Youth work and cultural socialization of "KZ generation"

ALEXANDER N. TESLENKO[1,2,]
[1]Department of Social and Pedagogical Disciplines
Kokshetau University named after Abay Myrzakhmetov
KAZAKHSTAN

[2]PF “Center for Juvenile Studies”
KAZAKHSTAN

ORCID: 0000-0003-1398-1832

Abstract: - Relevance of article is caused by need of studying of a problem of the young Kazakhstan citizens cultural socialization through a prism of the author's concept of youth work and the sociological theory of generations. The purpose of article consists in scientific polemic with foreign authors in an assessment of values and a way of life of the younger Kazakhstani generation, places and roles of youth work in socialization of socially active and responsible youth. The author based on the secondary analysis of sociological data analyzes features of cultural socialization and identification of "KZ generation" which is formed by two generational groups: "mellenials" and "centenials". In article, it is offered to consider features of the young Kazakhstan citizens’s sociocultural identification and socialization of through a prism of the author's concept of youth work. The revealed hierarchy of cultural practice allows to consider youth work as a special form of sociocultural animation, a field of the younger generation cultural self-realization, investment into the humanistic potential of the future. Processes of reformatting the modern youth cultural practice open new prospects of youth activity and self-expression.

Key-Words: - youth work, KZ generation, "mellenials”, “centenials", cultural socialization, cultural identification, sociocultural stratification, sociocultural animation, youth leisure.

Received: March 14, 2026. Revised: April 16, 2026. Accepted: May 11, 2026. Published: November 4, 2026.

1 Introduction

Over the past two or three years, Kazakhstan has seen dramatic changes in the socio-political life of the country, primarily the transfer of power by Nursultan Nazarbayev, a series of mass protests that forced many experts to talk about the place and role of youth in the socio-political modernization of the country. The growing importance of the "youth issue" in the context of the power transferring and forming of the new structural and cultural positions of young Kazakhstanis has actualized the need for an in-depth study of cultural identification in Kazakhstani society. The problem of cultural identification and socialization in the Kazakh scientific field has been studied for quite a long time. However, a new stage in the study of youth topics has opened in the last 5-10 years, especially after the opening of a number of specialized research centers and the publication of annual national reports "Youth of Kazakhstan", summarizing the data of sociological research, official statistical information of government agencies, national companies and youth organizations [1].

In the public discourse, the work of the director of the Institute for European, Russian and Eurasian Studies (IERES), professor at George Washington University Marlene Laruelle "Generation Nazarbayev: Youth in Kazakhstan" (Laruelle, 2020) stands out. Of great interest for understanding the modern problems of Kazakhstani youth socialization is the sociological study of the Friedrich Ebert Foundation under the guidance of the famous German sociologist Kurt Hurelmann [2], which prompted me to write this article. In a scientific polemic with foreign authors, I would like to identify the features of the cultural socialization of the young generation of Kazakhstanis, their values and way of life, so to speak, "from the inside."

2 Cultural socialization of Kazakhstani youth: models and conditions

Modern Kazakhstan is a multinational and multi-clan society that does not have a single cultural field in which representatives of different nationalities and social groups would have common values and guidelines, and would perceive themselves as a single people [3]. Intercultural contradictions tear Kazakhstan into social and cultural sides: Eurocentrism and ethnocentrism (Figure 1).

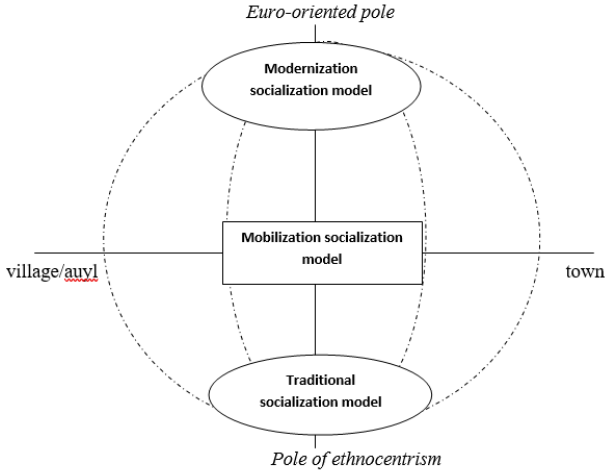


Fig. 1: Social and cultural stratification of Kazakhstan society

Source: created by the authors

Euro-oriented pole of cultural socialization is directed into values of industrial and urban civilization. Here all the natural relations, which subordinated and integrated a young man into a local community with its close personal (natural and kin) dependence, disintegrate; the ties of a person and society gain anonymous market character mediated with the money. This allows an individual to become independent, to be directly or indirectly independent subject of socialization. For the first time he gets a possibility of liberation and development of his personality, creativity, though he becomes the victim of economic and money dependence from tough and impersonal market. Though authoritarian state society falsifies, deforms and blackmails these essential signs of town industrial market civilization at the period of transition from agrarian to industrial society. However, the progress in the development of a town person in comparison with the village one is undoubted.

Pole of ethnocentrism is based on the traditions of agrarian nomadic civilization and on the dominance of patriarchal stem (zhuz) paternal way of thinking of aul environment. The Kazakhs came to a sudden sovereignty burdened with old before-revolutionary diseases as well as with acquired soviet ones: tribalism, zhuz feud, stem arrogance, regionalism. The processes of social integration and cultural adaptation in the transient society haven't formed in the most of Kazakhs strong skills and labor culture, professional competence and respect to highly technological labor, haven't worked out personal individual origin.

Taking into consideration the peculiarities of historical and civilization and cultural development of the country population we can differentiate some types of socialization models. The parameters of socialization model were specified by intercultural antagonisms between social and cultural sides of the society. They are determined by the correlation of possibilities to harmonize and satisfy basic, social and spiritual demands of youth regarding civilization and history vertical or regarding opposition "auyl – town". First of all, numerous traditional socialization model is singled out. It is inherent to numerous part of auyl youth and town migrants, whose first generation was born in Kazakh (or mixed) auyl with its traditional patriarchal culture, authority of elders, priority of the stem, zhuz and, finally, the priority of the state over a separate individual. Usually, they finish Kazakh school, speak and think principally in Kazakh, Russian and European culture is foreign ethnic culture regarding them. If they move to a Russian-speaking town with its individual civilization and foreign language environment, they experience a great social and psychological discomfort, cultural shock.

Although they gradually develop town way of life, new values and practices, they fail to overcome their marginality and traditional way of thinking. Using Kazakh traditions and customs they remain language and culturally opposed to Russian-speaking town culture for ever. Their cultural code is described with the definitions of zhuz tribalism, community, characteristic to marginals of the whole world of anti-Semitism and xenophobia, rank worship, loyalty to power and authoritarianism. In memory of distant grievances, the educational model is build on postcolonial syndrome of inferiority, ideas of national revanchism ("we were oppressed, now we will oppress the others") and islamization.

The next socialization model of Kazakhstan youth may be called mobilization. It is characteristic for Russian-speaking youth from villages and for some part of Kazakh youth being at the joint of two cultures: Kazakh and Russian-European, between auyl and town culture. The leading type of the development (of the society and appropriate to it socialization) in this case is personal development, directed on the achievement of contingency goals with the use of exceeding means and ad hoc

regulations. Its specialty is that it is going on under the influence of external extreme factors, first of all, unequal start conditions of socialization in comparison with urban youth. They are characterized with ethnic cultural and language dualism (they are half Kazakhs, half Russians), with two main determinants: their rural origin (civilization component) and Russian education (ethnic cultural component). There were almost 43% of Kazakhs among those who finished secondary school in the Russian language in 2022. They are more tolerant to non-Kazakh ethnic groups, they absorbed both Russian-European and traditional Kazakh culture, they speak and think in Russian as easy as they do it in Kazakh, though not all of them know literary Kazakh language.

And finally, modernization socialization model is characteristic for town Russian-speaking youth, among them not a numerous group (less than 3-5%) of those who come from families of Kazakh intellectuals of the second and the third generation may be singled out. They have grown up in town culture, in Russian European culture from their childhood like in their native environment. Most of all, the Russian language is their native and single language. Being the product of a town civilization, they are more sensitive to individual market vision with its basis on the person himself, not on the stem community collective priorities. Overcoming the initial marginality, inertia of nomadic way of thinking, absence of traditions of settled and industrial civilization, the new generation of Kazakh intellectuals, in cooperation with the essential part of Slavic European ethnic groups, is becoming more sensitive to the ideals of western democracy, liberalism, internationalism and common human values. It is this part of the youth that sets the mainstream; they are typical representatives of the Generation KZ.

3 Generation KZ: "millennials"

The authors of the sociological theory of generations proposed to operate not with age parameters when studying generational issues, but with the deep values of a particular era [4]. The collapse of the USSR and the subsequent social stratification of society formed a rather motley marginal mass of young people who were born and raised in the conditions of an unstable transition society and who had to endure a difficult period of formation of a new political and socio-economic system. All this was accompanied by the destruction of the previous structure of values and the formation of multiple ideological vacuums and new cultural practices that formed the unique "generation KZ" (in the interpretation of Marlene Laruelle "Generation Nazarbayev"). In the spirit of the Howe-Strauss generational theory, the “KZ generation” represents two generational groups: the so-called “Y” or “millennials”, which include those born in 1981-2000, and the following “centennials” – young people who were born after 2000 (Generation Z).

"Gen.Y" is the first generation that has no heroes, only idols. The collapse of the USSR caused a very painful breakdown of cultural and value orientations, which caused a state of culture shock and an age-related desire to "bury their heads in the sand" among a significant part of the youth.

Marlene Laruelle rightly calls them conformists. "They believe in family values, material comfort, do not challenge the values of their parents, perceive higher education only as a way to get a good job, believe that social connections will help them build a career and arrange their life" (Laruelle, 2020: 8). Research in recent years (Youth of Kazakhstan, 2014-2022) convincingly show an approximately equal ratio of material and spiritual values in the system of value orientations of Kazakhstani youth.

Self-expression (selfie mania, flash mobs, etc.) has become extremely important for this generation, to which the Internet and communication technologies have given the desired acceleration. The desire to enhance one’s “Me”, to stand out from the crowd, to be an individual, has become the cornerstone of youth culture in Kazakhstan, especially among the so-called “golden youth”. The “Generation MeMeMe” records every step they take (FitBit), location (Foursquare) and genetic data (23 and Me). Narcissism as a personality trait is more common among them than among older generations. As they grew older, they received so many incentive prizes for participating in all sorts of contests and competitions that 40% of them expect to be promoted every two years, regardless of their success [5], p. 88.

"Gen Y" interact with the world around the clock, but mostly through a screen. When meeting each other, they continue to write messages on their phones. 70% of them check their phones every hour, many experience phantom vibration syndrome in their pockets. The constant search for a dose of dopamine ("Someone liked my post on Facebook!") reduces creativity. According to the Torrance tests, the creativity of young people increased from the mid-1960s to the mid-1980s. Then it fell and collapsed sharply in 1998. Since 2000, a similar drop in empathy is observed for the ability to be interested in other people and points of view (Shamis, 2019). This is probably due to the rise of narcissism and the

lack of face-to-face communication. The Internet, urbanization and globalization of all aspects of social life have formed a new generation of incredibly self-confident and self-obsessed people. Moreover, all this is no longer a problem of the rich only: the poor are even more narcissistic, materialistic and dependent on technology.

Millennials are more receptive to the ideals of Western democracy, humanism, liberalism, internationalism and universal values. But the dilemma of "East - West" in their minds: European values are the rights and freedoms of the individual, the dictatorship of the law, free labor, humane treatment of women, technical progress, they are nevertheless illogically combined with "Asianism".

Marginality of consciousness and mentality is the main characteristic of the “millennials” generation, pushing many of them to search for their cultural identity. Often this search takes bizarre forms of “reinvented traditions” and mythologization of history. The so-called “Kazakh-speaking candidates of science”, of which more than three hundred were stamped out during the short period of formation of the national education system, have particularly distinguished themselves in this. As a rule, these are people “who cannot find a use for their “Kazakh brains” in a Russified society” [6]. It was the millennials from this cohort who were active participants in the public discussion around the transition of the Kazakh script from Cyrillic to Latin. The deadline for completing the reform has long since expired, and the main goals have not been achieved, creating only a host of new problems and difficulties, both in the educational field and in the information space.

The old cultural rift between the Russified urban world and the Kazakh-speaking rural world is being overcome by internal migration from the countryside, thus blurring the urban culture with the traditional way of life and archaic cultural habits of the auyl.

The major cities of Kazakhstan today are becoming both an ethnically and linguistically dominant sphere of Kazakhs, especially the young, those we described earlier in the traditional model of socialization. As factors of socialization, they have certainly determined the characteristics of the next generation of "centennials".

4 Generation KZ: "centennials"

Centennials are young people aged 10 to 27, "children of the liberal economy" and consumer society. They make up 27.1% of the population [2], p. 131, young people who "lived in a world of political stability and relative material wealth, developing a strong consumer culture" (Laruelle, 2020: 12). They were born "with a button in their finger" in the era of the all-encompassing and accessible Internet, without which they cannot imagine their lives [7]. Such close integration of centennials into the digital society has formed a number of basic psychological properties of the generation:

1) lack of a clear boundary between the real and virtual worlds;
2) visual perception of information;
3) "clip consciousness" and multitasking;
4) emotional depression;
5) low level of critical thinking.

Centennials are the “generation of independence”, in the terminology of Marlene Laruelle "the true generation of Nazarbayev". Their degree of conformism is off the charts. They are far from a revolutionary transformation of the world: they do not challenge the values and way of life of their parents, they trust the family more than any other social institution (more than 90%), they build their relationships with their parents on partnership and trust (at the same time, parents are not always an authority). They are against early marriage and approve of the ban on abortions (59.8%), they dream of having at least two children (37.1%) and living in a family where the father is dominant (82.4%), they consider virginity an important quality for a girl before marriage (56.8%) [2], p. 105.

The "centennial" generation is a supporter of a healthy lifestyle: healthy eating tops the list of life values, 56% of respondents consider alcohol consumption unacceptable, and 36% regularly use contraceptives [2], p. 38.

Constantly being online, communicating with a large number of different people regardless of race, gender, appearance, or place of residence has made centennials perhaps the most tolerant generation. The only exception is communication with people of non-traditional sexual orientation: 58% say it is undesirable to have homosexuals in their immediate circle. At the same time, 4% of young respondents would not want to live next to criminals, and 16% would not want to live next to homosexuals and lesbians [2], p. 108.

The younger generation of Kazakhs are polylinguals, usually Kazakh, Russian and English. Accordingly, thanks to modern IT technologies, they are more integrative: their potential for integration into any other social and ethnocultural community is significantly higher than that of monolinguals. Bilingual consciousness is more mobile. At the same time, they are less controllable, or rather, more

difficult to manipulate [8], p. 222. The Kazakh language for them is only a means of identification, while Russian and English are tools for integration into world culture and science, without which it is impossible to become a competitive individual.

The situation is approximately the same in terms of religious identification. Traditionally, being a Kazakh means belonging to Islamic culture and the Muslim world. But in the context of the geocultural expansion of Anglo-American culture and Western standards of living, religious foundations are unlikely to become attractive to a generation fixated on digital interaction, where there is less human communication and more technogenic. It is already clear that children and teenagers understand technology and material things better than human emotions and human behavior. This is reflected even in the communication between children and their parents: the communicative distance between them increases, and the chain of social inheritance and the transfer of experience is interrupted.

5 Youth work as a condition for positive socialization

The peculiarities of the "KZ generation" require a serious revision of the modern youth policy of the state, the transfer of its mechanisms from the imposition of political identities to socio-pedagogical practices of cultural self-realization. The “Concept of Youth Work in the Republic of Kazakhstan” developed by us defines the place and role of youth work in the implementation of the state youth policy, formulates the foundations of its methodological, organizational and informational support [9].

The concept of youth work in the Republic of Kazakhstan:

- defines modern approaches of the state and society to the youth sphere;
- formulates its goals, objectives and principles that correspond to modern ideas about the internal, external and global challenges facing Russian society;
- serves as a basis for preparing proposals to improve the legal, scientific, personnel, organizational and financial support for activities in the youth sphere;
- acts as a conceptual basis for developing national and regional strategies, target programs and projects in the field of youth work;- sets modern guidelines and approaches for building and improving the practical work of civil society institutions, all levels of government and local government, and other entities involved in youth work.

Therefore, youth work is a specific type of professional activity aimed at supporting the life of the younger generation, as well as improving the quality of the youth population, carried out by state, regional, municipal, commercial and public organizations, as well as individual citizens.

The basic principles, directions and standards of youth work should not be based on guardianship and paternalism, but on stimulating the activity of young people themselves, creating conditions for independent solution of the problems they face [10]. Technologically, the youth work system should use the methods and techniques of socio-cultural animation.

Socio-cultural animation as an idea designed to humanize the free time of the population is defined by Western experts as a conscious activity aimed at developing and changing social communication between people, public structures and improving the conditions of action of individuals and social groups in order to more fully realize the potential of diverse human capabilities [11]. Animation is considered as an integral part of all social activity and includes all the problems of free time, as well as the problems of the youth movement aimed at creating autonomous youth houses or centers.

Comparison of the concepts of socio-cultural animation and youth work allowed identifying their interrelations and spheres of influence (Figure 2). It should be noted that in the social sphere, a significant part of the organizer work with youth is aimed at implementing pedagogical actions. That is why youth work is largely pedagogical and requires a variety of educational methods.

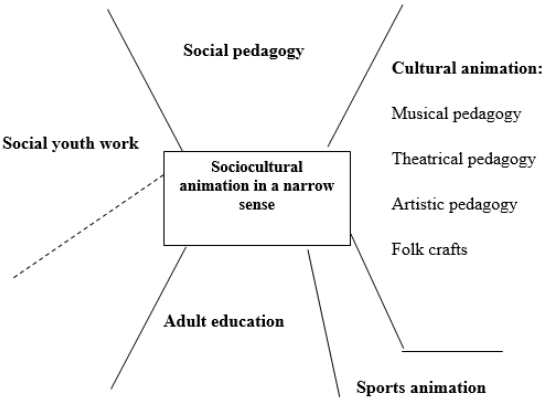


Fig. 2: Field of operation of socio-cultural animation and youth work

Source: created by the authors.

Youth work should take into account the processes of reformatting modern youth cultural practices and the discovery of new prospects for youth activity in the context of the expanding "cultural and style supermarket" [12]. In this “supermarket” there is no traditional division into high and low art, into elite and commercial, but there is cult and mass. Authenticity/individuality, as a unifying principle of the new cultural hierarchy, is aimed at adapting any subcultural content to the youth market, its entry into the mainstream culture (MC):

Individuality – Subculture – MC – Subculture – Individuality

The new cultural hierarchy is taking place under the sign of "popularization" of cultural practices. As a result, in the youth consciousness of a significant part of the "KZ generation", a fundamental transformation of value coordinates has occurred in the direction of shocking and glamor. A typical example of new cultural practices of Kazakhstani youth is the q-pop subculture (Qazaq Pop Music). It’s a musical trend that emerged against the backdrop of the popularity of Korean pop music.

The modern youth activities themselves, which are to one degree or another subcultural in nature, can be conditionally divided into sports (parkour, skateboarding, mount bake, etc.), art activities (street dance, graffiti, etc.) and games (role-playing games, historical reconstruction, quests, etc.). These youth cultural practices are “forms of public fantasy, a model of the leisure sphere or freedom for anyone who wants to have a good time, feeling young and free” [13], p. 168.

Cultural and mass forms of youth work should become a worthy alternative to spontaneous forms of leisure, for example, the widely popular "vpiska" (organizing parties with complete strangers). This direction is called upon to maximally facilitate the establishment and maintenance of social connections, the involvement of young people and their communities in solving current youth problems. As a rule, mass youth work is carried out on the scale of a specific territory (for example, a microdistrict, a city) and is aimed at cooperating the activities of relevant structures to meet the needs of young people, expanding and stimulating existing claims, expectations and interests of young people. It is implemented in the immediate living space of young people and adolescents, but at the same time, the interests of residents of other age categories of a given territory (district) should be taken into account.

6 Conclusion

In general, the Concept of Youth Work in the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2020-2030 puts forward as a common goal: ensuring the opportunity for the all-round development of the personality of a young person through increasing the diversity, accessibility and quality of youth work. It’s based on modern theoretical ideas about youth and its self-organization.

Self-organization of the young generation is the result of socio-cultural interaction, a proactive way of generational identification. Self-organization through the forms of youth culture is today truly attractive both for the youth itself and the state; and, most importantly, a real form of social non-state participation of youth. The main vectors of self-organization of the youth space: a) subcultural participation, b) non-politicized participation, c) style behavior.

The space of "KZ generation" cultural socialization is a field of cultural self-expression and self-affirmation, an investment in the humanistic potential of the future. Of course, there is a risk of social detraining, demobilization of future generations, but it is of the same order as the risk of entrepreneurship or scientific creativity. The combination of new humanitarian knowledge with the uninhibited individualism of leisure can, in an unpredictable form, give no less impressive results than those that the combination of technical, natural science knowledge with free entrepreneurial initiative gave in its time. Perhaps the nonconformism of youth leisure is one of the ways to interrupt the inertia of personality development, which today is met with mistrust, and tomorrow, it is possible, will become urgent.

Declaration of Generative AI and AI-assisted Technologies in the Writing Process

During the preparation of this work, the author(s) utilized artificial intelligence (AI) technologies solely for the purpose of linguistic refinement and grammatical correction. Following the application of these tools, the author(s) comprehensively reviewed, verified, and edited the resulting text. The author(s) maintain full accountability and responsibility for the accuracy, integrity, and final content of the publication.

References:

[1] Youth of Kazakhstan. National report (2014-2023). Astana: "Molodezh" Research Center, 364 p.

[2] Youth of Central Asia. Kazakhstan: On the basis of sociological poll (2016) / Under hands. prof. K. Hurelmanna (Germany). Almaty: F.Eberta in Kazakhstan Fund, 660 p.

[3] Teslenko A.N. (2007) Cultural socialization of youth: Kazakhstani model. – Saratov-Astana: CSTI. – 370 p.

[4] Howe, N; Strauss, W. (2000) Millennials Rising: The Next Great Generation. N.Y. Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group. – 398 p.

[5] Shaputis, Kathleen (2004). The Crowded Nest Syndrome: Surviving the Return of Adult Children. L.: Clutter Fairy Publishing. – 286 p.

[6] Beysembayev S. (2015) Phenomena of the Kazakh nationalism in the context of today's policy: from denial to understanding./ Almaty: Soros Kazakhstan fund, 36 p.

[7] 30 facts about modern youth: research of Sberbank. / http://www.sberbank.ru/common/img/uploaded/files/pdf/youth_presentation

[8] Zaytseva N.A. (2015) Theory of generations: we different or identical // Russian regions: prospection. No. 2 (3). pp. 220-236

[9] The concept of youth work in the Republic of Kazakhstan (2020) / Ed. prof. A.N. Teslenko. Nur-Sultan: Center Elite, 90 p.

[10] Teslenko A.N. (2024) Organization of youth work: introduction to the specialty. Kokshetau - Astana: Center Elite Publishing House, 2024. 273 p.

[11] Montez, M. (2018) Sociocultural Animation and Community Development – contributions for social work. Hradec Days of Social Work. Hradec Králové, Czech Republic. pp. 355-362

[12] Seabrook G. Nobrow: culture of marketing, marketing of culture. M.: Publishing house "Hell Marginem", 2005. – 274 pages.

[13] Omelchenko E.L. (2006) Beginning of youth era or death of youth culture? // Magazine of social policy researches Vol. 4. No. 2. pp. 151-182

[14] Teslenko A.N., Rozhkov M.I. (2019) Yunogogik: theory and practice of youth work. Monographic. Kokshetau: KUAM. – 260 p.

[15] Shamis E. The generation grows in what conditions Milenium and Z and that will become their values. http://rugenerations.su/2009/05/21 Date of the address of 30.05.2020.

[16] The Nazarbayev Generation: Youth in Kazakhstan (2019) // Contemporary Central Asia: Societies, Politics, and Cultures. L. - N.Y.: Lexington Books, – 342 p.

Contribution of Individual Authors to the Creation of a Scientific Article (Ghostwriting Policy)

The author contributed in the present research, at all stages from the formulation of the problem to the final findings and solution.

Sources of Funding for Research Presented in a Scientific Article or Scientific Article Itself

No funding was received for conducting this study.

Conflict of Interest

The author has no conflict of interest to declare that is relevant to the content of this article.

Creative Commons Attribution License 4.0 (Attribution 4.0 International, CC BY 4.0)

This article is published under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License 4.0 https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/deed.en_US