Student’s Territorial Mobility (Example of Yekaterinburg)

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Abstract. Territorial mobility today is one of the key issues in the system of distribution and redistribution of human resources in a particular state. In search of their place in the new digital society, young people are striving to live urban society, in which mechanisms of communication are being developed, and interactions with various social groups have been intensified. Dialogueness of the urban environment, sociocultural heterogeneity and intellectual spiritual life attract the younger generation, setting the coordinates of its territorial mobility, which becomes a marker of the economic, socio-cultural and educational potential of a given territory. The research methodology combined both qualitative and quantitative approaches. The primary data was collected using questionnaires and in-depth interviews. Two hundred respondents—bachelor students were questioned on the basis of quota sampling. Depths interviews with 8 experts were conducted in order to identify key issues of students’ territorial mobility. The research was conducted in Yekaterinburg, in the Urals, in Russia. The study has revealed that 42% of the students plan to make territorial displacement after receiving a bachelor's degree. At the same time 10.0% of the respondents would like to travel outside of Russia. The students believe that territorial mobility is associated with meeting a wide range of needs that cannot be fully met in an urban environment of Yekaterinburg. In addition, in the motivational structure of the students’ territorial mobility, the leading positions are occupied by the students’ desire for independence, as well as for idealization/iconization of the city image in which they plan to live. Our respondents note that St. Petersburg and Moscow are the most attractive cities for them. The constraining factor of students’ territorial mobility is the reproduction of social connections and relations in the current residence area. Students consider mobility as a type of risky behavior.

1. Introduction

Students’ territorial mobility is one of the most urgent issues. It is due to two key points. Firstly, in the context of globalization young people become a valuable resource for the production and reproduction of human capital in a certain territory (in a country, in a state). In this regard, an analysis of students' migration attitudes makes it possible to determine potential indicators of migration, to predict youth’s village/town exit and to determine strategies for improving the quality of life and attractiveness of living in a certain area. Thus, youth’s territorial mobility is associated with moving from villages and small towns to megalopolises. The directions of migration flows depend on the conditions created by the urban environment for satisfaction of young people’s needs and their successful vertical mobility.

Megalopolises are a super-integrated economic, social and political system in which resources and opportunities are concentrated. M. Castells believes that the megalopolises have powerful streams of information, people, goods, signs, samples and symbols [1]. It forms a new urban form an “informational city”. This “stream” creates not only a complicated and heterogeneous structure of the megalopolises’ environment, but it also intensifies territorial mobility, “pushing” out city-folks and “involving” new ones.

The student community is a dynamic social group, a subject of social activity and innovative transformations. In the process of making a decision on a change of scenery, she/he is guided by such characteristics of megalopolises as the dialogical character of a city, socio-cultural diversity,
intellectual life, communicative intensity and interaction with various social groups. In addition, the student community is the provider of the intellectual elite which replenish the creative class (Florida) [2] and create new opportunities for the development of the urban environment.

2. Theoretical Frame

The well-known sociologist P. Sorokin examined the issue of territorial mobility: horizontal mobility which is associated with spatial flows that fulfill the function of circulating multidirectional flows of population movement with different social statuses belonging to different social groups [3]. In the conditions of liquid modernity [4], practically there is a lack of territorial bounds for individuals and groups, and mobility becomes operational one.

Today one of the key issues is the question dealing with the relationship between territorial mobility and territorial identity. There is the following contradiction: highly mobile people have a weak sense of territorial identity, and residents with a strong sense of territorial identity are less likely to change their place of residence. Meanwhile, a number of studies (for example, P. Gustafson' research), show that mobility can strengthen territorial identity [5]. The experience of living in different cities makes it possible to assess the current place of residence and to establish a person’s own territorial identity.

Questions dealing with the multidimensionality of territorial identity and cosmopolitanism [6], as well as a new understanding of territorial boundaries [7] become a stimulus for the development of the idea of promoting people's capabilities: the territory becomes attractive for persons’ mobility. It indicates that due to changes in the social, political, and cultural order in modern societies, mobility is taking on new forms [8], often initiated by students and young people. Hence, S. Santos examines socio-territorial heterogeneity with the help of student’s mobility models and the researcher has shown how space and society interact in the production of mobility [9].

The production of mobility is associated with human resources, including the mobility of “knowledge workers” [10], whose strata is reproduced at the expense of graduate students. The knowledge workers’ mobility as the future economic resource of the region and the country is updated in the post-Soviet space and in the countries of the European Union. According to L. Wilken, youth’s mobility is associated with dreams of creating better living conditions for themselves [11]. In this context, attractive and problem regions and countries can be determined. For example, in Russia there is an outflow of young people from the northern regions to the central zone, as well as to large cities (Moscow, St. Petersburg).

The outflow of youth’s groups is associated with the low attractiveness of the territory for the implementation of their life plans. However, F. Giambona notes that it is necessary to take into consideration the high uncertainty of territorial attractiveness [12], which requires a comparison of socio-economic and other characteristics of the regions. The researcher emphasizes on the study of individual factors identified as the backbone for the sustainable attractiveness of the city (public transport system [13], the presence of “green zones” [14], etc.).

The youth’ mobility becomes a factor in the reproduction of social inequality. Thus, mobility (J. Blanco) can be considered as an intermediary that young people use in gaining access to goods, services and opportunities in order to avoid poverty and social exclusion [15]. Uneven appropriation and use of city resources reinforces the process of revising the boundaries of the core and the periphery. A. Moldovan considers territorial mobility as the main mechanism of this processes that shows, on the one hand, how increasing imbalances between cores and periphery affect mobility flows, offering different levels of structural advantages, and on the other hand, how different social groups can influence these advantages, choosing a place to study, to live and to work [16].

3. Materials and Methods

The research methodology combined both qualitative and quantitative approaches. The primary data was collected using questionnaires and in-depth interviews. Two hundred respondents—third year and fourth year bachelor students were questioned on the basis of quota sampling (n=200). The
author's questionnaire included 12 questions, including 10 closed questions with a choice of one or several answers, and 2 open questions, where respondents freely expressed their opinions and associations. The study involved students aged 18–25 years (71 men and 129 women) training in different specialties: 40% of the respondents were students of technical and natural science specialties, 36% of the respondents were students training in humanitarian specialties, and 24% of the respondents were students of socio-economic specialties. The obtained data was processed using the SPSS statistical analysis package (version 20).

Depths interviews with 8 experts were conducted in order to identify key issues of students’ territorial mobility. The research was conducted in Yekaterinburg, in the Urals, in Russia. The guide included 14 questions. The informants were 4 women and 4 men at the age of 19-21. In processing the interview data, the method of thematic networks was used, which allowed us to identify the main topics contained in the interview texts and to arrange them into groups.

4. Results and Discussion

The study has revealed that 42% of the students are ready to implement territorial mobility. Their plans include two potential directions of movement: a part of the students is ready to go to another Russian city and the other respondents would like to go to a city outside of Russia. Our research has determined students’ academic mobility: 11% of the respondents intend to consider the possibility of obtaining a master’s degree at the universities located in other cities or abroad.

The survey has fixed the motivational structure of territorial mobility. First of all, the implementation of territorial mobility for students is connected with their possibilities of realizing the need for personal autonomy and independence. Moving is considered as a way to put their selves in conditions of absolute responsibility for choosing their path of life thanks to territorial / physical distance from the parental family: “I want to change something, to change the situation, to find out how people live in another city, to become a little more independent. After all, here I am not be completely independent, complete independence will be there” (woman, 20 years old).

Another motive for territorial mobility is the prevailing image of a particular city in the students’ consciousness. At the same time, this image is formed both due to their own experience (visiting the city), and due to collective ideas drawn from the mass media and due to the communications with friends / acquaintances. “I want to live in Petersburg, because I have had a dream since grade 5—when I went there for the first time” (woman, 19 years old). Moscow and St. Petersburg are the desired Russian cities for territorial mobility. These megalopolises are rated high by the respondents – “this is history and architecture, and think so for so many years” (woman, 19 years old). The assessment of their educational space is also important in such a high attractiveness of St. Petersburg and Moscow: the notion that the capital’s universities have a higher quality of education, give more opportunities for international internships, and they have a better faculty is dominant. Respondents do not deny that the city of Yekaterinburg is a high-resource territory; however, in order to achieve their goals, students will have to expend considerable efforts by using various resources (parents / relatives / friends / acquaintances).

This motive is also the main one when a student decides to move outside of Russia. Hence, it is necessary to become “first of all, a successful person who has achieved something in my life.” (man, 20 years old). Obviously, this group of young people believes that capitalism does not fully ensure the “work” of social mobility lifts in Russia that are characteristic of Western capitalist systems. In addition, some students are not content to accept poor workmanship of legal institutions, which functioning is better in Germany and in the USA.

The study of factors constraining the students’ territorial mobility occupies a special place in our analysis. First of all, our respondents identified the factor of reproduction of existing social connections and relations as a source of «attachment» to a specific territory. “It seems to me that the most important thing is social ties that I don’t want to break. Therefore, all people want to live where their loved ones are” (woman, 19 years old). Social ties are social capital, which increases the chances for further successful promotion. They, including the social capital of the parental family, are becoming a students’ resource, and increase the starting opportunities in the “native” megalopolis.
Another key factor can be considered as a barrier to moving to another city is uncertainty, and, as a result, the risks associated with relocation. Territorial mobility is assessed by respondents as a type of risk behavior. “I would like to live abroad somewhere, but it’s still very hard. ...maybe I am not such a risky person, I cannot decide to leave Yekaterinburg” (woman, 21 years old).

Understanding the difficulty of adapting to the new urban environment by the respondents can be considered as a barrier of their decision to move. Students note the risks associated with the lack of employment opportunities, the opportunity of housing, as well as the difficulties of integration into new social groups.

Analyzing the city of Yekaterinburg, 84% of the respondents note that the city is an attractive area for living. Among the competitive advantages of the city, students single out the following features.

Firstly, the historicity of the city is the presence of historical buildings, monuments of architecture and historical sites. At the same time, the respondents interpret the very concept of “history” quite widely both as that a classic history of the founding and development of the city, and as a modern history associated with particular aspects of city life (the history of the Ural rock culture, the birthplace of the first president of Russia BN Yeltsin and others).

Secondly, the city significance in the life of the country is traditionally perceived both as that of an industrial capital (pivotal region) and as a cultural and intellectual center. The Yeltsin Center is of particular significance which has become the “debatable symbol” of the city, a monument to the ambiguous era of B.N. Yeltsin and an innovative cultural center of public life in the city.

Thirdly, the development of the city, its “advanced” in many areas – is the saturation of cultural events and opportunities for self-development of young people (workshops, webinars, sports facilities, etc.) and the development of trade infrastructure.

Fourthly, the architectonical environment of the city is determined by its historical center, modern buildings and structures, landscape gardening ensembles, as well as the natural landscape, the beauty of the surrounding places, preserved natural reserves and recreation areas of citizens.

5. Conclusion

Our research has elucidated that students’ potential territorial mobility will be determined by their ideas about the resources of the territory and the possibilities of the urban environment to become a platform, and even a «partner» in the implementation of their life plans. Our research has revealed that megalopolis should consider as a balance of human capital and production of the city capacity.

The survey has determined that the city, attractive for the individuals’ life, is the point of attraction, including those groups that have special knowledge that is in demand in modern post-industrial society. Accordingly, it becomes especially important to realize their needs and demands. Student’s youth is a potential “driver” of the urban environment development and the mobilization of significant resources in the future. Hence, in order to increase the attractiveness of the city, ecological, economic, socio-cultural sustainability and the dynamics of its development should become a strategic policy in the field of planning and designing urban space.

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References


