, etc.) [23].

Among groups, potential objects of social identification, we should specially note groups of reference. We mean those existing only in individual's imagination and being like a model to which aims, interests and norms the individual is directed and according to which he behaves [24].

Selection and classification of social categories correspond to some other criteria. Objective social features, in our case, age, ethnicity, occupation or profession, standard of well-being, help to select categories being macro-structural elements of society. Identification with them, if it is complete at least, means identification with the functions that society charges on representatives of these categories.

There are two more categories representing people that were selected by subjective features. Identification with them deals with closeness of beliefs or inclination to certain types of social behavior. These categories include "people with close political beliefs", "those who do not wait for manna from heaven" (who try to solve their problems on their own).

As we can see, these principles for classification and selection of social groups and categories include not only statistical, value-normative, structural and organizational features but also dynamic, functional aspects that, as a result, should promote to determine a subject field of social identification close to reality. Heuristic value of this classification is that it is adequate to the current kinds of social identification different because of subject (not object), owing to those features of object that are in the focus of individual's attention, according to which he identifies himself with it.

Despite significance of cognitive component of social identification, we would like to say that its role is auxiliary because the feeling of "us" directly proves the fact of identification. That is why this indicator is widely used by sociological studies as a way to determine personality's social

identity, while cognitive and conative components of identification are meant for revealing its content, specific character, and differences from its other kinds. Social identification of person with all its characteristics is a very important step to determination of community as a subject of public opinion. Identification indicates this community but, being exclusively subjective, it needs to be proved by other, independent from it, aspects. We talk about correspondence of community (with which an individual identifies him/herself) level and scale to the level and scale of interests, aims, and values that determine his/her attitude to the opinion object.

Apart from this limitation that appears and changes in the context of attitude (that is the function directed out), there is a limitation that appears and changes in the context of the opinion function directed in: regulation by means of social control over behavior of community members in order to coordinate their reactions to the opinion object.

Such duality of opinion and its subject consequently is not accidental. This feature is inherent in every social subject and can be regarded as its attributive characteristic. Being a source of action directed to an object, such as practical activity, cognition, attitude, a social subject acts through instruments of labor, language, thought, settled ways of organization and regulation of this activity [25]. These links between an object and a subject, like ways of organization and regulation of subject's activity, it would be better to say self-organization and self-regulation being in the focus of this study attention, speak about the second, latent, function. We are sure that without taking into account its content and purpose the determination of opinion subject will not be complete, sufficient because it will be a simple description of community representatives as bearers of attitude to object with no explanation of their role in organization and regulation.

Regulative function of public opinion that should be taken into account if we want to determine its subject would be possible only after clear understanding of features in which this function is revealed. We start from the definition: self-regulation mechanism in social systems (groups, organizations, society as a whole) is a social control, so, its features must indicate that the community self-regulation exists. Further, we have to clarify structural elements of this mechanism, how it acts as a mean of indirect influence of community on an individual, what place and role of individual are in this process.

First of all, we must tell about essential features of social control, its difference from other means regulating human behavior. It is known

that various factors determine such behavior, mainly natural, like organic needs, instincts of self-preservation and reproduction, etc. Through psychic reactions, they become inclinations, habits, orientations supporting various social functions of individual starting from elementary and going to the higher kinds of spiritual life. However, such psychic mechanisms do not always correspond to demands of social life. Sometimes these natural and acquired needs and inclinations cause anti-social actions. That is why there arises necessity of outer limitations imposed by community or society in order to control these psychic reactions [26].

Apart from these natural determinants, human behavior can be influenced by social (in their content) factors, like personal interests. They appear in the process of historical individuation of person as images of mostly economic social relations, but act like natural-psychological impulses, so, social regularities realize in individual behavior more voluntarily than purposefully. This is a way of personal interest and, as a result, reproduction of social regularity can sometimes lead to consequence unfavorable for the public interests. We have the next example when outer regulation is needed; in this case it has a normative character [26, p. 236].

Normative regulation is based on social norms, models, and standards of behavior adopted in community that are necessary for individual's integration in community because they ensure realization of its interests. Norms necessary for execution can exist in different forms and, various systems of normative regulation. They can be adopted as official laws or can exist only in public opinion and personal beliefs. They can be included in special codes or even have no verbal definition, people experience them emotionally, and they come to one's mind only in special situations. Being reflected in specific social forms of consciousness (legends, verbal codes, laws, statutes), the norms are processed by consciousness of individual that perceives them from his social status, and, as a result, choose the most acceptable (for them) behavior [26, p. 245].

According to the way of norm existence, there determined the kind of its regulation mechanism: social control. As to norm existence and action kinds, the most adequate differentiation based on historical development of normative regulators of behavior. One of such lines is a formation of specialized apparatus of social control, demarcation of regulation subject and object, formalization of normative procedures and codification of sanctions. Another line consists in a differentiation of interpersonal and mass relations between people, development of individual aspect in these relations, formation of normative ideas that people use in

their behavior together or individually without mediators. In the latter, we talk about phenomenon of public opinion and its separation from the mass of traditionally inherited ideas, when it becomes an autonomous and specific way regulating human behavior, a mean of social control [26, p. 261]. This is a point where normative regulation divides into institutional and non-institutional, law and public opinion, formal and informal social control.

Further analysis of the mentioned classifications proves that, despite different names, their ideas are the same: on division of normative regulation in law and public opinion, though discussed from different points of view, like specific features of their inner organization or ways of functioning. These various approaches to law and public opinion being compared promote full determination of the subject, its structure and ways of action. In both cases, we deal with normative regulation, so, let us start from the nature of norms on which they are based on. Legal norms are always verbalized, clearly stated in verbal constructions logically developed. They are included in codes of laws and reflected in normative acts. After adoption by legislatives, they become laws — the highest instance obligatory for all members of society and all official institutions. System of legal norms is the most formalized and effective mean of social control used by society to regulate relations between all citizens with no exception.

Contrary to the legal ones, the norms based on public opinion not always are of clear logical forms and system character. Some of them rather look like requirements as to course of action than verbalized norms. Such requirements-norms are formed in the process of human life and mass communication. Social and historical experience and its reflection in necessary, obligatory norms for people take place in everyday life, they get all its features: historical, cultural, and social limitations. Under such conditions, the "legislative" instance developing norms is a community itself, and imperative character is based on its acceptance by community members and its spread in their life [26, p. 259].

Differences between law and public opinion can be seen in realization of norm imperative. Clear determination of legal norms, their classification lead to the corresponding determination and systematization of sanctions, rigid links with norms that leave no choice for the regulation subject. On the contrary, public opinion deals with numerous sanctions for each norm, practically unlimited. Everything depends on orientations and preferences of those who determine them, in other words, on the opinion subject.

This situation is grounded on the nature of normative regulation subject, on the way of its interaction with the object. Attributive feature of law is a clear distinction between a subject and an object of normative regulation. Specialized institutions with the following prerogatives support this distinction: to register violations of legal norms, to determine corresponding sanctions, to set them and ensure their execution. Regulation functions separated from practice to follow norms, they belong to law machinery maintaining order and their representatives. In this case, a community influences its members: 1) through specialized institutions, and 2) without taking into account the character of personal identification with the community — whether an individual accepts the community aims and interests as his own, approves its norms-requirements or not.

As to public opinion being a kind of normative regulation, there is no well-marked separation between regulation object and subject (inherent in law). Here all individuals are equal representatives of community and bearers of common norms, their executors and conductors. Regardless of the positions in community, interpersonal status, post, duties, an individual can express on behalf of a group or even society normative requirements (to others and to himself), acting of his own free will or will of community. To the same extent, an individual has to obey the requirements from others, duly accept their assessments of his/her actions or intentions. Under these conditions, every community member may be a subject of normative principles and assessments as well as an object in various situations. So, if we talk about the function of public opinion directed in — regulation by means of social control over behavior of community members in order to coordinate their reactions to an external object of opinion — then there is no clear separation between the regulation object and subject, because in such kind of normative relations man is a social individual having (along with others) the same right to take a position that depends on his/her will but not external pressure [26, p. 264].

These features of the subject of public opinion have to determine specific approaches to his identification. For instance, the fact of his existence, reflected in activity of those community members who of their own free will assume the function of control over behavior and intentions of others, gives grounds for considering them as subjects of opinion — each of them acts on behalf of community. Apart from this category, there are community representatives that willingly identify themselves with the community, accept its public opinion as their own but do not consider themselves as its subjects. These community members could be

called bearers of opinion because they are passive in realization of its regulative, controlling function.

We must also mention those community members who do not identify psychologically themselves with it. They obey its requirements because do not want sanctions. But if this pressure weakens or it is possible to avoid sanctions, they will able to change their attitudes towards the opinion object.

As we can see, the subject of public opinion and the community whose opinion he represents are not always similar. Only the most active part of community members can be considered as a subject of public opinion. They do not merely express this opinion but assume (on their own will) control over opinions of other members.

When we talk about different opinions on the same object in a poll, it means not pluralism of public opinion or pluralism of its subject, but existence of different opinions presented by different communities and different subjects consequently.

Concluding the analysis on determination of the public opinion subject in order to set principles and criteria for his identification, we can state that functional characteristics of public opinion are at the same time the features of its subject. They manifest themselves in: a) statements reflecting attitude of the opinion subject towards those events and phenomena of social reality which are significant as to his interests; b) actions of social control by means of which the opinion subject ensures unanimous reaction of community members to its object.

Dual nature of public opinion — as an attitude and a kind of social control — provides with two approaches to find criteria for identification of its subject.

In the first approach, an attitude is determined by criteria for assessment and perception of the opinion object. Content and scale of these criteria — interests, aims, needs, preferences according to which respondents assess and percept the opinion object — condition the specific features and scale of the community (potential subject of opinion) in accordance with the dispositional conception by V. Yadov. To verify determination of the subject of public opinion by criteria of its attitude to the object, one can use social identification of respondents; its integral indicator is the feeling of "us" correlating with the feeling of solidarity with community, individual's ability to experience community interests as his own.

The function of social control realized by public opinion in regulation of community members' behavior is a subject of the second approach to

criteria of its subject identification. This function is presented as an informal normative regulation where there is no clear separation between the regulation subject and object (inherent in law). Each community member can assume (of his/her own free will) the function of control over behavior of others and at the same time has to accept their assessments of his/her actions and intentions. Depending on participation in the regulative function of opinion, community members may be divided into those who are simple its bearers and those who actively promote its formation and realization, so, they can be identified as its subjects because each of them realizes the regulative function.

In our opinion, these arguments completely describe theoretical grounds and methods of functional identification for the public opinion subject; they provide a basis needed to solve this problem at the empirical level.

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