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**LIFESTYLE OF MOSCOW DWELLERS: SYSTEM OF VALUES,  
BEHAVIOURAL PATTERNS, AND SOCIAL PRACTICES**

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***Abstract***

The relevance of the paper is attributed to the fact that higher standards of living are closely connected to prosperity at the state level, which does research of the way of life of the citizens important both theoretically and practically. The purpose of the paper is to identify contemporary trends in everyday life, the contradictions between consciousness and real behaviour of people, and between social promises made by the state and the real conditions of life. The main method of the research is a questionnaire survey of the population, which allows identifying reliable indicators that characterize the modern lifestyle of Moscow dwellers. The article presents major elements and factors which impact the tenor of life and living standards of Moscow dwellers, as well as their social well-being; it raises the issues of the citizens' trust in power institutions, of optimal distribution of social wealth, production resources and household incomes. The authors argue that the solution of many problems of Moscow dwellers, including the reduction of disparities in their income and property status and offering targeted social assistance, depends largely on the executive and municipal authorities. The materials of the article are of practical value for further studies of the way of life of the population of megacities, and for the bodies of state power in the city of Moscow.

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**Keywords:** Moscow dwellers, lifestyle, behavioural patterns, social wealth, production resources, household incomes.



## 1. Introduction

A lifestyle is a functioning mode of a society at the level of the individual and a hallmark of specific groups or communities; it emerges in the course of implementation and objectivation of ways and styles of living resulting in formation of a modal personality with a certain worldview. It incorporates the dominant models of activities of daily life and consolidating segments of the social space. The most general lifestyle features represent the life in a specific society, be it Soviet, Russian or American.

Certain cohesion of an individual's lifestyle is based on ego integrity, as well as on values, social attitudes and orientations which regulate behaviour of an individual, a group, or a community. Conservatism and innovativeness in formation and evolution of a lifestyle are dialectically interconnected. Evolving with the society, a lifestyle nevertheless remains relatively independent as it is a result of its own evolution and self-comprehension. It shapes the communication space, determines the window of opportunity, and regulates group interactions, forms of conflicts and cooperation.

A daily life of an individual is not always governed by authorities and institutions; it incorporates relatively autonomous spheres of life and creates a certain contingency of life worlds that ultimately determine social production and reproduction. Diversification of lifestyles and nascence of their new forms are conditioned by a number of factors. In one respect, a lifestyle is determined by the social context, channels of information and the functions it serves. At the same time, every individual re-invents their lifestyle. It does not simply follow from the living conditions; it may be chosen and construed. The order of daily life is a result of human activity. These assumptions emphasize the importance of orientation to person and pragmatic perspective as guiding principles for this study.

The lifestyle manifests itself in needs, interests, objectives, motives, attitudes, values, social images and expectations, preferences, personal meanings, habits, and deeds. Being a specific type of activity, it is characterised by its intensity measured by the extent of practical and emotional involvement of an individual in accumulation of high potential and its further implementation to achieve progress. Such activity may be both formative and destructive; it may serve only personal purposes or a combination of personal and public objectives.

The lifestyle can be characterised by practical involvement of an individual in a specific activity and their motivation, by the nature, content and conditions of such activity, by the level of satisfaction with different spheres of life and by proactive attitude and orientation to future.

In view of this, a theoretical model of analysis of a lifestyle in its dynamics can be defined as a system of notions, factors, and indices of involvement in the main spheres of life. Though the lifestyle offers somewhat limited opportunities for studying the daily life of Russians in dynamics, the authors find it an important tool to analyse the everyday behaviour and its forms.

## 2. Problem Statement

The category "lifestyle" stands for comprehensive assessment of the life of individuals, social groups, strata, classes, or society as a whole formed by religious, social, legal, political, ideological and cultural factors, as well as by the historical contingency, national character, external circumstances, and other factors (Voz'mitel, 1991).

The living standard is determined by real earnings, a subsistence level, life expectancy, a level of education, commodity bundle, calorie intake, housing conditions, consumption expenditure on durable goods and on services, an unemployment rate and so forth. In the broad sense, the quality of living refers to an access to material goods, safety, including environmental safety, an access to health services, education and talent development, satisfaction of spiritual and cultural requirements, social relations and so forth (Bestuzhev-Lada, 1983). A lifestyle reflects the individual behaviour influenced by various factors, such as religious, cultural, social, economic, political etc. (Tajfel H., 1978). A specific lifestyle determines a specific standard of living referred to as a set of rules, norms, habits which govern an individual's everyday life. It should be noted that the concept of "lifestyle" was studied in the framework of sociology (Bilig and Tajfel, 1973; Giddens, 1991; Tajfel, 1981; Turner, 1985), cultural (Adler, 1977; Mustafa, 2006), psychology (Erikson, 1996; Freud, 1921) and political (Guzzini, 2012) sciences.

### **3. Research Questions**

The main research questions of the paper were as follows:

- to obtain reliable indicators that characterize the modern lifestyle of Moscow dwellers;
- to reveal modern trends in everyday life, the contradictions between consciousness and real behaviour of people, between social promises of the state and the real conditions of life;
- to determine specific features of the daily practice of a single lifestyle for individuals, groups in modern social theories;
- to assess the dynamics of the value of work and changes in social and labour relations in Moscow, which characterizes the lifestyle of Moscow dwellers.

### **4. Purpose of the Study**

The relevance of the study follows from the general significance of studies of lifestyle of citizens in view of the fact that higher standards of living are interconnected with prosperity at the state level. The purpose of the paper is to identify contemporary trends in everyday life, the contradictions between consciousness and real behaviour of people, and between social promises of the state and the real conditions of life. A modern state can achieve sustainable development only if its economic policy aims at increasing the level and quality of life of its citizens and providing them with more opportunities to build future.

### **5. Research Methods**

The sample for studying the lifestyle of the population of the Moscow Metropolitan Area was collected using questionnaire survey methods.

The representativeness of the sample was achieved by applying random multistage sampling with gender, age and education quotas.

The total sample is 640 respondents. 55.4% of the participants had higher education, 30.4% – vocational education, 11.4% – general secondary education, and 2.8% - unfinished secondary education or lower. The survey participants included 16.9% were top managers, 19.1% middle managers, 14,1%

low-level managers, and 49.9% nonsupervisory employees. The questionnaire included more than 30 questions on various aspects of the lifestyle of the respondents.

## 6. Findings

### 6.1. Economy

The volatile and unpredictable economic situation is one of the main features of the present-day Russia. The general stagnation in the national economy may be aggravated by crises in regions.

At present day, economists cannot estimate accurately all consequences of the “war of sanctions” for Russia’s economy. Yet, even now, it can be predicted with great probability that the current situation will have adverse effects in the short and medium terms. Against this background, the citizens’ trust in power institutions increasingly depends on their standard and quality of living. In view of this, elaboration of a system of assessment of the national lifestyle and the quality of life gains high relevance. Such system needs a set of indices which would cover all objective and subjective aspects of these notions.

Therefore, the category of “lifestyle” allows researchers to study all major spheres of life, including labour, everyday life, public life and culture; to establish the causes for a certain behaviour (way of life) shaped by the scheme, level and quality of living, with reference to one another (Luhmann, 1998).

Answering the question “Which measures should be taken to achieve a fairer distribution of the national wealth for the common good?”, 33.8% of the Moscow respondents have stated that it is necessary to apply progressive taxation to withdraw money from the rich and allocate it to federal education, culture, and social aid to people who cannot provide for themselves; 30.2% of the survey participants have argued that it is necessary to re-nationalize high-yield enterprises in the fields of oil, gas, jewels and precious metals extraction, airline and railroad services etc., and 24.4% have stressed that the modern Russia need completely change its socio-economic system. 12% did not answer this question.

At the same time, the real poverty rate in Russia is far from the proclaimed Constitutional provisions. In our survey, the distribution of answers to the question “What should the state do for its citizens?” is as follows: 69.8% of Moscow dwellers consider that the state should provide fair wage, good education and healthcare to all citizens who want to exercise the corresponding rights; 19.6% believe that the state should provide its citizens only with the minimum social benefits; 8.3% argue that the state should provide only targeted assistance for the most underprivileged people and people in hardship; and 2.3% of the respondents have replied that citizens should solve all issues themselves at their cost.

The capacities to restore and to increase the human capital, to acquire goods and services, to spend free time, to increase comfort and to satisfy their needs in the spheres of education and healthcare are determined by the working population’s salary as a main source of income. Being asked about their material security, 36.5% of the participants have stated that they are well-off; 53.4% have reported their level of prosperity as satisfactory and 10.1% – as unsatisfactory. 22% of Moscow dwellers have good prospects for vacations; 54% – satisfactory, and 24% – unsatisfactory. 52.5% of the respondents have good opportunities to spend their free time; 39.1% – satisfactory, and 8.4% – unsatisfactory. 37.9% of Moscow dwellers have good opportunities to send their children (grandchildren) to a nursery or a

kindergarten; 49.2% – satisfactory, and 12.9% – unsatisfactory. 35.7% of the respondents have good opportunities to provide education for their children (grandchildren); 51.8% – satisfactory, and 12.5% – unsatisfactory.

The public consensus is that the following groups receive income overproportional to their work: owners of large businesses, heads of ministries and departments, top managers in large companies, producers, directors, movies and show business actors. The earnings of the following categories of specialists are disproportionately low: farmers and other agricultural workers, doctors, teachers, university lecturers, scientists, and workers of manufacturing enterprises. The fair wage is offered to owners of middle and small businesses, police prosecutors, criminal investigators, judges, engineers, skilled workers, heads of shops, section engineers, heads of services and their deputies, and the military.

The majority of the respondents agree that the highest incomes should exceed 20 individual incomes of an average Moscow dweller.

## **6.2. Social Well-Being.**

The level of social well-being among Moscow dwellers is largely connected with their financial situation and living conditions. Social well-being refers to the subjective perception of one's social status and satisfaction of one's needs and interests. Social well-being is also significantly influenced by social optimism. The question "What mood has been dominating your life recently?" has rendered the following answers: 53.6% of the respondents have assessed it as normal or smooth; 29.8% – as good and optimistic; 13.8% of the participants feel anxiety about the current situation; and 2.8% of Moscow dwellers feel angst, despair, and desperation.

Though such traits of the character as "sympathy and delicacy" and "honesty and integrity" were named as important to succeed in life, the most frequent reply was "to know the right people" and every third respondent named "education", "money", "hard and conscientious work", and "flexibility". Moscow dwellers believe that the majority of their acquaintances wish to receive as much as possible from the society while giving as little as they can back.

## **6.3. Social Content and Financial Standing.**

The first and one of the most important indices of community commitment and the population's attitude to future urban development is the individual and household financial standing. At present, poverty and income inequality can potentially result in social tension, social disintegration or disruption of intergenerational continuity. Statistics shows that 14.6% of Russians have low incomes (even with the low poverty threshold and the minimum subsistence budget in Russia). The consumption gap index, or "index of fairness", was 0.399 in 2016; the ratio of the average income of the richest 10% to the poorest 10% (R/P 10% ratio) reached 14.1, while the acceptable value is 8-9.

Financial standing is related to income, with salaries being its primary source, and expenditure. In relation to this, 20.6% of Moscow dwellers believe that they have a well-paid job; 45.1% are generally satisfied with their salary; 26.7% are generally unsatisfied, and 7.6% of the respondents feel underpaid.

Notwithstanding a relatively high salary level, the subjective assessment of the respondents from Moscow area shows that they are not fully satisfied with their financial standing. Only 6.1% of them have

reported absolute material welfare which allows them to buy anything that want, spend free time as they want and, generally, “live large”; 36.6% of the respondents are generally free to choose how to spend their income, but they cannot buy a house, a car or other expensive goods; 40.4% of Moscow dwellers cannot buy a new refrigerator or a TV set; 12.5% live pay check to pay check: they, can pay their bills and buy food; they are not at risk and their income is above the subsistence level, but they have to borrow or save to buy clothes; 4.4% of the respondents are at risk; they have to borrow money to buy the essential goods and are unable to save.

The analysis of the financial standing shows that the income level in Moscow testifies to a relatively high socio-economic satisfaction level of its dwellers and to their ability to maintain their standard of living. It is not without reason that over a half of the respondents believe that they will improve their financial standing under favourable conditions, and only about one third of them are either undecided or find it impossible. It is evident that the dominant sentiments are anxiety, despair, depression, frustration, and anger. There is evidence that such feelings lead to cardiovascular diseases and cancer; they may have important adverse effects on the society, destabilize the Russian society and impede its development.

#### **6.4. Labour Market.**

One of the most important aspects that influence the population’s lifestyle is a stable labour market, a satisfactory income and a property status (wages of the working population and retirement benefits; housing conditions), protection of the rights of working population, and comfortable living conditions. A gap between the reality and social expectations, significant disparities between professional and demographic groups lead to an increase in a social distance.

Our survey has shown that 63% of Moscow dwellers feel satisfaction with their job and salary as well as with opportunities for self-actualisation. At the same time, the survey reveals significant problems at work, for instance, the fact that a significant share of the respondents (37%) go to work emotionally uninvolved, tired, bored, feeling commonplaceness of their work and anticipating troubles and conflicts.

Though the majority of Moscow dwellers seek work-life balance, 4 in 10 had to take any hard or unattractive job to support themselves or their families in the past five years and 2 in 10 had to put their property, reputation or even life at stake to increase revenue.

6 out of 10 Moscow dwellers believe that they would waste their life if they focus only on working hard. Besides, only 13.7 % are ready to risk everything they have to make a fortune; they only feel dissatisfaction with their current standing.

Generally, Moscow dwellers want to have a good balance between life and work.

#### **6.5. Employment Rate.**

An important socio-economic aspect of the market economy is an employment rate defined as the extent to which available labour resources (people available to work) are being used. As statistics shows, at present Moscow has the lowest unemployment rate in the country (1.5%) while the average unemployment rate in Russia reaches almost 6%.

Answering the question “Which of the following statements is the closest to your idea of the right work-to-life balance?” 28.5% of the respondents argue that they need work hard and earn a lot to ensure high standard of living for themselves and their families and to be able to buy whatever they want even at the cost of leisure and free time; 63.8% believe that they should work moderately and earn enough to provide themselves and their families with everything necessary for living (live an average life) and relax at free time; 7.7% of Moscow dwellers find it necessary to work only to provide for the subsistence level and to have more free time for personal development, pleasures, and family.

Within the past years, real incomes and purchasing capacity of ordinary people have dropped significantly, while the large businesses and the establishment have had constant income growth (Bezrabotitsa v Rossii, 2017; Monitoring of the HSE, 2016). In this context, the question “Which measures should be taken to achieve a fairer distribution of national wealth for the common good?” has yielded the following answers: 24.4% of the respondents believe that the socio-economic and political systems require complete replacement; 30.2% find it necessary to re-nationalize high-yield enterprises in the fields of oil, gas, jewels and precious metals extraction, airline and railroad services etc.; 33.8% – to apply progressive taxation to withdraw money from the rich and allocate it to federal education, culture, and social aid to people who cannot provide for themselves; and 11.6% of Moscow dwellers think that no specific measures are necessary.

Answering the question “What will you do in case of further aggravation of the current situation and further decrease of your living standard?”, 12.9% of the respondents state that they will look for opportunities to emigrate; 14.2% will join rallies and protests to solve ordinary people’s problems; 50.5% will look for means to increase their (or family) income; 12.5% of the respondents are not ready to undertake anything, and 9.9% of Moscow dwellers are not worried about such prospects.

#### **6.6. System of Values.**

An important aspect of analysis of Moscow lifestyle is the subjective assessment of success and achievement of one’s values. The research has proved that the most easily achieved values are those which implementation depends on the individuals themselves, such as respect by others (29.4%) and seeking God and keeping the commandments (6.6%). Moscow dwellers pursuing enrichment also report to have achieved their goals: 39.2% earn enough and have an “adequate” standard of living and 15% have grown rich; it is also true for the respondents aimed at self-actualisation and interesting and creative work (10,2%).

33.4% of the respondents have admitted to be confident and optimistic about their future; 66.6% have close families and good children; 13.1% have succeeded in their professional life and have risen to power.

The authors have offered another value which was rather seldom chosen by the respondents, namely “absolute and unconstrained freedom of word and operation”. The share of the respondents who find it easily achieved is 5-7 times higher than that of participants who consider it important. Yet, this share does not exceed 9.5%.

The comparative analysis of the desired vs. the achieved shows that the majority of Moscow dwellers find such values and an interesting job, prosperity, successful career, confidence in the future and safety and ecological safety the least likely to be achieved (Yudina et. al., 2015).

Obviously, a value system is an important aspect of amelioration of the level and quality of living because values are the core of harmonious personal development. Another side of this aspect is leisure which should correspond to the socially important objectives (Castels, 1997).

The analysis has revealed no significant disparities between value hierarchy in the capital and the periphery. The respondents show unity in the core values, including “close family, good children”, “confidence in future and optimism”, and “interesting job to display skills and talents”. This set of values may be called “neoconservative”, or “Soviet”. Yet, the results of the analysis show that the markedness of these values is different in Moscow and in the periphery: they are more distinct beyond the capital: in Moscow, 4 out of 10 respondents named “close family, good children” their top value, while the similar ratio in other towns was 8 out of 10, or twice as high. Similar patterns can be traced for other values.

Instrumental values of our respondents are liberal and prove that skills and talents are important for success and prosperity in modern Russia: they have been named as such by 56.1% and 23.4%, correspondingly; 2.8% have called them unimportant and 17.7% – not very important. 76.7% of the respondents have mentioned the importance of education, while 23.3% of Moscow dwellers argue that it is not important.

The majority of the respondents have named the following values key to success and prosperity in modern Russia: “money” (34.1%) and “right connections” (44.2%), while honesty and integrity are the least important values in this list (21.7%).

These values are far from humanism and the ideals of innovative development of the Russian society and obviously result from the Russians’ adaptation to the quasi-market economy emerged after radical reformation.

The respondents believe that the current economic situation requires people to display not the best social qualities. Less than a half of the respondents think that the society demands professionalism, diligence, education and culture and only one in four adds to this list honesty, dignity and commitment. On the contrary, avarice, unscrupulousness, cruelty, impudence and egotism are in demand.

Although every individual is guided by their own motives, intentions and objective, the majority conduct similarly for certain reasons that has far-reaching consequences for the society. For instance, our survey shows that the majority of Moscow dwellers aim at doing their best at work (5.1% – “almost all” and 43.3% – “majority”), but have unhealthy lifestyle (12.8% – “almost all” and 38.8% – “majority”).

At the same time, the majority of Moscow dwellers believe that self-regard is very important at the present socio-economic situation (55.8%).

### **6.7. Social Policy.**

The municipal social policy may serve as an integral index of effectiveness of the top-down welfare enhancement. A significant number of the respondents were unable to characterise the social policy, chiefly because they are unaware of the authorities’ work. Among those who could articulate their



position, the assessment of the government work showed a negative tendency: social policy was positively assessed by 20.9% of the respondents, negatively – by 38.9% and 40.2% were undecided.

Among the most frequent obstacles to exercising their rights the respondents named negligence on the part of public officials (36.8%) and lack of information (42.3%). 20,9% of the respondents also named bureaucracy. Yet, the respondents could not always differentiate between bureaucracy and negligence on the part of public officials: at times, they consider excessively complicated bureaucratic processes as negligence. Nevertheless, in view of the inability to assess every case, the authors rely on the respondents' opinion.

Over a half of the respondents (69.2%) noted that the feature “people wish to receive as much as possible from the society while giving as little as they can back” is distinctive for regional communities.

This ambivalence of spontaneous actions by most people can be explained by individual choices of specific deeds in the present socio-economic and socio-political context. This context is not always consciously or intentionally created by power, mass media or civil society. It does not rely on social correctness and social attractiveness of such choices and the latter are made based on rational conclusions, traditions and emotions.

An important index of solidarity is the dominant strategy of dealing with everyday problems, which can be generalized as “self-reference” (Adler, 2011). The question “What can people like you do to improve your life and the life of others?” has rendered the following answers: 19.5% – people like me are unlikely to change their own lives to say nothing of others; 27.5% – to change the life for the better it is sufficient to work harder; 36.5% – we should assume personal responsibility for worthy life; 16.5% – we need new effective trade unions.

In this context, the common life space, similar conditions and social feeling are the factors which determine the abovementioned assertions and orientations.

## **7. Conclusion**

The notion of lifestyle incorporates all significant features of daily activities. The lifestyle may be referred to as a complex (a system) of essential features of individual, group or community activities under specific historically determined social conditions (Moscovici, 1984; Osipov and Moskvichev, 2008). This notion covers all aspects of social action.

Firstly, it refers to the material production of goods and specific historical work relations underlying the social life. Secondly, the lifestyle depends on the specific historical social relations dominating in the society. Thirdly, the lifestyle depends on subjective factors, including pre-school, secondary and higher education, professionalism of teachers, availability of libraries etc., which can significantly ameliorate life in a specific community. Fourthly, the lifestyle is shaped by the individuals in power who elaborate constitutional laws and regulations which are binding for all citizens of the state. Fifthly, an important element of amelioration of the life quality is development of value systems that ensure harmonious personal development, including provision of leisure activities which would correspond to social needs and objectives.

Our research has revealed that the major social problems in Moscow are hardships, threats and risks to normal life related to objective negative processes and extreme social and natural conditions:

unemployment, inflation, diseases, disablement and casualties. These problems are to be tackled by the executive state and public authorities at all levels. Both government and social institutions are to focus their activities on poverty reduction and decreasing income and property disparities because both poverty and significant disparities in incomes may lead to disunion of the Russian society. The specific measures offered by the respondents and experts include tailored social aid, changes in taxation, elaboration of career longevity programmes, and application of corporate employee benefits programmes to solve the mentioned problems.

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