
Open Social System: The Problem of The Impact of Vertical Social Mobility on The Prospects for Economic Growth (In the Context of The Discussion About the Affirmative Action Prospects)

YURI V. KOLIN¹

¹Doctoral student, PhD of philosophical sciences, Department of cultural theory, Institute of Philosophy, Social and Political Sciences, Southern Federal University,
105/42 Bolshaya Sadovaya Str., Rostov-on-Don 344006, Russia
Email: rostovchanin-rostov@rambler.ru

Abstract: In this article for the first time are considered the aspects of positive discrimination state politics in the context of its impact on the processes of social integration, vertical social mobility and economic growth rate. The comparative analysis of positive discrimination models in USSR and Western countries has been carried out. The repercussions of the Russia's abandonment of the positive discrimination politics are distinguished. The actuality of the analysis of the forms of vertical social mobility stimulation is based on their potential impact on economic growth in the conditions of high social inequality and the growing tendency to global social polarization. The high level of social inequality is a barrier to upward mobility, the expansion of economic activity and the dynamic economic growth.

The article justifies the importance of the open social system as a transparent system of social elevators for economic growth' acceleration and states the correlation between the level of vertical social mobility and the economic growth in long-term perspective.

The methodology of the research is based on the complex approach to the problem of vertical social mobility and the use of the models of positive discrimination, and the comparative analysis of the Soviet and Western practice of its applying is carried out. The article is based on the research of the processes of vertical social mobility and social inequality rate codependence in the context of understanding of social inequality rate as a social and economic development prospects' indicator.

The modern Russian scholars view the problem of positive discrimination in the predominantly negative light: as a Soviet legacy, within the paradigm of understanding the Soviet society as totalitarian. Whereas in Western society the use of positive discrimination models is widely studied as a factor of lowering the social inequality and strengthening the social integration within the separate social spheres: politics, industry, education, gender and race relations.

The article for the first time names the problem of national importance of positive discrimination as a factor of increasing the social system openness and the acceleration of economic growth in long-term perspective.

The research can be considered as a review of the examples of the positive discrimination models usage and the invitation to further discussion on the perspectives of wider applying of the positive discrimination models as an indirect factor of strengthening the social integration and economic growth stimulation.

Keywords: open social system, social inequality, social polarization, social integration, positive discrimination, society with equal opportunities, Soviet society, vertical social mobility, economic growth.

INTRODUCTION

The international community has accepted the importance of social inequality by including it in the 2015 UN agreement on the Sustainable Development Goals. Social inequality in the world has reached a stage where it has become a serious obstacle to development (Grigor'yev and Pavlyushina, 2018; Piketty, 2014; Stiglitz, 2012). The tendency for the world's wealth to be concentrated in the hands of the 1% of the population who effectively control the world's resources continues (Piketty, 2014). The insularity of the higher social groups and the prevalence of various forms of nepotism, the development of plutocracy (Bard and Soderqvist, 2012; Butcher, 2015), reduce the credibility of the current government (Alesina et al., 2020) and the legitimacy of the elite, its competence and ability to adequately protect public interests and solve public problems. Inequality in income and prospects of social advancement is transmitted to future generations (Cohen, 2010).

Nobel laureate J. Stiglitz argues that societies with high levels of social inequality cannot have effective functioning of their systems, because the highest social group concentrates too much power and the actions of

society in this case are directed towards the predominant implementation of private interests of these groups, rather than public interests (Stiglitz, 2019).

The processes of social polarization make the boundary between the higher and lower social groups absolute, lead to the conservation of the higher and lower social groups, the erosion of the middle class (Krueger, 2012) and the formation of the precariat that is a new class of the humiliated and insulted, deprived of social rights and prospects of social advancement (Standing Guy, 2014).

The aim of the study is to analyse the prospects of positive discrimination in the context of its impact on levels of social polarisation, vertical social mobility, social inclusion and, as a mediating factor, on prospects of economic growth.

The study hypothesizes that there is a correlation between the widespread use of affirmative action programmes at the state level, increased vertical social mobility and prospects of economic growth. Countries with high levels of vertical social mobility and trust in institutions as an indicator of social inclusion, show high levels of social stability, income growth and sustained economic growth in the long run, compared to countries with high levels of social inequality and low vertical social mobility.

The novelty of the study lies in the analysis of positive discrimination policies as a factor in reducing social polarisation, increasing trust in the institutions of power, enhancing social consolidation, and as an indirect incentive for economic growth.

METHODOLOGY

Materials and methods of research are based on a comparative analysis of the experience of positive discrimination models in the USSR, Western countries and China. The results of stimulating the openness of the social system and increasing vertical social mobility in the USSR through positive discrimination policy are compared, as well as the results of abandoning positive discrimination policy in the social sphere in modern Russia. The results of positive discrimination policies in the USSR are exemplified by intergenerational social dynamics. In Western countries, the application of positive discrimination is considered in terms of strengthening social integration, increasing the access of the lower strata of the population to the educational and political spheres, and overcoming the consequences of racial segregation.

The study is based on the works of Rajan, Zingales, Corak, Sigal, Stiglitz, Piketty (Corak, 2013; Piketty, 2014; Rajan and Zingales, 2004; Sigal, 2015; Stiglitz, 2012) in the context of analysis of the correlation between levels of social inequality and vertical social mobility as factors affecting social polarization and social stability.

The analysis of the application of positive discrimination models in the USSR is conducted on the basis of studies of vertical social mobility in the USSR by Shkaratan (Shkaratan and Yastrebov, 2011). The analysis of positive and negative aspects of positive discrimination models is based on the research of Fullinwider, Krueger, Nagel and Barnes (Barnes, 2011; Fullinwider, 2018; Krueger, 2012; Nagel, 1973), who examine the impact of positive discrimination models on the implementation of fundamental individual rights, the level of social polarization in education, the political sphere and in addressing racial segregation.

The work is also based on Handy's study (Handy, 2015) of the experience of companies and authorities that consider the expansion of vertical mobility of employees and subsidiary responsibility as a way to improve organizational efficiency.

The level of social integration is assessed according to Edelman's (Edelman Trust Barometer, 2020) world ranking of the criterion of trust in the institutions of power; the correlation of the level of trust in the institutions of power and the rate of economic growth in the countries of the world over a long time period is taken into account. The trend of declining levels of vertical social mobility in different countries of the world as a factor preserving a high level of social inequality is considered on the basis of Piketty study, and the correlation of the level of social inequality and economic growth rates in the long term is assessed on the basis of OECD statistical data.

Social polarisation and vertical social mobility: aspects of the problem

P. Sorokin in his work "Sociology of the Revolution" believed that the cause of both the February and October revolutions was the inability of the lower social groups to realize their needs, their human potential due to the class structure of Russian society (Pitirim Sorokin, 2019).

The level of human capital development (Buckland, 2017), career development and opportunities for creative self-fulfillment of citizens become decisive for social growth in the post-industrial era. In the context of modern capitalism, which is "characterized by high turbulence," manifested in the "precarization of the labor market," individuals find themselves in a situation of risk and constant search for their professional prospects (Valitova et al., 2016: 126). In this regard, "employment is considered one of the important aspects of social inclusion," since it provides professional adaptation to economic change and helps reduce social costs for society (Miethlich and Oldenburg, 2019: 6253)

According to researchers (Handy, 2015), the greatest efficiency of an organization is promoted not so much by increasing the income of employees, but by increasing their involvement in the organization based on personal growth of employees and opportunities for career advancement.

Economic growth requires career opportunities, high level of vertical social mobility, strong social lifts, while, according to researchers, there are gender, social and national limitations to vertical social mobility in modern society (Corak, 2013; OECD. Income Inequality and Poverty, 2020).

The low level of vertical social mobility (Krueger, 2012) [does not contribute to the development of human capital; the huge gap in income and property of the upper and lower social groups provokes social polarization, causes closure of the social system and contributes to low rates of economic growth.

The high level of social inequality is an obstacle to the development of human capital, social lifts, consumer market development and dynamic economic growth (Krueger, 2012; Piketty, 2014).

There is a worldwide trend of increasing social barriers between the higher and lower social groups (Corak, 2013) and the formation of a "glass ceiling", that is an insurmountable boundary between them. According to researchers, only within the framework of free competition and free market, the problem of closed social hierarchy and insurmountable boundary between the higher and lower social groups as evidenced by historical examples cannot be solved. It requires active state intervention (London zashchishchayet, 2008; Shvab, 2019).

Social polarization contributes to the expansion of processes of anomie (Crossman, 2020), deviant behavior and alienation in society, traumatization of mass consciousness (Podberezkin and Zhukov, 2020), which affects the level of social integration and reduces the potential of social and economic activity, limits economic growth in the long term.

There is a global contradiction between society's needs in human capital development, social integration, expansion of elite renewal mechanisms, and strengthening of economic growth incentives and the processes of social polarization, increase of social barriers, and rigid hierarchical structure of modern society, which put an insurmountable boundary for social advancement of lower social groups and their social status increase.

Successful stimulation of economic growth requires enhancement of vertical social mobility as one of the conditions for development of human capital, renovation and diversification of the social system.

High levels of social inequality and low levels of upward social mobility are largely determined by ineffective government policy, which is aimed at increasing openness of the social system and stimulating social advancement of lower social groups.

In this respect, it is relevant to analyse the models of positive discrimination applied both within the Soviet experience and the current forms of application of positive discrimination in developed Western countries.

Policies of positive discrimination are aimed at a long-term perspective, taking into account the consequences for society of overcoming the closed social system, the disintegration and exclusion of representatives of lower social groups in the political and social sphere, as well as the degradation of the elite and its transformation into a closed caste.

A comparative analysis of countries based on the criteria of the level of social integration, trust in state institutions (Fullinwider, 2018), economic growth rates and increase in per capita income (Grigor'yev and Pavlyushina, 2017), shows that countries with a high level of social integration, trust in public institutions also lead in terms of per capita income.

Models of positive discrimination: aspects of the Soviet and Western experience

The criterion of social origin (Novosel'tseva, 2004), as a condition for social advancement in the USSR, extended to all social spheres, was part of the Soviet policy of positive discrimination and contributed to a partial equalization of starting opportunities between representatives of higher and lower social groups (Dankanich, 2011; Il'yukhov, 2010). In the USSR, the level of social inequality, the gap between the incomes of higher and lower social groups was one of the lowest in the world (with an overall low income level of the population): 4 times in the USSR and approximately 5.5-6 times in European countries, while in modern Russia and the USA this gap reaches 15 times (Dankanich, 2011; Krueger, 2012; Zutsman et al., 2017).

The policy of positive discrimination in the USSR contributed to the fact that the overwhelming majority of the Soviet elite and all the leaders of the Soviet state (except Lenin) came from families of workers and peasants. This fact can be seen as one example of the social integration of Soviet society as a result of the positive discrimination policy.

In terms of intergenerational social dynamics, the criterion of social background was one of the factors contributing to high rates of vertical social mobility in the Soviet period. According to data for 1983, in the USSR, among respondents aged 50-59 years, 82.1% had a higher socio-professional status than their parents, among respondents aged 40-49 years the percentage was 74%, and among respondents aged 30-39 years it was 67%, illustrating the high level of social advancement in the Soviet social system (Novosel'tseva, 2004; Shkaratan, 1987; Shkaratan and Yastrebov, 2011).

The policy of wide application of positive discrimination models correlates in the Soviet period with periods of rapid economic growth in the USSR.

Examples of rapid social development during industrialization in the USSR (Harrison, 2017; Moorsteen, 1962) and in China from the 1970s to the present time (Grigor'yev, 2018; Yan'li, 2006) have some common features, such as large-scale activation of social lifts based on affirmative action policies. Periods of rapid social growth in the USSR (SSSR v tsifrakh, 1991) correlate with periods of maximum application of the policy of positive discrimination and stimulation of high levels of vertical social mobility (Novosel'tseva, 2004; Shkaratan , 1987; Shkaratan and Yastrebov, 2011).

Statistical data on the example of the USSR development suggests that the policy of stimulating vertical social mobility can serve as one of the mediating factors for increasing openness of the social system and stimulating economic growth as a consequence of wide use of personal potential of lower social groups in social development.

Degradation of the Soviet policy of stimulating openness of the social system and abolition of the criterion of social origin as a condition for promotion on the social ladder at the end of the USSR correlates with the period when economic growth in the country took a negative value, also the level of vertical social mobility reached a minimum (Voslenskiy, 1991). The policy of positive discrimination formally existed, but in fact it was curtailed, a closed social group, the higher social caste "nomenklatura" was formed, which, according to researchers, served as one of the reasons for stagnation and the collapse of the USSR (Voslenskiy, 1991; Nazarov, 1984).

The conceptual basis of modern international law, in the formation of which "European colonialism played a significant role," are the approaches of educators to law issues and the legal doctrines of the 18th century (Demicheva et al., 2017: 388). In Western countries, the prospects for democratic society are now seen not only in terms of the development of political openness as in Popper's concept of an open society, but also as the establishment of a social system that gives all citizens opportunities for social advancement (Fullinwider, 2018). Currently, Western societies use a flexible integrative strategy in relation to models of social development, aimed at the convergence of classical market models of development and models that do not fit into the classical understanding of liberal society. As part of this strategy, Western democracies have partially abandoned the classical understanding of the liberal model and consider forms of increasing its efficiency as one of the ways to improve the efficiency of liberal society, rather than abandoning state incentives for vertical social mobility, as a prospective development of the liberal concept.

One of the forms of limiting social inequalities and social polarisation in Western society is positive discrimination programmes (Affirmative Act). As compensatory justice (Nagel, 1973), positive discrimination programmes aim to increase the level of social integration and vertical social mobility of lower social groups according to social, racial, national or gender criteria [30]. Policies to limit social gaps and increase economic opportunities for lower social groups were used as one of the ways of overcoming the Great Depression in the 1930s (Beaudreau, 2020). It is also correlated with subsequent rapid economic growth in the United States. The equalisation of starting positions as a condition for achieving legal equality was given great importance by US President F. Roosevelt, who proposed the adoption of a Second Bill of Rights, dedicated to social rights (Sunstein, 2004).

The problem of social inequality and vertical social mobility in modern Russia in the context of positive discrimination models

As Russia transitioned to a market economy, the forms of positive discrimination that existed in the USSR were abolished as part of the liberal vision and critique of the totalitarian past. Arguments that a policy of positive discrimination might be evidence not of a return to a totalitarian past, but of a path to Russia's dynamic development are unpopular among contemporary Russian scholars. After 30 years of democratic development in Russia, it is possible to note some of the outcomes of the abolition of positive discrimination policy as a stimulus for increasing the openness of the social system.

Formed after the collapse of the USSR, since the 2000s, Russian society has remained rigid, with high levels of social inequality and low levels of vertical social mobility (Grigor'yev and Pavlyushina, 2017; Salmina , 2014; Shkaratan and Yastrebov, 2011), which correlates with low rates of economic growth in Russia (Report for Selected Countries and Subjects, 2018). The social stratification of Russian society exceeds almost twice the level of income distribution between the upper and lower social groups in Eastern Europe (Zutsman et al., 2017), while the economic growth rate in Eastern Europe as a whole exceeds the economic growth rate in Russia.

According to researchers, the top social group, comprising 3% of the population, concentrates about 90% of all property and financial resources of the Russian Federation, which exceeds the indicators of 1905 (Remizov , 2016; Shapovalov , 2019; Uzbekova , 2016; Zutsman et al., 2017). The share of wealth held by the top decile in Russia (actually 1%) is 86%, in Brazil - 73%, in the US - 75%, in the UK - 54% (Grigor'yev and Pavlyushina, 2017; Report for Selected Countries and Subjects., 2018; Sander, 2004).

Analysts argue that the level of social inequality in Russia is excessive and its structure is stable since the early 2000s. (Salmina, 2014). The top 10% of the wealthiest citizens account for 82% of all personal wealth in Russia, according to Credit Suisse's Global Wealth Report (2018). Russia is ahead of the US in terms of wealth concentration, where the top 10% of wealthiest citizens account for 76% of total personal income in the country. In China, the top 10% of the wealthiest citizens have 62% of total personal income of the population (Grigor'yev and Pavlyushina, 2018;).

According to the researchers (Shkaratan, 2011), the high level of social inequality in Russia correlates with low levels of vertical social mobility and low rates of economic growth (Grigor'yev and Pavlyushina, 2018; Report for Selected Countries and Subjects, 2018). The possibility of improving one's social status is not available to most of the Russian population today (Deryugina, 2019).

Social polarization processes continue in the Russian society. Despite the existing trend of a general decline in the disposable income of citizens (Kudrin ne iskluchayet sotsial'nogo vzryva, 2019), according to the Global Wealth Report (2016), the Russian Federation came third in the world (96 people) by the number of dollar billionaires, second only to the United States and China (Sedlov and Alikina, 2016).

The gap between the higher and lower social groups in the Russian society reaches 15 times, with a continuing trend of social polarization: reduction of disposable income of the lower groups and increase of income concentration in the higher social group (Grigor'yev L.M., Pavlyushina, 2017; Dankanich, 2011).

According to some researchers (Grigor'yev L.M., Pavlyushina, 2017), the "brain drain", the loss of Russia's human capital due to emigration, the inability of highly skilled workers to realize their opportunities for social advancement, has become one of the most tangible losses of Russia since the collapse of the USSR, seriously limiting its economic growth potential.

Without overcoming the underlying social gaps, the development of forms of social promotion of the lower social groups, the main beneficiary of economic growth becomes the closed upper group of the Russian business elite (3% of the Russian population), currently owning 90% of all Russian property (Shapovalov, 2019), which creates conditions for instability of the Russian society and a decline in the pace of economic development.

The reduction of social gaps in the Russian society could be helped by the return of Russia to the policy of stimulating social advancement of the representatives of the lower social groups on the basis of the Soviet and Western experience of positive discrimination models.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

There is a long-term correlation between high levels of social inequality, low levels of upward social mobility and low levels of economic growth.

Under conditions of high levels of social polarisation, the implementation of positive discrimination programmes acquires significant relevance and represents a mediating factor for the acceleration of economic growth.

Application of positive discrimination models in the West and in the USSR showed their high effectiveness in the spheres of interethnic relations, education and politics.

There are currently no studies on the problem of assessing positive discrimination as a factor in reducing social polarisation and as an indirect stimulus for accelerating economic growth.

The importance of positive discrimination in promoting social inclusion and enhancing vertical social mobility requires further research and further discussion on the positive and negative aspects of positive discrimination as one of the incentives for an open social system. It aims to reduce social inequalities and accelerate economic growth.

In the United States, in contrast to Great Britain, there are currently growing calls for a return to the classic principles of liberalism such as free competition and equal rights for all individuals, which imply limiting affirmative action programs as inconsistent with market principles and giving a non-market advantage to representatives of one social group (Vendik, 2018; Williams, 2013).

Proponents of the classical model of an "equal opportunity society" believe that personal abilities, under conditions of a free market and overcoming explicit forms of social, national or racial discrimination in a democratic society open up opportunities for representatives of lower social groups to reach higher status positions in society without direct active state intervention in the processes of vertical social mobility.

Within this position it is argued that in a democratic society, without direct state support, a mere aggregate of individual efforts can lead to a social advancement, contribute to the economic development of society as a whole, which in turn leads to the creation of new quality jobs and increased opportunities for members of lower social groups to advance socially. Here "equality of opportunity" and vertical social mobility is seen as a spontaneous result of developed democratic norms and a market economy.

According to opponents of positive discrimination, the directive, undemocratic (without reference to the rights of other social groups) expansion of the rights of some social groups, limits the opportunities for social advancement of representatives of other social groups, without reference to their real efforts, opportunities and

abilities as compared to representatives of social groups within the framework of positive discrimination programmes.

By appealing to the principles of freedom of choice and social justice at the individual level, opponents of positive discrimination argue that these programmes are undemocratic and violate basic individual rights, equal opportunities and the equality of all citizens before the law. The preferential right to social advancement of lower social groups, all other things being equal, violates the norms of market economy and the basic principles of liberal society which are: the equal right of all citizens to realise their opportunities and abilities, regardless of their national, social or racial origin.

Followers of the classical "equal opportunity society" model believe that only the individual's own efforts offer the prospect of social advancement in a democracy where there are no overt forms of national and social oppression in society. Numerous examples are given of "self-made men" who have achieved everything through their own efforts, in spite of unfavourable circumstances.

The liberal concept of "equal opportunities" cannot be validated at a statistically significant level and, consequently, cannot be unequivocally considered as effective and considered as the only possible one for the development of modern society. Individual efforts are not sufficient for social advancement, otherwise there would not be a huge gap between the higher and lower social groups in society, including in relation to property (Piketty, 2014). The persisting trends of social polarization and the "persistence of poverty" within the lower social groups are confirmed at the highest official level by representatives of developed countries (Krueger, 2012; Salmina, 2014).

The widespread attention of researchers, politicians and social activists to the problem of positive discrimination in Western society proves the relevance of the problem of state stimulation of social promotion of the lower social groups representatives. The huge social polarization in the modern world shows the ineffectiveness of the concept of "equal opportunities", which claims that the free market itself, within democratic norms, can spontaneously promote the most talented representatives of lower social groups to the elite and "equalize" the social disproportions of capitalism.

Proponents of positive discrimination (Edelman Trust Barometer, 2020; Fullinwider, 2018; Stiglitz, 2012) argue that the principles of "equal opportunities", freedom of choice and equality of individual rights cannot be realised on their own, certainly without active state intervention aimed at creating an open social system with transparent social lifts and criteria for social advancement. Notwithstanding the priority of individual rights in a democratic society, their realisation is correlated with overcoming the historical consequences of racial, social and national discrimination.

The overcoming of previously explicit forms of social oppression in modern Western society does not abolish their lasting effects on members of previously oppressed social groups and inherently limits their opportunities for social advancement, which creates serious limitations for the "spontaneous" implementation of the "equal needs society" model.

The principles of social justice and freedom of choice cannot be effectively implemented under conditions of enormous social polarisation as a consequence of existing and pre-existing forms of oppression and discrimination. Many sources of discrimination lie in the historical past of developed countries and their consequences have a significant impact on contemporary social life, forming closed social groups and limiting the starting conditions of lower social and national groups, resulting in anomie, the destabilisation of society as a whole and a reduction of economic growth potential.

Different social groups have a huge starting gap in opportunities for social advancement. The "culture of poverty" (Corak, 2013; Small et al, 2010), handed down from generation to generation, unlive forms of social oppression, create a "glass ceiling" (Small et al, 2010) for the social advancement of lower social groups.

The equalisation of starting conditions as a result of positive discrimination is a condition for the realisation of an individual's rights, freedom of choice and the principle of "equal opportunities". Inequalities in cultural, social and financial capital, within which members of different social groups find themselves at birth, are shown to have a decisive impact on social advancement, significantly limiting the ability of lower social groups to exercise their rights already at birth (Corak, 2013).

Advocates of positive discrimination (Boddie, 2016; Fullinwider, 2018; Sigal, 2015) have identified the following significant effects of positive discrimination: decreasing levels of exclusion and increasing social integration, increasing levels of trust in political institutions and civic participation of lower social groups, and overcoming the effects of racial segregation in employment and education.

Positive discrimination models limit the opportunities of certain social groups by granting preferential rights to other social groups. At the same time, the equalisation of "starting opportunities" for social advancement of representatives of different social groups can have a significant impact on increasing the openness of the social system by developing human capital, civic participation and social inclusion.

The equalisation of starting conditions between representatives of lower and higher social groups helps to reduce social polarisation and the development of the social system and, consequently, to increase social

integration and social stability, and to accelerate economic growth. All social groups become "beneficiaries" of social development and economic growth, which to a certain extent eliminates the problem of restricting the rights of some social groups for the sake of expanding opportunities for social advancement of representatives of other social groups.

The problem of finding a balance between the policy of equalizing starting conditions for representatives of various social groups and the principle of equality of individual opportunities for social advancement, irrespective of social background, should be considered. Further research is needed to identify the correlation between the level of economic growth and the level of vertical social mobility and to determine how they can influence each other and what negative and positive effects this can have.

One area for further research could be the analysis of extra-economic factors stimulating economic growth, including the Soviet and Western experience of positive discrimination models, especially during the periods when Soviet and Western growth was at its peak.

CONCLUSIONS

High levels of social inequality exist in contemporary society, and public policies are needed to increase social integration, increase vertical social mobility, and reduce social polarisation.

The relevance of Western and Soviet models of positive discrimination is based on the global trend towards the persistence of high levels of social inequality in the contemporary world, which risks degrading democratic institutions and elites by transforming social groups into closed castes and reducing economic growth. This contradicts the principles of an open society, as it includes not only an open economy and political sphere but also an open social system.

The high level of vertical mobility is noted by researchers as one of the main conditions determining the level of social integration (Podberezkin and Zhukov, 2020). And here the experience of wide application of positive discrimination models aimed at increasing vertical social mobility may be in demand both in Russia and globally as a way to increase the contribution of lower social groups to social wealth and to accelerate social growth.

Despite significant differences between positive discrimination programmes in the USSR and the West, they have had a positive effect in terms of social integration, social stability and improvement of the quality of human capital, ensuring greater representation in education, science and the state apparatus of representatives of social, gender, national and racial groups at the lowest rungs of the social hierarchy.

The policy of stimulating vertical social mobility and expanding social promotion prospects for lower social groups can serve as a significant factor in increasing the quality of human capital, civic participation and the contribution of lower social groups to economic growth.

Openness of the social system by means of higher levels of vertical social mobility and social inclusion, serves as a mediating factor for social inclusion and economic growth, and consequently for improved wellbeing and enhanced life prospects of members of all social groups, not only target groups of positive discrimination.

The correlation of low economic growth, low levels of vertical social mobility and high levels of social polarisation makes further research into patterns of positive discrimination as a way of reducing social polarisation promising.

The level of attention of researchers and government institutions to the problem of positive discrimination as a factor of reducing social polarisation and as a mediating factor of economic growth acceleration cannot be considered sufficient.

Whereas contemporary Russian studies hardly consider the problem of positive discrimination in a positive way, foreign studies focus on analysis of the effects of strengthening vertical social mobility within the framework of social and ethical criteria that include reduction of social inequality, development of social inclusion and human potential. At the same time, analysis of enhancement of vertical social mobility through positive discrimination policies as a factor of accelerated economic growth and increased incomes has been overlooked by researchers and is not considered at present.

The limited application of positive discrimination models in Western countries, despite their positive effects, cannot reverse the global trend towards the concentration of power and wealth in the hands of 1% of the world's population and the transformation of the elite into a small and closed caste of the elite, who receive their status by inheritance. Greater state support for affirmative action programmes and their expansion into various spheres of public life are needed. The development of an integrative strategy aimed at the convergence of market and non-market models of stimulating vertical social mobility seems to be effective.

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