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Theoretical foundation of the study of the region image

Modern theoretical foundations of studying the phenomenon of the region image are considered in the article. Image-relevant concepts such as «image», «self-image», «brand» are analyzed. Attention is also paid to various notions of definitions of the concept «region», which depend on disciplinary specialization. The authors note that in modern research the region ceases to be only physical space and attempts to apply constructionist theories in the analysis of the region phenomenon. The theoretical consideration of the region image, first of all, emphasizes the subjective importance of the image phenomenon, which allows to consider the region as a variable, which boundaries are defined not only physically, but also mentally.

Keywords: image, brand, character, region, theories, concepts.

Introduction

The analysis and interpretation of the concepts «character», «image», «self-image», «brand», «region» within regional subject allows to capture a wide range of issues of conceptualization.

The formation of ideas of a certain territory is a long-term and multi-factor process. All characters/images which appear in humans pass a difficult way of formation, development, fixing, transformation/adjustment. There is no doubt that political, social institutions involved in the process of socialization play a huge role in its formation.

According to the Russian dictionary, the word «image» has several meanings, the most suitable from which are: 1) appearance, shape; 2) that, which is drawn appears to be someone's mind's eye, imagination; 3) result of reflective (cognitive) activity of the subject, reflection in consciousness of objects, phenomena of objective reality [1; 559].

The «image» emphasizes the spontaneous nature of the formation of the object idea. Image is character correction through a number of standard procedures. An image is formed based on the character.

In spite of the fact that the word «image» is translated from English (English «image», from Latin «imago») as «character», it has a slightly different definition: 1) display; image; sample; 2) mental image, representation; 3) formation of a stable positive impression about the product, service of the enterprise manufacturing or selling the product. Here it draws attention to the fact that on the first two meanings of these concepts we see a meaningful similarity. However, there are differences: if the description of the «image» indicates that «...this is a reflection in the consciousness of objects, phenomena of objective reality», then the definition of the concept «image» emphasizes «the formation of a stable positive impression» [2; 225].

It can be noted that, being synonyms, the terms «image» and «character» carry different semantic charge. The word «image» is associated with the words image maker, imagology, etc. And this creates some kind of artificiality of everything that is called an image. Most likely, the image can be called that was specially created, designed, according to any plan or purpose. And if it is formed spontaneously, without external or internal intervention, then it is a character. Obviously, the line between these two terms is rather unstable.

The interpretation of the concept of image has its own features, which depend on the scope of which scientific field this concept is considered. Thus, according to the sociological definition, an image is «an external character created by the subject, in order to cause a certain impression, opinion, attitude in others; a set of properties attributed by advertising, propaganda, fashion, prejudice, tradition, etc. to an object in order to induce certain reactions in relation to it [3; 97].

These definitions are extensive and make it possible to attribute them to various objects of image research — personality, family, small and large groups, etc.

An image is an impression produced by a person, company, or institution on one or more groups of the public. It is not a drawing, not a calcium, not developed in the smallest detail, accurate image, but rather sev-

eral details which have an emotional impact [4; 307]. «Image, as it is known, is not amaterialized reality — it is what a person imagines to himself about a particular subject (phenomenon) or how he perceives it. Firstly, image is an imaginary category; secondly, it is a managed category that can be correlated, constructed and transformed as we wish» [5; 10].

Thus, it can be concluded that the image is what has formed and exists without external influence and various elements of manipulation. And image is a character on which professionals worked and corrected.

The image, from the viewpoint of the identity of the region inhabitants, is expressed through the concept of self-image. Self-image derives from the past experience and reflects the current state of self-esteem, self-confidence [6]. Hence, self-image is the notion that the people of the region create of themselves.

In modern literature, despite the ambiguous interpretation of the meaning of term «brand», the marketing component dominates. Thus, the American Marketing Association defines brand as «a name, meaning, design, symbol, or any other feature that distinguishes one seller of an item or service from another. The legal meaning of the term «brand» is a trademark [7]. And a marketing specialist called «the father of advertising», D. Ogilvy gives the following concept to the brand: «The intangible sum of a product's attributes: its name, packaging, and price, its history, its reputation, and the way it's advertised» [7]. According to the marketing expert J. Knapp, «the brand is the sum of all impressions received by consumers and users, developed in their minds on the basis of perceived emotions and functional benefits» [8].

The definition of a brand seems less controversial in contrast with an image. The brand is formed from image characteristics. When a certain symbol stands out from the image, which is the most marketing of the image components — succinct, recognizable and dividend-paying. The brand of territory is a symbol that represents the whole space.

Methodology and research methods

Today, more theoretical approaches to the analysis of territory and regions are based on a constructive position and consider the region as a variable boundaries of which are defined not only physically, but also mentally. «The boundary between regions is not necessarily objectively obvious, shared by all regional subjects and often even exists as an «imaginary» phenomenon» [9; 55].

A region is a variable that reacts on changing conditions which affect economic growth and well-being [10].

Some researchers note that «the region» as an economic or institutionalized area loses its meaning in the information economy, as it is spatial formation of industrial society» [11].

In the theoretical analysis of the image of the region, first of all, it is necessary to note the subjective significance of the image phenomenon. Image is a part of social reality, but reality is not actual, but discursive or rather mental. Consequently, constructivist theories are the most heuristic in the conceptualization of the image of the region.

Image is a resource that has been accumulating for many decades and is the capital that affects to all aspects of public life. All the images go through a complex path of formation, development, consolidation and transformation. Formation of ideas about a particular territory is a long and non-linear process. A huge role in the design of the image of the region in people's minds is played by politics, economics, culture, education, the family and many other social institutions of the modern society.

The appearance in modern theoretical literature of such metaphorical concepts as the «elusive world» (E. Giddens), «fluid modernity» (Z. Bauman), «risk society» (W. Beck), etc., clearly demonstrate a change in the perception of social and physical space. Borders, territories as a physical world that was «objective», «tangible», «forced» in this «elusive» context ceases to be a constant, and becomes a variable, which, above all, thanks to informatization and digitization of space, can be archived and expanded not in real but in a cognitive mode.

Today, more and more theoretical approaches to the analysis of territory and regions are based on the constructivist position and consider the region as a variable whose boundaries are determined not only physically, but also mentally.

Attachment to the place to a certain geography became the criterion of inadaptability in conditions of fluid modernity. The mobile way of life inherent in a modern person changes the attitude to the territory and its parameters. The region is no longer regarded as something frozen (a constant) within its specific boundaries. The region becomes flexible and mobile, which also affects its image characteristics.

The most relevant conceptual approaches in analyzing the image of the region are such theories as the network theory (M. Granovetter, M. Castells), the theory of social capital (J. Coleman), phenomenology and

social constructivism (P. Berger, T. Luckman, etc.) the concept of the habitus (P. Bourdieu), the concept of fluid modernity (Z. Bauman).

From the point of view of network theory, the region can be viewed as a social network. The physical space (territory), combining with the social (network), forms a social sense of place, the so-called regional identity. This is not just a physical finding / co-presence of bodies in one space. People living in the same region feel a similar social experience on basis of which common values, interests, and stereotypes are formed. The physical space of the region is primarily supported by social networks / connections. The farther geographically regions from each other, the more interference in the establishment of social ties between them. The more chances of ignorance of the inhabitants of some regions about the life of other regions, even within the same country.

The images of the regions represent community and stability of the meanings attached to communication participants, and they are viewed in the representations as a phenomenon of «objective» reality. In the discourse of images and regions, and their carriers are typed and presented in understandable and familiar categories: «southerners», «northerners», etc. These typifications are the basis for new constructions that are built into the life world and are considered «for granted».

The analysis of the above conceptual series, mostly constructivist, reveals their explanatory ability in studying the phenomenon of «image of the region». The image of the region is based on sociocultural, subjective, media, reflexive attributes, meanings, elements.

The region does not exist outside consciousness. Therefore, in studying the territorial image, a significant heuristic potential lies in the use of the mental map method. The concept of mental maps is widely used in various fields of knowledge — pedagogy, psychology, geography, history, etc. The founder of mental maps as a method of studying the territory is the American researcher Kevin Lynch. In the 60s of the twentieth century, he analyzed the mental perception of the city from residents of Los Angeles, Jersey City and Boston. According to the results of the study, K. Lynch concluded that «the formation of an image is a two-way process, uniting the observer and the observed, there is an opportunity to strengthen the image or retrain the observer or restructuring the environment» [12; 22].

Later, in the studies of the geographer R.M. Downs (Downs R.M.) and psychologist D. Stea (Stea D.), mental maps were also used. They considered mental maps as «images of a part of the surrounding space created by a person» [13], that means these images are present in human representations and, therefore, they are not cartographically accurate and can be distorted.

Images, concepts included in the human mental map are products of institutional history — economic, political, cultural, daily life. They (images, concepts) cannot be constant and will permanently change under the influence of social changes. Consequently, mental maps will always project historical changes. History is tied not only to time, but also to a specific territory, which is also reflected in the minds and perceptions of people, primarily in the format of mental maps. Virtualization of the modern world, the newest technical devices, even more actualize the concept of mental maps and sharpen the attention of modern researchers to their features in postmodern conditions [14].

Discussion

Approaches to defining this concept vary significantly. The definition of the region is specified on the basis of disciplinary/scientific objectives aimed at studying this phenomenon. From the point of view of Western economists, the identification of a region as a region is based on an awareness of public regional interests, where an important characteristic is «the relationship between the economic experience of territories which form part of the region and the groups which express certain interests» [15; 22].

Finnish geographer A. Paasi, considering the concept «region» as a sociocultural and historical category, concludes that the process of institutionalization of the region consists of such stages as formation of territory, creation of symbolic form, institutions and their establishment in the social consciousness of society. He notes that «institutionalization is a process in which social-spatial territorial unit acts as a part of the spatial structure of this society, they are created and defined in various spheres of social activity and consciousness, and over time may disappear or be de-institutionalized» [16; 243]. The institutionalization of the region is defined as production and reproduction of regional consciousness, material and symbolic features of the region both in residents and in people who live outside this region.

The processes of globalization and glocalization have led to a paradigm shift in the study of regions, which has led to the formation of a new «territorial logic» and requires the redefinition of the region. Regions lose their «certainty» and stability and represent «evanescent space» [17].

It should be noted that today in scientific research the region ceases to be only a physical space. That is, the objectivistic tradition that had dominated in the age of modernism, which considered the region as a natural constant, relied on such indicators as territory, climate, history, economy, politics, etc.

Conclusion

«Heavy modernity» was replaced by «fluid modernity», which led to a change in the morphology of territoriality. The attachment to the place typical for settled lifestyle, which for a long time was considered as a sign of civilization, became a criterion of non-adaptability in the conditions of fluid modernity. The nomadic/mobile lifestyle, which is becoming more common in the conditions of fluidity, changes the attitude towards the territory and its characteristics. Under the conditions of fluid modernity, it would be a distortion to consider the region as something frozen (constant) within its defined boundaries.

The physical parameters of the territory, which were valuable in the «heavy era», gave place to mental, network, intangible. «This was an era of drawing boards and designs — not so much for mapping social territory, but for lifting the territory to a level of clarity and logic that only maps can boast of» [18; 56] In fluid modernity, «boundaries» of regions become flexible, elastic and this also affects image characteristics. Therefore, from the viewpoint of the concept of fluid modernity, the images must be light and mobile in order to be successful.

Recommendations

Since the modern spatial structure is multilevel and heterogeneous, one can see not only the economic regionalization but also the cultural, historical, geographical, etc. Simultaneously with economic associations in the cognitive regionalization, there are such images as — southerners and northerners, Kazakh-speaking and Russian-speaking, capital and peripheral, traditional and modernized, urbanized and agrarian, polyethnic and monoethnic, etc. Here appears active role of the subject in designing both regions and their image.

The concept of the region is very dynamic, flexible and it is extremely important to understand its context. The essence of regional research and regional policy depends on this. In the process of forming the image of the regions, one should take into account the strengthening or weakening of a particular context. Theoretical developments on the image of regions can be basis for the implementation of regional policy.

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Аймақтық имиджді зерттеудің теориялық негіздері

Мақалада аймақ имиджінің феноменін зерттеудің қазіргі теориялық негіздері қарастырылған. «Бейне», «өзіндік имидж», «бренд» сияқты ұғымдардың релеванттық имиджі талданған. Мамандандыру пәндерінде «аймақ» ұғымының анықтамаларының әртүрлі түсіндірмелеріне назар аударылған. Авторлардың айтуынша, қазіргі заманғы зерттеулерде аймақ тек физикалық кеңістікті білдірмейді және аймақтың феноменін талдауда конструктивистік теорияларды қолдануға әрекет жасалған. Аймақтың имиджін теориялық тұрғыдан қарастыруда, ең алдымен, шекарасы физикалық жағынан ғана емес, ментальды түрде анықталатын аймақты ауыспалы ретінде қарауға мүмкіндік беретін имидж феноменінің субъективті мәні атап көрсетілген.

Кілт сөздер: имидж, бренд, бейне, аймақ, теориялар, концепциялар.

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Теоретические основы изучения имиджа региона

В статье рассмотрены современные теоретические основы изучения феномена имиджа региона. Проанализированы релевантные имиджу понятия, такие как «образ», «самоимидж», «бренд». Уделено внимание различным трактовкам определений понятия «регион», которые зависят от дисциплинарной специализации. Авторами отмечено, что в современных исследованиях регион перестает представлять собой лишь физическое пространство, и предприняты попытки применения в анализе феномена региона конструктивистских теорий. В теоретическом рассмотрении имиджа региона, в первую очередь, подчеркнута субъективное значение феномена имиджа, позволяющее рассматривать регион как переменную, чьи границы определяются не только физически, но и ментально.

Ключевые слова: имидж, бренд, образ, регион, теории, концепции.

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