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LIFE CHANCES OF CONTEMPORARY RUSSIAN YOUTH IN MEGACITY

Specialty: 5.4.4 Social structure, social institutions and processes

Abstract of the dissertation for the degree of Candidate of Sociological Sciences

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The relevance of the research. In the context of contemporary Russian societal development, the study of the life chances of modern youth is of particular significance. Life chances, understood as the ratio of opportunities to deprivations, serve as significant indicators comprehensively characterizing the social structure of society and allowing for an assessment of an individual's positive or negative privilege within a given socio-economic situation. A substantial gap in the volume of life chances among various representative groups of Russian youth can exacerbate social inequality, undermine individuals' belief in their own strengths and prospects, and adversely affect the functionality of social institutions designed to help youth feel like a significant part of society and stimulate their social activity. Moscow, as a megacity, creates a unique social environment where the abundance of institutional resources paradoxically combines with high structural barriers to their actual assimilation, especially for the younger generation. High competition in the labor market, critical inaccessibility of housing, and increasing spatial segregation, which entrenches the inequality of life chances depending on the district of residence and migration status, also affect the social demand for youth. Thus, the relevance of the research topic is determined by the following circumstances: first, the growing disparity in the volume of life chances among various groups of Russian youth in the megacity; second, the emerging dissonance between real and declared life chances; third, the need to activate the efforts of state and non-state structures in assisting with career choices and providing comprehensive support for the youth.

The scientific development of the problem is based on a theoretical foundation encompassing sociological, economic, and urbanistic approaches.

The scientific comprehension of social inequality began in the works of T. Hobbes, J. Locke, M. Weber, J. Ortega y Gasset, K. Marx, W. Sombart, and G. Simmel through the prism of rationalization and the development of monetary relations. The concept of "life chances" by M. Weber within his stratification theory is of fundamental importance, as it explores the social, political, economic, and cultural factors influencing an individual's position in the social hierarchy. This

concept was further developed by A. Giddens, D. Eitzen, M. Zinn, R. Breen, and P. Bourdieu, who identified the impact of new socio-economic trends on the transformation of the social structure. The works of the "sociology of life conditions" (P. de Vries, L. Costa, N. Long, A. Sen) are of particular interest, as they provide the theoretical and methodological framework for measuring the potential of individual or group impact on life conditions.

Significant contributions to the study of the megacity as a distinct complex subject of research were made by J. Gottmann and M. Foucault, and in the Russian context, by A.I. Maskayev, G.I. Chikarova, I.A. Vershinina, and A.P. Romanova. Various global and regional factors affecting city dwellers were studied by O.V. Rogach, L.A. Vasilenko, V.Y. Ledeneva, E.A. Nazarova, and L.A. Kononov.

The specifics of stratification of Russian society and social inequality were studied by M.K. Gorshkov, F.E. Sheregi, N.E. Tikhonova, A.V. Karavay, M.N. Rutkevich, V.P. Potapov, and E.I. Kuzmina. The analysis of life chances in the context of public well-being and deprivation was conducted by L.A. Gordon, A.T. Terekhov, E.V. Buzilova, N.M. Davydova, I.P. Popova, N.L. Antonova, and S.B. Abramova. The works of Y.A. Zubok, N.L. Rusinova, E.V. Chankova, T.A. Evstratova, and I.A. Gazieva identify the psychological, communicative, and economic resources of Russian youth.

The object of the research is youth as a socio-demographic group.

The subject of the research is life chances of youth aged 25-30 in Moscow as the largest megacity of the Russian Federation.

The aim is to identify and evaluate the specifics of youth life chances in the Moscow megacity.

The objectives are as follows:

- To reveal methodological research approaches to defining the essence of life chances as a ratio of life opportunities, deprivations, and risks;
- To consider and analyze the specifics of life chances of Moscow youth aged 25-30, taking into account local, regional, and global factors;
- To analyze the correlation between the objective life conditions of Moscow

youth and the indicators of subjective satisfaction with life opportunities and deprivations;

- To identify the relationship between desired and actual life chances of youth in the context of subjective perception, using Moscow as a case study.

The hypothesis of the research is the assumption that in Moscow, as a dynamic heterotopic system, there is a contradiction between the objective life opportunities and deprivations of youth aged 25-30 in five main life domains (work situation, financial status, educational opportunities, health status, leisure) and their subjective perception, which leads to the underutilization of available resources, demotivation, and the exacerbation of life risks for the youth.

The scientific novelty and results of the research are as follows.

– It is revealed that Moscow functions as a heterotopic megacity: despite the formal presence of all institutional resources, it contains multiple heterotopic sub-spaces (condominiums, ethnic enclaves, residential areas, business clusters), the mobile boundaries between which become a key factor in differentiating the life chances of youth.

– The concept of "youth life chances" in a megacity is operationalized as a variable set of opportunities and deprivations within several life domains, the volume and ratio of which often determine a person's position in the social hierarchy and reflect their ability to navigate the complex realities of multiple heterotopias. It is substantiated that in Moscow, life chances act as a dynamic trajectory, the successful completion of which requires the development of specific competencies of "heterotopic navigation" – the ability to master the mobile and often hidden boundaries between privileged and deprived sub-spaces of the city.

– The link between the objective life conditions of Moscow youth and the indicators of their subjective satisfaction is revealed. It is found that positive privilege in five main domains and a minimal number of negative privilege indicators generally have a favourable effect on satisfaction. It is shown that the indicators of the degree of subjective satisfaction in different life domains are in

a non-linear dependence due to specific compensatory mechanisms expressed in "domain asynchrony".

– The relationship between desired and actual life chances in the context of subjective perception is revealed. The paradox of low social mobility despite institutional opportunities is disclosed, allowing for the identification of hidden patterns of social exclusion. The author's position on overcoming this paradox is substantiated through the transition from the extensive provision of resources to the targeted development of conversion competencies, the formation of proactive life-building strategies, and the development of mentoring and psychological support mechanisms.

The theoretical and methodological basis of the dissertation research includes the theoretical provisions of domestic and foreign scholars studying the social structure of society based on the concept of life chances. The author relies on the following approaches: verstehende soziologie (M. Weber), phenomenology (A. Schütz), sociology of everyday life (M.K. Goshkov), social stratification (N.E. Tikhonova), and sociology of youth (Y.A. Zubok).

The empirical base of the dissertation consists of sociological survey (questionnaire), in-depth semi-structured interview, content analysis of scientific literature, secondary analysis of sociological data.

Studies conducted directly by the author:

Sociological survey (questionnaire) "Life chances of youth in a megacity (case study of Moscow)" (N=395), December 2024 – March 2025 (Index: ZHShMM-2025). Supervisor: E.A. Litvintseva, Doctor of Sociological Sciences. A target (quota) sample was used based on criteria: age (25-30), gender, permanent income, migration status, employment, residence in Moscow.

In-depth semi-structured interview "Subjective assessment of life chances of Moscow youth" (N=16), April 2025 – May 2025 (Index: SOZhShMM-2025). Supervisor: E.A. Litvintseva. The sample was formed based on the principle of maximum variation (gender, age subgroup, income, migration status).

Secondary data used: VTsIOM-Sputnik (2024, N=1600), FOMnibus (2024,

N=1500).

The main provisions of the dissertation research submitted for defense are as follows.

- It is established that the study of life chances of youth aged 25-30 in a megacity should be conducted through the prism of their objective and subjective status in five main life domains (work, finance, health, education, consumption/leisure). The presence of domain asynchrony is revealed as a non-linear dependence between the volume of resources and life quality satisfaction. Empirically proven that domain asynchrony is a measurable phenomenon: cluster analysis identified three empirical types of domain profiles (synchronously privileged, synchronously deprived, and asynchronous). (Passport of Specialty 5.4.4, Point 4).
- It is shown that the key factor of social differentiation is the ability of youth to engage in "heterotopic navigation". A four-component model of heterotopic navigation (spatial, network, digital, reflexive mobility) is substantiated, and a typology of adaptive strategies is empirically verified. A high level of navigation allows converting formal access into real practices even with modest resources. (Passport of Specialty 5.4.4, Point 7).
- A comprehensive portrait of the most and least satisfied young residents of Moscow aged 25-30 is outlined. Objective characteristics of well-being are defined. The criteria for selecting signs of privilege/deprivation are their functional role in forming subjective assessments. It is additionally established that gender, age, and origin play an important role in forming expectations regarding future social mobility; the most optimistic attitudes are characteristic of females, older age subgroups, and migrants. (Passport of Specialty 5.4.4, Point 2).
- It is substantiated that the mechanism of resource utilization in a heterotopic megacity has a structural-group character. Three types of conversion trajectories are identified: "hereditarily privileged conversion" (natives with high income/family support, leading to the "devaluation of privileges");

"compensatory-navigational conversion" (migrants/professionals actively developing navigation competencies); and "blocked conversion" (youth with low income/capital facing structural barriers and external locus of control). (Passport of Specialty 5.4.4, Point 2).

The theoretical and practical significance. Theoretical value lies in the analytical synergy of existing approaches, transitioning from static class models to dynamic, domain-oriented models. The concepts of "domain asynchrony" and "heterotopic navigation" are introduced into scientific circulation. Practical significance is realized through mechanisms of implementation in state youth policy. Recommendations include improving employment centers via individualized career navigation, developing preventive health programs (digital check-up services), and revising targeted support for young families. At the regional level, results can be used by the Department of Labor and Social Protection of Moscow, the Committee for Public Relations and Youth Policy, and the Moscow Government's Career Portal.

The approbation of the research results was carried out through presentations at methodological seminars of the Department of Organizational Design of Management Systems of the Institute of Public Administration and Civil Service of RANEPA, as well as at various conferences. The materials of the dissertation research were also probated in the following forms: 6 scientific articles with the main provisions and conclusions of the dissertation were published in peer-reviewed scientific journals, including four (with a total volume of 4.0 printed sheets) in leading journals recommended by the Higher Attestation Commission (VAK).

The VAK-listed publications include:

– Diyazhev A.V. Life chances of youth in uncertainty // Public service. – 2024. - No. 3 (149). - pp. 82-92.

– Diyazhev A.V. Specifics of life chances of youth in a Russian megacity // Perm University Herald. Philosophy. Psychology. Sociology. 2025. No. 2. pp. 274-285.

– Diyazhev A.V. The relationship between the objective life conditions

of young people in Moscow and indicators of their subjective satisfaction with life opportunities and experiences of deprivation // Theory and Practice of Social Development. 2025 No. 5 pp. 95–105.

– Diyazhev A.V. Domain asynchrony and heterotopic navigation in the context of life chances conversion of Moscow youth // Sociology. 2026. No. 10.

The structure of the dissertation consists of an introduction, two chapters comprising four sections, a conclusion, and appendices.