

The Specific Features Of A Systemic Approach To The Formation Of The National Mentality Of Karakalpak Youth

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Abstract: The national mentality of Karakalpak youth is a multilayered phenomenon formed at the intersection of historical memory of the Aral Sea civilization, Turkic–Khorezmian cultural codes, Islamic and Sufi spirituality, Soviet-era modernization and the present youth policy of independent Uzbekistan. Because these layers do not arise in isolation but operate as an interdependent whole, their study requires a systemic approach that reveals stable links between family, education, environment, language policy, cultural heritage institutions and state development programs. Relying on official documents on state youth policy of Uzbekistan, materials on Karakalpak cultural heritage, and analytical reports on the socio-ecological situation in the Aral Sea region, the article shows that today’s Karakalpak youth are socialized in conditions of ecological stress, multilingual communication and intercultural coexistence, which compels the state and society to form their national mentality not by sporadic cultural events but through a continuous, feedback-based system. The systemic approach is manifested in the integrity of goals (preservation of identity and preparation for modernization), in vertical and horizontal coordination between republican and local institutions, in the inclusion of ecological factors in value education, and in the pedagogical use of oral and artistic heritage. It is concluded that only such an integrated model can prevent the erosion of Karakalpak identity under the pressure of migration and digital globalization.

Keywords: Karakalpak youth; national mentality; systemic approach; Aral Sea region; youth policy; cultural heritage; spiritual values.

Introduction: Karakalpakstan, located in the north-west of Uzbekistan, has for centuries been a contact zone where steppe traditions, Khorezm agriculture, Amu Darya river culture and Islamic institutions met and produced a specific regional civilization. Modern descriptions of the republic underline its “unique and rich cultural heritage” that embraces archaeological monuments, epic folklore, musical and craft traditions and a distinct Karakalpak language. At the same time, the region has become the epicentre of one of the most dramatic ecological crises of the 20th century: the drying of the Aral Sea, salinization and desertification, which directly affected the living conditions, health and social mobility of the younger generation.

After Uzbekistan gained independence, youth was recognized as a strategic resource for national development. The Law of the Republic of Uzbekistan

“On the State Youth Policy” (1991, updated 2016, amended 2021) guaranteed young citizens political, socio-economic and cultural rights and explicitly prioritized the preservation of national and universal values. These provisions are fully valid for the Republic of Karakalpakstan and even acquire special importance here because of the need to protect and transmit a relatively small but historically deep national culture. Karakalpak youth therefore grows inside a dual framework: the all-Uzbek system of political, educational and digital modernization, and the Karakalpak cultural-linguistic environment with its own symbols, epics, heroes and memory of ecological losses. This duality predetermines the very content of the “national mentality” of Karakalpak youth: it is expected to be open, tolerant and forward-looking, yet firmly attached to its land, language and spiritual tradition.

Such a complex configuration cannot be sustained by fragmentary cultural measures. It requires what systems theory calls integrity of elements, hierarchy of management levels, feedback and adaptability. A systemic approach makes it possible to see how school curricula in Karakalpak and Uzbek, youth NGOs, religious-spiritual education, media content, ecological projects in Muynak or Kungrad and family socialization interact and either reinforce or weaken the national mentality. Without such an approach, identity remains declarative and is easily eroded by labour migration, urban anonymity and global digital culture.

The purpose of this article is to reveal the specific features of a systemic approach to forming the national mentality of Karakalpak youth under contemporary conditions. To achieve this purpose, the article first conceptualizes national mentality for a multiethnic, environmentally vulnerable region; second, it analyses the institutional and socio-cultural subsystems that influence youth; third, it shows how ecological, linguistic and spiritual components can be integrated into one educational and value-forming space.

The research is built on an interdisciplinary methodological basis that combines historical-cultural, sociological and pedagogical approaches. Historical and ethnocultural materials on Karakalpak ethnogenesis, including UNESCO and national publications describing the centuries-long formation of the Aral Sea culture, were used to identify the “long” constants of the mentality—collective solidarity around land and water, respect for elders, pride in epic oral creativity. Legislative sources, first of all the 2016 Law of the Republic of Uzbekistan on state youth policy and its later amendments, were analyzed to determine the normative field that frames youth socialization, participation and cultural development. Particular attention was paid to the principle, fixed in law, of the priority of cultural and moral values and to the possibility of implementing youth policy taking into account regional specificity.

Socio-economic and ecological analytical reports on Karakalpakstan, including UNDP and GIZ project documents on increasing the resilience of the local population in the Aral Sea region, were examined to understand how environmental stress enters the system of youth value education and why it requires an integrated response from state bodies, NGOs and educational institutions. Folklore and linguistic studies were used to trace the channels through which national mentality is transmitted in everyday communication—through toponyms, oral narratives, children’s folklore and ritual practices.

The analytical procedure followed the logic of systems

analysis. First, the subsystems that affect Karakalpak youth were identified: family and mahalla; general and higher education; cultural-museological sphere; religious-spiritual institutions; state youth organizations; media-digital environment; ecological and volunteer movements. Second, the links and feedback between these subsystems were reconstructed. Third, the conditions under which the system strengthens the national mentality or, on the contrary, weakens it were described. The method is qualitative and interpretative, but it relies on current official and research sources.

The central result of the study is the identification of integrity as the first specific feature of a systemic approach to forming the national mentality of Karakalpak youth. In the context of Karakalpakstan, integrity means that all channels of socialization must speak one language about what it means to be a young Karakalpak today. If the family insists on preserving the mother tongue, crafts and rituals, while school promotes only Uzbek-language and global content, and youth organizations concentrate solely on employment, the integrative core of mentality becomes fractured. A systemic approach requires semantic coherence: the same images of homeland, the same assessment of the Aral Sea tragedy, the same respect for local heroes such as the baksy-storytellers or cultural figures of Nukus must be present in family upbringing, textbooks, artistic events and media. The existence of unified portals and cultural resources on Karakalpak heritage already creates a foundation for such coherence.

The second specific feature is multilevel coordination. Karakalpakstan is part of the unitary state of Uzbekistan, but it is also an autonomous republic with its own parliament and ministries. The state youth policy formulated in Tashkent sets the overall goals—patriotism, legal culture, entrepreneurship, spiritual and moral development—but the actual content of these goals for Karakalpak youth is defined by local authorities and cultural institutions. A systemic approach presupposes stable vertical links: national programmes on youth employment and spiritual education must allow for modules on Karakalpak language, on the history of the Aral Sea, on traditional environmental management and on mixed ethnic neighbourhood. At the same time, horizontal coordination between schools, the Karakalpak branch of the Academy of Sciences, the arts university in Nukus, the Savitsky Museum and youth NGOs is necessary so that local initiatives do not remain isolated. Only in this case does the system produce cumulative impact instead of scattered actions.

The third feature is ecological inclusion. No description

of the contemporary mentality of Karakalpak youth can ignore the anthropogenic catastrophe of the Aral Sea. Environmental reports emphasize that the drying of the sea caused not only economic losses but also psychological and cultural trauma for the local population. Young people who grew up in Muynak or in the desertified zones of the Amu Darya delta perceive environmental protection not as an abstract global agenda but as a matter of preserving the symbolic centre of their people. Therefore, ecological education, volunteer tree-planting, promotion of green technologies and participation in international Aral Sea projects should be integrated into the very idea of national mentality. This is a good example of how an external factor (ecology) becomes an internal value through systemic inclusion. UNDP's project on strengthening the resilience of the local population in Karakalpakstan explicitly speaks of a "systematic approach" to mitigating environmental and socio-economic problems, and youth organizations can directly borrow this logic for value education.

The fourth feature is cultural-linguistic multiplexity. Karakalpaks traditionally interact with Uzbeks, Kazakhs and Turkmens; the republic is multilingual, and young people consume content in Karakalpak, Uzbek, Russian and increasingly English. Cultural studies note that music, decorative art and toponymy are carriers of ethnic memory and are used to "pass on identity to future generations." A systemic approach does not try to shield youth from this multilingual environment; instead, it structures it. In school and university curricula the Karakalpak language and literature should not be residual but core subjects that provide access to folklore and local history; Uzbek and Russian function as integration languages inside the country and the wider region; foreign languages open global horizons. When this hierarchy is clearly articulated and supported by media and youth NGOs, multilingualism ceases to threaten national mentality and becomes its resource.

The fifth feature is spiritual-moral continuity. Research on spirituality in Karakalpakstan shows the persistence of Sufi-influenced practices, veneration of saints and communal rituals, which are often combined with modern forms of religious education. For young people, participation in such practices gives not only religious experience but also a sense of belonging to a long chain of generations who lived in the same harsh natural conditions and preserved the same ethics of mutual help. A systemic approach here means that spiritual practices must be pedagogically supported: teachers of history and literature should explain their historical roots; youth organizations should invite local spiritual authorities to discussions on ecology or

entrepreneurship; media should present Islamic and pre-Islamic heritage not as incompatible but as successive stages of cultural development. The aim is to prevent the fragmentation of youth worldview into unrelated compartments—religion, ethnic culture, civic loyalty, ecological activism—and to show their inner coherence.

The sixth feature is feedback and adaptability. Karakalpak youth is a mobile and digitally connected group; many of its members study in other regions of Uzbekistan or abroad and are exposed to global cultural codes. If the system of forming national mentality remains rigid and does not react to their new needs and media habits, it will become irrelevant. Therefore, regular sociological monitoring of youth value orientations in Karakalpakstan, analysis of social networks, involvement of young bloggers and designers in producing culturally competent content are necessary elements of the system. Project documents on the Aral Sea region emphasize the importance of scaling up successful solutions and integrating local initiatives; such managerial flexibility should also be built into cultural and educational policy.

Finally, the systemic approach has a pronounced integrative-regional character. Karakalpak national mentality is not formed in isolation from the wider Uzbek and Central Asian space. On the contrary, the very history of the Karakalpaks is a history of interaction with neighbouring peoples and adaptation to changing political frameworks. This means that modern programmes for youth should simultaneously nurture pride in indigenous culture and readiness for interethnic cooperation. The systemic approach allows to harmonize these two tasks by embedding intercultural competence into teaching of local history and by presenting the Aral Sea not only as Karakalpak tragedy but also as a common challenge for all Central Asians.

The study has shown that the formation of the national mentality of Karakalpak youth can be effective only if it is carried out on a systemic basis. Such a basis presupposes, first, the semantic integrity of all socialization channels around the images, values and historical memory of the Karakalpak people; second, the multilevel coordination of national and republican institutions that allows adapting all-Uzbek youth policy to the specific linguistic, ecological and cultural conditions of Karakalpakstan; third, the inclusion of ecological experience, bilingual communication and spiritual heritage into value education; fourth, the creation of feedback mechanisms that make it possible to update educational and cultural content in accordance with the rapidly changing media environment of young people. In this configuration the

national mentality becomes not a static folklore stereotype but a dynamic, reflexive identity capable of integrating modernization, migration and global digital culture without losing its Karakalpak core. For policymakers this means that investment in youth in Karakalpakstan must not be limited to social protection or employment programmes, but must also support museums, archives, digitalization of folklore, ecological volunteering and bilingual teacher training. For researchers the presented model demonstrates how regional specificity and systems thinking can be productively combined in the analysis of youth in multiethnic and environmentally vulnerable regions.

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