

Mobile Lifestyle of Latvian and Belarusian Youth in the Aspect of Employment

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Mobile lifestyle is a comparatively little studied phenomenon, although the development of information and communication technologies significantly changes almost all manifestations of our life. Mobility, network capital, social and humanitarian technologies are becoming substantial conditions for successful employment. The purpose of the article is to analyse the results of the sociological project where youth of Latvia and Belarus became the object of research, in order to determine problems of mobile lifestyle in the aspect of employment through general and special perception of young people of two countries with differing economic systems.

Keywords: mobility, network capital, youth, employment

INTRODUCTION

Technological progress is making ever deeper changes in various spheres of society. The leading role in the formation of e-economy is played by information and communication technologies, changing our understanding of labour market quality and its flexibilization. The concept of “mobility” is increasingly used to characterize innovation and novelty both in the world of technology and in the system of social relations.

The results displayed in the Figure confirm a high interest of scientists to the topic of “mobility”. Especially promptly publications on the topic of “mobility” were indexed in the Scopus database in the late 90’s and the beginning of the 21st century. The number of publications in 2015 as compared to 1990 increased by more than five times and reached about 26,000. Most publications refer to the natural sciences and engineering, and 7.5% of their aggregate number is represented by the social sciences.

There are increasingly more scientific articles where representatives of various scientific disciplines use the concept of “mobility”. Thus, mobile communication and data transmission technologies are actively developing in the world of modern information technologies. The development of data transmission technologies leads to restructuring of the entire information

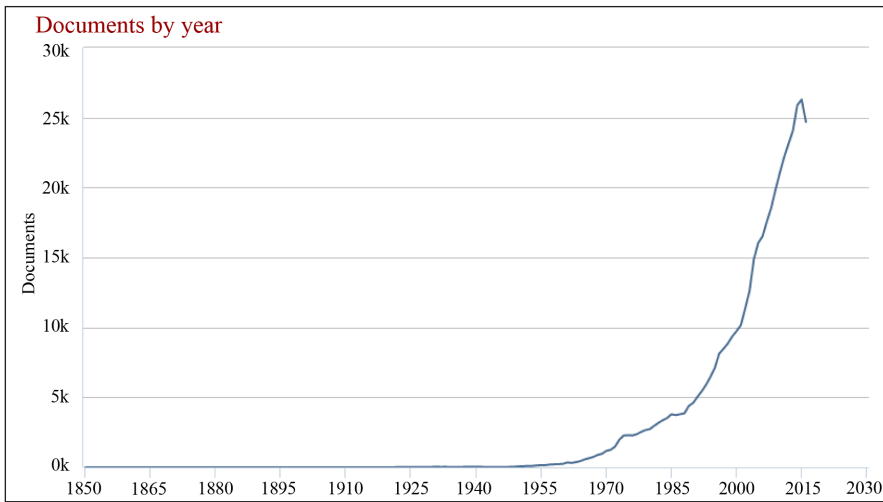


Figure. The number of documents by year, which contain the word “mobility” in the title, abstract or keywords, in the Scopus abstract and citation database from 1850 to 2017

industry, changing of the lifestyle of people, allowing us to be more mobile. Combination of these technologies provides a mobile access to Internet resources, which, ultimately, will change the world. Various mobile data services based on mobile Internet technology provide subscribers with a wide range of online services:

- Operations with securities;
- Purchase of goods;
- Bank operations;
- Payments on various types of accounts;
- Orientation and search facilities in a specific territory and much more.

The main advantage of the Internet for employees is freedom of movement with access to the necessary information. Among the main advantages of the Internet for working people are work with corporate and personal e-mail, work with documents of different formats, access to corporate networks and use of special corporate applications.

With innovative features of remote cooperation, new types of business and economic activities are developing. Researchers in the field of employment distinguished previously non-existent professional groups in the conditions of a mobile network society (Vankevich 2014, Saveleyeva 2011). Communities and associations, connected by same interests, create social networks in the Internet environment. The development of network structure and technologies allows individuals to work in any company of the world without leaving their house. An excellent example of such cooperation is freelance. Specialists of different professions, who are able to carry out their work in an electronic format or deliver it to another country, organize special online communities and use professional associations or websites to do work in digital environment. One of the most popular communities is the Upwork service (former oDeck) and their statistics show that in early 2015 9.7 million freelancers and 3.8 million companies offering work were registered on the web service (Upwork 2015). In 2013, the Freelancers Union estimated that 1 in 3 workers in the United States were self-employed (approximately 42 million), with more than

four million (43%) of those self-employed workers, members of the creative class, a stratum of work specifically associated with freelance industries, such as knowledge workers, technologists, professional writers, artists, entertainers, and media workers (Florida 2013).

The labour exchange (freelance exchange) is gaining popularity in virtual space. Thus, the FreeWork Exchange accepts orders of the following nature: drafting and verifying of contracts, reprinting commodity checks, typing a document, etc. At the time of our visit to the exchange's website, there were over 250 new orders (FreeWork).

Another example is an outsourcing or, in other words, the possibility to transmit certain enterprise processes and functions to another organization. Outsourcing activity has become possible due to the development of technologies and social capital accumulation. Despite the fact that income from a final product belongs to a customer country, taxable administrative and personnel costs as well as a performer company's profit bring a significant revenue to national economy. In fact, this is an absolutely logical and natural process of the world resources redistribution (in this case labour resources) only in the electronic environment and using distant cooperation opportunities. In this situation, real labour emigration does not occur and does not bring any significant changes to the global demography.

One more important example of a platform for networking is the professional social network Linked In, which allows finding the necessary business contacts on the Internet. If in the case of social networks like Facebook and Instagram the main target is an informal, friendly chat and other social purposes, then professional networks contribute to economic development, creating new possibilities for business cooperation. Besides, it offers a very interesting concept of contact search that allows you to find not only representatives of certain professions and businesses, but also people with certain interests, hobbies, skills and so on. Thus, the formation of contacts becomes easier and faster, and that contributes to overall economic development through the accumulation of network capital.

Surprising is also the speed of social web networks development mentioned earlier – if in early 2009 the number of monthly active Facebook users worldwide was 197 millions, then at the beginning of 2016 this figure rose to 1 654 million (8 times). In turn, the number of LinkedIn members at the beginning of 2009 amounted to 37 million and in early 2016 this figure has increased by almost 12 times (433 million users) (Statista 2017). These findings very vividly illustrate the growing popularity of social networks in the digital space, allowing users to find contacts and communicate with other users outside their geographic and social proximity.

The formation of e-employment has a strong impact on national labour markets with mixed consequences (Taljunaite 2010; Vankevich 2014). The openness of national labour markets is growing, labour quality requirements are increasing, employment guarantees are decreasing, the functioning of many jobs is tied to dematerialized financial capital, which forms additional risks of unemployment. This forms a sense of instability, insecurity and mental discomfort. On the other hand, the development of e-economy and e-employment generates new social and labour relations both in the business field and in the field of individual labour. Despite the growing information pressure on a person, these new relationships help to solve the main problem technologically and psychologically: increasing effectiveness of any activities based on synergetic effects when using the network capital.

THEORETICAL BASES AND EXPERIENCE OF EMPIRICAL RESEARCHES OF THE PROBLEM

The analysis of scientific literature shows that researchers in their theories and concepts cannot get along without the concept of "network". First of all, economists and sociologists have inte-

grated this concept when explaining the phenomenon of social capital. "Thereby social capital may be defined as benefit carrying resources that are associated with belonging to a group: the network of links that cannot be used otherwise than through the groups or people who have a certain power and who are able to provide a "favour for a favour"" (Mensikovs 2013) Social capital, with emphasis on the role of modern technology and new types of remote communication, gradually extends to the socio-economic analysis focus. All types of aggregate capital of an individual can be seen as a network of different energies that can quickly change its configuration and significance of its individual components. Realized life strategy is always the result of hybrid energy, connection and conversion of various types of the aggregate capital.

Sociologists are increasingly using the theory of capital, to which Pierre Bourdieu contributed greatly (Bourdieu 1986). Thus, the sociological concepts like "capital", "field" and "habitus" help to creatively comprehend the most complicated problems of adolescence touched by motor disability and teenagers' habitus formation (Matulionis, Subačiūtė 2016). Based on his theory and methodology, we found it possible to integrate various types of the human capital in the concept of "aggregate capital", and more widely use it in empirical studies of various social problems. For the first time this approach was proposed at an international conference in Nalecheva (Poland) in 2008: "We must try to empirically determine the role of aggregate capital of an individual or a group, correlation and significance of its separate forms" (Menshikov 2008).

An even more essential concept of "network" was proposed by John Urry in his monograph "Mobilities", who explains the emergence of sociology of mobilities through the role of different networks in the modern society – through "network capital", which is actually an integral part of the social capital. For Urry "network capital – is the ability to generate and maintain social relationships with people who are not necessarily located in the same geographical neighbourhood, getting from this relationship emotional, financial or practical benefits (although often these benefits are enclosed in different objects and technologies or different means of media networking)" (Urry 2007). When Urry reveals the content of eight elements of network capital, he presents the role of different technological advances in its development and growth, and particularly the role of information and communication technologies. Summarizing the description of allocated elements of network capital, he accentuates the link between network and mobility: "So, I have presented this rising form of capital, network capital, arising as a result of the spread of new mobility." (Urry 2007)

The German theorist of media and communications Norbert Bolz writes about the role of network in connections with creating the added value: "Network is a system of competition, where nodes are fighting for links; the more links node can attract, that is, the more links to the node is given, the more viable it is. For the economy, linking is important as social added value: consumer choices are developing into links, which form a network. The most successful products of the 21st century are no longer determined by their material value, but by their "linking value". In other words, value of a product is expressed by the amount of links in which it became involved by buyers. Therefore, the social added value of goods is at the centre of a new marketing strategy and many people speculate that now it is better to say not "marketing", but "societing". Thus, the motto of the internet economy says: connection is more important than the thing, which it connects." (Bolz 2007) The aggregate capital theory states that any kind of the aggregate capital in varying degrees can be converted to the economic capital. Therefore, it can be said that the social added value converts into the economic added value.

This requires an increased attention of specialists in the fields of human and social sciences to the mobility in the modern lifestyle, especially youth's lifestyle, who acquire the means of

mobility faster than others do. However, it is also known that: “Methods of perception among young people are scattered, multidimensional, mosaic, focused on the principle of pleasure and are caused by a time deficit. Attention is a scarce resource” (Bolz 2007). It is important to know how young people use an expanding set of mobility tools in the economic sphere, solving the problems of employment.

In 2012, the Institute of Social Studies of Daugavpils University implemented the research project “Aggregate Capital, Its Structure and Relationship to Labour Migration”, which widely used the aggregate capital theory (Menshikov, Vanags, Volkova 2013). The volume and structure of the aggregate capital of Latgale’s residents were established during the study, taking into account the needs of socio-economic development, as well as expectations of people in the region, related to labour migration. The analysis of the results allowed to draw important conclusions about the role of certain types of the aggregate capital in employment and economic well-being. The main hypothesis of the research was confirmed – in the present conditions of “knowledge society” formation and a high share of service industries in the gross product, the basis of human capital growth, as a rule, is the cultural capital of a family, which directly determines the economic welfare of a family and an individual. The next important form of capital is the social capital and its increasingly more prominent basic component in the conditions of new mobility – network capital.

In 2014, the Institute of Social Studies of Daugavpils University carried out the research project “Mobile Lifestyle of Modern Youth” (Menshikov 2014). The findings of the sociological survey in Daugavpils ($n = 355$) suggest that the access to mobile lifestyle is expanding in the conditions of e-society. 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. The most important factors in favour of mobility are not only hardware and equipment (computers, mobile phones, etc.), but the humanitarian and social technologies that allow to expand and enhance a network of solidarity, to accumulate the network capital. Unfortunately, the high specific weight of communication, hobbies, entertainment and games excludes quality education from the set of the three most important factors of mobility.

The accomplished research projects have shown the importance of the aggregate capital theory, have brought important results in the analysis of various problems of the e-society formation. They showed that there is a growing role of non-economic types of aggregate capital in the implementation of people’s life strategy. An important conclusion was made: the role of network capital and cultural capital is growing dramatically.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In early 2016, researchers of Daugavpils University (Latvia) and Vitebsk State Technological University (grant of Belarusian Republican Foundation for Fundamental Research) carried out the research project “Prevention Youth Unemployment of Latvia and Belarus Border Territories in Conditions of Emerging from the Crisis”, in which the characteristics of mobile lifestyle in perception of youth were studied. Respondents were young people aged 15–29 years ($n = 414$ people), including: Latvia (Latgale region) –107 people, and 307 people in Belarus (Vitebsk region). Among the respondents 51.1% (218 people) were men and 48.9% (196 people) were women. Respondents’ distribution by the level of education is the following: higher education – 15%, secondary special – 22%, other education levels – 63%. 75% respondents from Latvia and 43% from Belarus had the student status (all levels of education). 37% of the respon-

dents in Latvia and 48% in Belarus had jobs that generated income. 16% respondents in Latvia and 6% in Belarus temporarily did not have a job and were looking for job opportunities.

Among the main objectives of the study there was identification of the most significant characteristics of “mobile lifestyle” in the perception of youth of the two countries with differing economic systems (liberal in Latvia, transitional with a high share of state regulation in Belarus). The study objectives included identification of the most important factors contributing to the implementation of mobile lifestyle, establishment of self-assessment in various mobility activities (especially economic), examination of distance work experience, including work in online space.

On the basis of youth mobility self-assessments, we identified three levels of mobility: low (no more than 2 types of activities where respondents consider themselves mobile), medium (from 3 to 4 activities), high (from 5 to 10 activities). Only 7% of respondents in Latvia and Belarus showed a high level of mobility. There is practically no difference in the data between two countries on the proportion of young people with an average level of mobility (Latvia – 28%, Belarus – 25%) and a low level of mobility (Latvia – 65%, Belarus – 68%) (Table 1).

Table 1. 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 | Country | 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 |
| Rest, hobbies, entertainment, games | Latvia | 35.5 | 33.6 | 30.9 |
| | Belarus | 43.3 | 28.3 | 28.4 |
| Communication in the Internet | Latvia | 37.4 | 28.0 | 34.6 |
| | Belarus | 36.2 | 31.9 | 31.9 |
| Studies, competency development | Latvia | 29.9 | 36.4 | 33.7 |
| | Belarus | 24.8 | 48.9 | 26.3 |
| Sport | Latvia | 17.8 | 37.4 | 44.8 |
| | Belarus | 21.8 | 32.2 | 46.0 |
| Communication – parties | Latvia | 18.7 | 20.6 | 60.7 |
| | Belarus | 18.2 | 27.4 | 54.4 |
| Hired employment in enterprises, institutions | Latvia | 12.1 | 23.4 | 64.5 |
| | Belarus | 17.3 | 15.3 | 67.4 |
| Activities in cultural field | Latvia | 9.3 | 25.2 | 65.5 |
| | Belarus | 11.7 | 28.3 | 60.0 |
| Entrepreneurship, one's own business | Latvia | 9.3 | 11.2 | 79.5 |
| | Belarus | 6.5 | 8.5 | 85.0 |
| Political activity, work in non-governmental organizations (NGO) | Latvia | 4.7 | 9.3 | 86.0 |
| | Belarus | 2.9 | 5.5 | 91.6 |
| Participation in the work of religious organizations, church | Latvia | 10.3 | 14.0 | 75.7 |
| | Belarus | 2.0 | 6.2 | 91.8 |

Source: the data of the sociological survey in the framework of the project “Prevention Youth Unemployment of Latvia and Belarus Border Territories in Conditions of Emerging from the Crisis”, May 2016, $n = 414$ people.

We found an overlap in the top three types of activities, where the youth of Latvia and Belarus are more mobile – communication in the Internet (Latvia – 37.4%, Belarus – 36.2%), rest, hobbies, entertainment, games (Latvia – 35.5%, Belarus – 43.3%), studies, competency development (Latvia – 29.9%, Belarus – 24.8%). Mobile youth of our countries is mobile in the same activities: entrepreneurship, one's own business (Latvia – 9.3%, Belarus – 6.5%), political activity, work in non-governmental organizations (Latvia – 4.7%, Belarus – 2.9%), participation in the work of religious organizations, church (Latvia – 10.3%, Belarus – 2.0%).

However, in the characteristics of the “mobile lifestyle” phenomenon, youth of the two countries do not have great solidarity (see Table 2). Although in the dominant responses we can see such two characteristics of the mobile lifestyle as “ability to work in different projects, project work” and “ability to communicate in several languages”, the ability to have Internet access at any time of the day among young people in Belarus is not among the three most important characteristics of mobility (on the rank scale, it is moved to the fifth place out of seven).

The role of humanitarian and social technologies in achieving mobility is demonstrated by our respondents even more when assessing factors of the mobile lifestyle (see Table 3). The most significant factors of mobility are a good command of foreign languages (Latvia – 84.5%, Belarus – 62.2%), good health (Latvia – 52.3%, Belarus – 51.8%) and quality education (Latvia – 42.1%, Belarus – 47.2%).

In our opinion, it is possible to affirm the reassessment and rethinking of the role of higher education by the youth as only an indicator of a certain status. Young people are increasingly considering whether it is relatively easy to convert a human capital into economic and other types of the aggregate capital of an individual. This is evidenced by a higher assessment among the mobility factor of “quality education, not necessarily higher one” and underestimation of the role of higher education in providing relatively new requirements of employers to the mobility of workers, to the quantity and quality of its network capital. Young people primarily associate the importance of higher education with rapid technological changes in production and the globalization of the labour market. The role of higher education was noticeably less pronounced when solving the problems of youth employment as a result of rapid changes in the requirements for mobility of employees, increasing the importance of employee's communication with clients, colleagues, managers, etc., the need to improve linguistic culture, knowledge of foreign languages.

Table 2. 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 | |
|--|--------------|-----------|---------|
| | | Latvia | Belarus |
| ... ability to work in different projects, project work | 43.5 | 31.8 | 47.6 |
| ... ability to communicate in several languages | 39.8 | 38.3 | 40.4 |
| ... to have Internet access at any time of the day | 28.7 | 32.7 | 27.4 |
| ... disregard of the “attachments” to one's life in a specific place | 28.0 | 20.6 | 30.6 |
| ... preoccupation with travels, tourism, but not with group travels | 27.8 | 24.3 | 29.0 |
| ... to be free from outdated traditions, dependencies | 23.4 | 15.9 | 26.1 |
| ... everything that we do not do on a daily basis | 7.7 | 8.4 | 7.5 |

Source: the data of the sociological survey in the framework of the project “Prevention Youth Unemployment of Latvia and Belarus Border Territories in Conditions of Emerging from the Crisis”, May 2016, $n = 414$ people.

Table 3. 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 | |
|--|--------------|-----------|---------|
| | | Latvia | Belarus |
| A good command of foreign languages | 63.3 | 64.5 | 62.2 |
| Good health | 51.9 | 52.3 | 51.2 |
| Quality education, not obligatory higher one | 45.9 | 42.1 | 47.2 |
| Mobile phone | 29.7 | 29.9 | 29.3 |
| Computer | 24.2 | 23.4 | 24.4 |
| Car | 21.7 | 17.8 | 23.1 |
| Higher education | 19.3 | 18.7 | 19.5 |
| Flat (housing) in a big city | 6.5 | 8.4 | 5.9 |

Source: the data of the sociological survey in the framework of the project "Prevention Youth Unemployment of Latvia and Belarus Border Territories in Conditions of Emerging from the Crisis", May 2016, $n = 414$ people.

Young people consider the lack of professional skills to be the main obstacle to a successful receipt of desired work, which is largely due to the lack of work experience, very often – significant working practices while studying in educational institution (see Table 4).

Thereby the youth underestimate the network capital and the ability to work with a computer as a factor of mobility. Only 3.4% of the young people surveyed indicated that they did not have these skills, while only 27.1% of our respondents in Latvia and 21.2% in Belarus had an experience of distance work. Moreover, only 1% of the interviewed was constantly working on terms of distance employment and only 17% of those, who were employed at the time of the survey, successfully used the Internet when looking for a job.

Table 4. The lack of skills to get the desired job, in % from the total number of the interviewed

| Skills | Total | Including | |
|---|-------|-----------|---------|
| | | Latvia | Belarus |
| Professional skills | 44.9 | 44.9 | 45.0 |
| A good command of foreign languages | 22.7 | 27.1 | 21.2 |
| Knowledge of specific software applications | 10.4 | 6.5 | 11.7 |
| Communication skills | 9.2 | 14.0 | 7.5 |
| Computer and Internet skills | 3.4 | 3.7 | 3.3 |

Source: the data of the sociological survey in the framework of the project "Prevention Youth Unemployment of Latvia and Belarus Border Territories in Conditions of Emerging from the Crisis", May 2016, $n = 414$ people.

CONCLUSIONS

Important changes are observed in the modern labour market where the way of life, work and employment are mobilized. Traditionally, labour mobility is understood as the geographical and occupational movement of workers, labour migration. Today, mobilization in labour includes any mode of movement in the economic space (increasingly – in virtual space),

which saves working time and gives expansion of partnerships. Researchers are increasingly focusing on new groups of professionals whose work is not possible without high mobility, the presence of a significant amount of the network capital.

The results of the sociological project showed that in the two countries with existing differences in economic systems, the problems of mobile lifestyles of youth are identical. The main problem is the asymmetry in types of mobility and underestimation of those that provide employment and high competitiveness. The self-assessment of the mobility levels of young people in Latvia and Belarus is very similar and is characterized by a comparatively small proportion of those who expressed their level of mobility at a high level. It was found that there is a relatively low share of mobility in business (9.3% of respondents in Latvia and 6.5% of respondents in Belarus already own a business).

Our researches show that competitiveness and economic success of a worker is determined not only by human capital, but also by cultural capital (a broad outlook, a high level of intelligence, a good command of foreign languages) in the modern conditions of formation of knowledge and services economy (vocational and educational). However, only about 10% of our respondents pay attention to their activity in the sphere of culture.

In our opinion, we need national, regional and local programs aimed to improve the mobility of youth as an important part of modern youth policy. A widely known programme at the moment is only Erasmus Mundus – a global academic mobility program for students and teachers. However, the mobility of young people has not only an international dimension, but also following one after the other changes in the industrial and social technologies cause a massive professional movement from one sector to another and a frequent change of specialties.

Solving these problems requires formation of the institutional structures, whose functions should include development of normative legal acts, formation of institutional mechanism and an effective system for e-employment monitoring in the countries. It is hard to argue that mobile lifestyle as a result of multiplying of the network capital requires more attention of researchers and practitioners in the field of youth policy formation and implementation.

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Latvijas ir Baltarusijas jaunimo mobilus gyvenimo būdas užimtumo kontekste