

Mobility in the lifestyle of today's youth

VLADIMIR MENSHIKOV

Institute of Social Research of Daugavpils University, Latvia

E-mail: vladimirs.mensikovs@du.lv

The researchers of the Institute of Social Investigations at Daugavpils University (Latvia) carried out a project “Mobile Lifestyle of Today's Youth” based on a new paradigm of mobilities (John Urry). The aim of the investigation was a study of the characteristics of mobile lifestyle perceived by the youth of Daugavpils. The most significant factors that contribute to the realization of mobile lifestyle are defined, the disproportions in the youth's empowerment of its network capital are identified, the ways for the youth to optimize its mobility to increase competitiveness in the labour markets are outlined.

Key words: mobility, lifestyle, education, youth

INTRODUCTION

Lifestyle is a notion that reflects a particular typicality, dominant activity of individuals and social groups in different historical circumstances. There are widely used such characteristic features of behaviour and activity as demonstrative and hidden, urban and rural, ascetic and consumer like, healthy and pathological, etc. In this range of characteristics, such an increasingly more noticeable characteristic feature of modern lifestyle as mobility has been being used more frequently. By all means, a new understanding of mobility does not replace a measurement of the horizontal and vertical displacement of individuals and groups in social differentiation, which is so widely used in theory. The new approach contrasts mobility with inertia and closure of human life.

It goes without saying that lifestyle does not stand for “humdrum” of well-established life; it also denotes a phenomenon, which, under the influence of new thinking, consciousness and identity, is gaining strength in people's behaviour and activities.

As Anthony Giddens (1991) puts it: “A lifestyle can be defined as a more or less integrated set of practices which an individual embraces, not only because such practices fulfil utilitarian needs, but because they give material form to a particular narrative of self-identity... Lifestyles are routine practices, the routines incorporated into habits of dress, eating, modes of acting and favoured milieux for encountering others; but the routines followed are reflexively open to change in the light of the mobile nature of self-identity” (Giddens 1991: 81).

Acceleration, dynamics, movement, motion and other similar characteristics of a new society have formed the basis for an emergence of Sociology of Mobilities. John Urry is the first to thoroughly unfold and establish a systematic elaboration of what he calls “new mobilities paradigm” in his book “Mobilities” (Urry 2007). J. Urry introduces a new concept of mobility-systems by means of which he describes the organization of social life in terms of the magnitude of historical eras. It is fundamentally that many traditional issues of sociology are

reconsidered by J. Urry through the central idea of network capital: "...network capital points to the real and potential social relations that mobilities afford" (Urry 2007: 196).

The spread of new mobilities multiplies network capital. This, in its turn, strengthens network solidarity, enhances access to various activities, to mobile lifestyle. J. Urry states that "[n]etwork capital is the capacity to engender and sustain social relations with those people who are not necessarily proximate and which generates emotional, financial and practical benefit... Those social groups high in network capital enjoy significant advantages in making and remaking their social connections, the emotional, financial and practical benefits" (Urry 2007: 197).

Network capital is not an attribute of any individual; it is a product of interaction of individuals and possibilities of "the environment". New means of mobility and network capital enhance access to activity, to mobile lifestyle. Mobility envisages network, network solidarity; it is a specific lifestyle that has been given one more measure of freedom. "Life is 'handy' and that is most definitely a new configuration" (Urry 2007: 46) ('handy' is synonymous to 'mobile' as mobile phones are known as 'handies' in various European countries). But as a rule, everything that is new is contradictory. Along with new freedom, new advantages and benefits there appear new threats, new challenges. In our case, this is a possible increase of the dependence of man on systems of surveillance, separation from native "soil", cybercrime, extinction of emotional warmth in "mobile families", etc. All these require more attention from sociologists and other specialists in the field of humanities and social science; the attention should be paid to the mobilities, the new characteristics of the modern lifestyle, and, especially, to the youth that acquires the means of mobility faster than others.

In the beginning of 2014, the Institute of Social Investigations at Daugavpils University carried out a research project "Mobile Lifestyle of Today's Youth" (scientific project leader, prof. V. Menshikov). Through the paradigm of "mobility" the project entailed the characteristics of the mobile lifestyle understood by the youth of Daugavpils (Latvia). Respondents were young people aged 13–25 (total n = 355 people), including people aged 13–17 – 114, 18–21 – 107 and 22–25 – 134. Among the interviewed 44.5% (158 people) are young men and 55.5% (197) are young women.

The main objectives of the research are the following: identification of the most significant characteristics of a category "mobile lifestyle" perceived by youth; determination of the most important factors that contribute into the realisation of mobile lifestyle, detection of the correlation of increased mobility with material status of a family, the way a young man perceives his place in the social stratification of society, some other characteristics of the living conditions of youth and youth's value priorities.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The data of the sociological survey indicate a domination of two aspects ("to have Internet access at any time of the day" and "ability to communicate in several languages") found in the characterization of the concept of "mobile lifestyle", produced by the youth (see Table 1). The second aspect of mobile lifestyle is of special significance for young women: much more often they associate mobility with employment ("ability to work in different projects, project work").

According to the youth's estimations of the mobile lifestyle characteristics suggested by the researchers, the greatest importance is attached to such factors like computer, mobile phone and a good command of foreign languages (see Table 2).

The lifestyle of urban youth is marked by a high proportion of communication, hobbies, entertainment and games. Thus it excludes quality education from the three most important

Table 1. The most important aspects of mobile lifestyle in estimates of youth, in % from the total number of the interviewed, 3 answers out of the suggested 7 could be chosen

Mobile lifestyle is...	Total number	Including	
		young men	young women
... to have Internet access at any time of the day	45.1	47.1	43.1
... ability to communicate in several languages	41.7	35.0	47.2
... ability to work in different projects, project work	28.7	24.8	32.0
... preoccupation with travels, tourism, but not with group travels	27.9	28.0	27.9
... to be free from outdated traditions, dependencies	27.3	24.8	29.4
... disregard of the "attachments" to one's life in a specific place	22.8	22.3	22.8
... everything that we do not do on a daily basis	17.2	18.5	16.2

Source: the data of the sociological survey carried out by the Institute of Sociological Investigations at Daugavpils University, January 2014, n = 355 people.

Table 2. Factors of mobile lifestyle in estimates of youth, in % from the total number of the interviewed, 3 most important factors (in respondent's opinion) could be chosen

Factors of mobility	Total number	Including	
		young men	young women
Computer	53.0	58.0	48.2
A good command of foreign languages	49.0	40.1	56.3
Mobile phone	41.7	38.2	44.2
Good health	39.2	38.2	39.6
Quality education, not obligatory higher one	34.6	30.6	37.6
Car	27.3	36.3	19.8
Higher education	17.2	15.9	18.3
Flat (housing) in a big city	10.4	11.5	9.6

Source: the data of the sociological survey carried out by the Institute of Sociological Investigations at Daugavpils University, January 2014, n = 355 people.

factors of mobility.

The data of Table 3 once again demonstrate that such parts of the youth's lifestyle like communication (first of all in the Internet), hobbies, entertainments, games are saturated with mobility. Despite the fact that 70% of the respondents were pupils and students, less than half from their number (31.9%) consider themselves mobile in their studies, competency development.

Participation in the activities of religious organizations, church (21.1%, including 4.9% of the respondents who consider themselves mobile), entrepreneurship, one's own business (15.3% and 3.2%, respectively), political activity, work in non-governmental organizations (17.2% and 2.6%, respectively) are completely on the periphery of the youth's activities.

On the basis of the self-assessments made by the youth considering their mobility in some separate aspects of lifestyle, we singled out three levels of mobility: low (not more than 2 types of activity, where the respondents consider themselves mobile), middle (3–4), high (from 5 to 10 types of activity). It turned out that by the level of mobility our respondents were grouped in the following way: low – 57.8%, middle – 32.1%, and high – 10.1%. In the aspect of

Table 3. Distribution of the answers given by youth to the question "Living in a mobile world requires an individual to be mobile. Where are you mobile?", in % from the total number of the interviewed

Activities	Degree of mobility		
	I consider myself mobile here	I pay attention to this aspect of my life	This activity does not exist in my life now
Communication in the Internet	44.2	43.3	12.5
Communication – parties	42.8	40.2	17.0
Rest, hobbies, entertainment, games	42.5	46.4	11.1
Sport	33.3	45.1	21.6
Studies, competency development	31.9	39.9	28.2
Hired employment in enterprises, institutions	16.0	26.4	57.6
Activities in cultural field	10.7	41.0	48.3
Participation in the work of religious organizations, church	4.9	16.2	78.9
Entrepreneurship, one's own business	3.2	12.1	84.7
Political activity, work in non-governmental organizations (NGO)	2.6	14.6	82.8

Source: the data of the sociological survey carried out by the Institute of Sociological Investigations at Daugavpils University, January 2014, n = 355 people.

employment, the biggest proportion of the youth with a high level of mobility is found among the students (14.9%) and the private sector employees (14.1%). For comparison, among the pupils there were only 6.3% of people with a high level of mobility.

The calculation of the Pearson correlation coefficient between the mobility level of the youth's lifestyle and the majority of the used variables that characterize the socio-demographic and other characteristics of our respondents (gender, age, ethnicity, household income per person per month) did not display any significant relation. Moreover, no significant correlation between the mobility level of the lifestyle and all 12 life values, ranged according to their significance from 1 (more preferred) up to 12 (least preferred), was observed. Among the five most significant life values of our youth there are health (3.57), love (4.01), happy family life (5.04), education (5.89) and interesting work (6.15).

It is interesting to note that there was detected a significant though not very strong correlation ($r = 0.118^*$) of the level of lifestyle mobility and the youth made self-assessment of its position at a stratification scale, where 1 is the highest position, and 10 is the lowest one. By all means, one should not draw precipitous categorical conclusions from this fact. It is only possible to make an assumption that the high mobility of lifestyle is perceived as life success that subjectively increases the social status of a person not considering the material aspect of life.

Only 45.3% of all respondents consider that higher education is the most significant guarantor of mobility and, thus, of life success. About the same number of respondents (44.7%) is not sure that "higher education really ensures professional and social mobility of an individual", and 10.0% of respondents indicate that higher education hinders life success as "universities are unable to keep up with rapidly developing technologies, economic life and culture". As presented in Table 4, those, who consider themselves to be at the top of the scale of stratification (58.7% with a possibility of error when comparing average values of dependent

Table 4. Young people's attitude towards higher education. In % of respondents

Groups of respondents	n	Higher education		With higher education
		is the most significant guarantor of mobility and life success	belongs to the 3 most important factors of mobility	
Total	355	45.3	17.2	10.7
Including:		$p = 0.067 > 0.05$	$p = 0.56$	$p = 0.325$
Gender:				
males	158	39.5	15.9	8.9
females	197	49.2	18.3	12.2
Age:		$p = 0.955$	$p = 0.645$	$p = 0.000$
13–17 years	112	47.3	17.9	0
18–21 years	107	41.1	16.8	0.9
22–25 years	128	45.3	16.4	26.6
Occupation:				
schoolchildren	127	44.9	19.7	0
students	121	51.2	18.2	9.1
employed	98	34.7	10.2	27.5
unemployed	20	35.0	15.0	0
other groups	39	53.8	15.4	20.5
Household income per person per month:		$p = 0.031 < 0.05$	$p = 0.331$	$p = 0.000$
below 140 Euros	131	38.2	19.1	2.3
141–200	110	41.8	19.1	9.1
201–1120	104	54.8	12.5	24.0
Mobility level:		$p = 0.364$	$p = 0.230$	$p = 0.05$
low	205	44.4	18.0	2.3
average	114	42.1	13.2	9.1
high	36	55.6	12.5	22.2
Position at stratification scale (self-evaluations):		$p = 0.025$	$p = 0.572$	$p = 0.421$
top (1–4)	75	58.7	16.0	14.7
middle (5–6)	166	40.4	19.3	9.6
bottom (7–10)	140	42.7	14.5	9.1

Source: the data of the sociological survey carried out by the Institute of Sociological Investigations at Daugavpils University, January 2014, $n = 355$ people.

variables in one-way layout analysis of variance $p = 0.025$) and have household disposable income per household member per month more than 200 Euros (54.8% with $p = 0.031$), give the highest evaluation to the significance of the role of higher education as a guarantor of mobility. A group of young people with a high level of mobility (55.6%) highly evaluate the role of higher education; but, taking into account a relatively small number of this group (just 36 people), the variance analysis gives a result for the evaluation of the general significance of differences $p = 0.364 > 0.05$. Though, this does not reveal a significant difference among the levels of mobility displayed by the selected groups. Proceeding from the set of 8 factors of mobility, the group of a high level of mobility gives a high evaluation to higher education

(25%), but, once again, at a value of $p = 0.230$ it is not possible to assert the significance of the found differences among the selected groups. Only the proportion of those, who have higher education and are placed into the group with a high level of mobility (22.2% with 10.7% in average for all respondents), gives a value of $p = 0.05$; this significantly distinguishes young people with a high level of mobility by the indicator of already received higher education.

However, the proportion of those with higher education, who are placed into the group with the highest median household income, is even higher (24% with $p = 0.000$). It is noteworthy that 27.5% of the employed in government institutions, public or private enterprises have higher education. At the same time, among the respondents there is no any single unemployed, who would have higher education.

In our opinion, at present it is possible to state that young people reevaluate the role of higher education, considering it just as a certain status indicator and not taking into account its quality. Young people increasingly consider whether higher education can be converted relatively easily as a major part of human capital into economic, administrative and other types of aggregate human capital. This is testified both by a higher rank of "quality education, not obligatory higher one" among the factors of mobility (34.6%) and by undervalue of the role of higher education in the support of new requirements by employers for the mobility of their employees, to the quantity and quality of his network capital. So far, young people primarily associate the importance of higher education both with rapid technological changes in production (31.5%) and with globalization of the labour market (23.7%). The role of higher education is far less noticeably marked by young people dealing with employment problems; this is a result of rapid changes in the requirements for the mobility of employees – 19.7%, increase of the significance of quality in employee's communication with clients, colleagues, supervisors, etc. – 18.9%, necessity in the improvement of linguistic culture, foreign language knowledge – 13.5%.

Thereby, the data of the sociological investigation allow for stating that the youth of the city expands the access to mobile lifestyle. In the youth's opinion, the most significant factors of mobility include not only technical devices (computers, mobile phones, etc.) but also humanitarian and social technologies that allow to expand and strengthen solidarity and to accumulate network capital. Thus, 49% of the youth attributed a command of foreign languages to the factors of mobility, whereas 34.6% regarded quality education as such a factor.

CONCLUSIONS

However, it is obvious that in the youth's lifestyle there is a real domination of those aspects of mobility that are connected with communication, entertainment, games, rest. The aspects of mobile lifestyle that are becoming more significant for life success and competitiveness in the labour markets are not considered by the youth as being of vital importance. Our investigations show that under the modern conditions of establishing knowledge economy and services the competitiveness and the economical success of an employee are determined not only by human capital (professional-educational) but by cultural capital (broad outlook, high intelligence level, a command of foreign languages) as well (Menshikov, Volkova, Boronenko 2013). Yet, only half of our respondents pay some attention to their activity in cultural sphere, about 15–17% already have their own business, are involved into entrepreneurship, are politically active or work in non-governmental organizations (NGO).

In our opinion, there should be national, regional and local programmes to increase mobility of the youth; these programmes should become the most significant components

of modern youth policy. For the time being there exists only one well-known programme, Erasmus Mundus, meant for academic mobility of students and lecturers. However, the mobility of youth does not have only international aspect. The successive changes in production and social technologies cause both mass professional moving from one branch into another one and frequent change of specialities. Youth devotes much of its time to social networks, but what do we know about the influence of this factor on the political activity of youth? The problem of cybercrime (that to a great extent remains the one of youth) continues to be rather topical (Boronenko, Menshikov, Marzano 2013). It is difficult to disagree that mobile lifestyle as a result of multiplication of network capital requires more attention of both researchers in the field of social sciences and practitioners of formation and realization of modern youth policy.

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VLADIMIR MENSHIKOV

Mobilumas kaip šiuolaikinio jaunimo gyvenimo būdas

Santrauka

Daugpilio universiteto Socialinių tyrimų instituto mokslininkai (Latvija) atliko tyrimą „Šių dienų jaunimo mobilusis gyvenimo stilius“, kuris remiasi nauja mobilumo paradigma (John Urry).

Projekto tikslas – ištirti Daugpilio jaunimo mobilaus gyvenimo stiliaus charakteristikas. Analizuoti svarbiausi mobiliojo gyvenimo būdo realizavimo veiksniai, identifikuotos jaunimo įsitvirtinimo socialiniame tinkle (socialiniame kapitale) disproporcijos, įvertinti jaunimo mobilumo optimizavimo keliai keliant jo konkurencingumą darbo rinkoje.

Raktažodžiai: mobilumas, gyvenimo būdas, švietimas, jaunimas