Everyday Consumption of Russian Youth in Small Towns and Villages

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Abstract

This article analyses the everyday consumption of young people who live in villages and small towns in modern-day Russia. Based on 59 semi-structured interviews conducted in three districts of the Leningrad region, the authors try to answer the following questions: How does everyday consumption fit in the biographical experience of rural youth? What consumption styles are implemented in small towns and villages? The conceptual framework of the analysis is the perspective of 'the lifestyle', which connects everyday consumption practices with the construction of youth identities. The authors come to the conclusion that the differentiation of the consumption styles of modern rural residents can be explained in the context of life strategies, construed on the basis of family capital, education, employment and orientation towards success. The article describes four basic styles that characterise the consumption of young rural residents, namely 'family', 'status-oriented', 'individualistic' and 'conformist' styles.

Introduction

The common theoretical framework of analysing the modern practices of youth consumption refers to a transition from a 'labour society' to a 'consumer society'. Russia becoming part of the new global order is marked by controversy typical for the countries which transitioned 'from necessary consumption to overconsumption' (Gurova 2009, p. 276). On the one hand, researchers note that in Russia, 'a new civil order is being established, an order with various types of today's reality, in which consumption has become one of the leading factors of private and public life' (Kozlovskij 2011, p. 64). At the same time, the Russian society corresponds to the western consumption standards 'only in some Russian territories, forming insignificant focal points of "real consumption"' (Vtorushina 2011, p. 259). Among such territories, reference may be made to major Russian cities and St. Petersburg in particular, which in addition to Moscow are becoming westernised shopping districts (Il'in 2005, p. 31). This has resulted in the 'urban-centred' model, in which the young residents of cities with a population of over a million people constitute a 'privileged'

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research target. It is their consumer experience that is regarded universal and serves as an empirical basis for new theories and concepts of youth consumption. At the same time, their peers who live not in big cities but in small towns and villages are not the focus of research interest and are often marginalised (Mkrtchjan 2014).

Another reason for marginalising rural youth is the perception of the countryside as a relatively closed and conservative society, which reproduces the same consumer behaviour patterns from generation to generation. Rural youth is deprived of individuality and is believed to adhere to the rural lifestyle, unified in its manifestations. In the Russian and particularly in the Soviet historical context, the opposition of the rural lifestyle as 'conservative/reactionary' to the progressive urban one played an important role in legitimising the state policy aimed at blurring the contrasts between the city and the countryside. In the 1930s, individual farms in the USSR were forced to unite into collective ones (kolkhozs) (see Fitzpatrick 1996). Moreover, during these years, the government actively encouraged the migration of the rural population able to work (mostly young people) to the construction of large industrial facilities (Gorbachev 2002). On the other hand, it was at this time that the so-called 'cultural revolution' (Fitzpatrick 1974) occurred, whose main purpose sought was the elimination of illiteracy, spread of universal secondary education and the confrontation of cultural 'vestiges of the past'. Despite the government's attempts to implement a large-scale transformation of the Soviet society, which were accompanied by purges and an increased number of victims,[1] the views of the countryside/collective farm as a space of backward mentality, stagnation and conservatism remained and were well-established in both the academic representations of the Russian countryside and in the daily discourse.

The liberal reforms of the 1990s were accompanied by the destruction of the technological, cultural, economic and social infrastructure and the existing rural-urban cooperation, developed under the command economy, which resulted in a sharp decline of the living standards of rural residents (Efendiyev and Bolotina 2002). These processes exacerbated the problematisation and marginalisation of rural youth. The Russian countryside started to be regarded as a social problem, a permanent crisis zone, and researchers focused only on those aspects of consumption which illustrated the idea of the crisis in the Russian countryside. In this context, the focus of many Russian researchers on the topic of alcohol consumption is representative (Zaigraev 2002; Poltavtseva 2003; Staroverov 2004; Roshchina 2012; Granberg 2015). Furthermore, the increasing migration of young rural residents to cities helped to establish the perception of the countryside as an 'ageing' space, where there is no place for the young. The 2007–2008 global economic recession and the current sanctions crisis of 2014/2015 (Okhotskiy 2016) only consolidated the perception of rural youth as a group struggling with social frustration and migration.

This article has a dual goal. At the empirical level, we strive to make up for the shortage of data on rural youth's consumption, who are often marginalised and rarely become the focus of either youth studies or research on the countryside. The theoretical goal of the article is the synthesis of modern concepts of youth consumption, on the one hand, and the current theoretical approaches to the study of the countryside, on the other hand.

Our research questions are formulated as follows: What consumption styles are implemented in the context of small towns and villages? Who adheres to each style? Do rural–urban differences in consumption matter?

Methodology

The empirical basis of the research is constituted by the materials of 59 biographical interviews with young people living and working in small towns, urban-type settlements and villages of the Leningrad region.[2] The respondents work in different fields and have different levels of education. Men and women are equally represented (29 men, 30 women) in two age groups (31 people aged 20–25 and 28 people aged 30–35).[3] The respondents were selected based on their work experience and job tenure. This was about/more than ten years for 30-year-olds and three to five years for 20-year-olds. The sample includes staff members of agricultural and industrial enterprises, employees of budgetary and municipal government organisations, private sector employees, representatives of the service and trade sectors, and the self-employed.

Since the study focuses on the labour strategies and consumer practices of rural youth, the sample includes only those municipal districts and settlements that are not part of the urban agglomeration of St. Petersburg. We also assumed that young people who live near the international borders (Estonia, Finland) have specific experience influenced by the availability of international travel, shopping and vacationing abroad. For this reason, they are not included in the sample. The sample demonstrates an even distribution across the three districts of the Leningrad region (Luzhsky district: 21 respondents, Priozersky district: 18, Volkhovsky: 20). Selected places are at considerable distance from St Petersburg – too far for every day travels to work. At the same time St. Petersburg is the nearest city in the neighbourhood for both selected locations.

In the first stages of the study, it became apparent that local youth has a rather high level of mobility within their districts (they live in a village, but work in larger settlements nearby). This is due to the concentration of vacancies in large industries and in trade centres, which are more developed at certain locations and near large cities. Therefore, the main criteria for the selection of informants was their particular age group and a long experience of living and working in the area under study.

The statement of the research goal has determined the choice of the biographical approach as the main method of data collection and analysis, where the unit of analysis is an individual as a separate subject of social life and social relations. This methodological position allows researchers to place rural youth's consumer behaviour into the general social and economic context of late modernity (Giddens 1991), which is characterised by blurred social and economic boundaries and the individualisation of life strategies. The application of the biographical approach in studying rural informants is gaining popularity in Russian sociology thanks to the development of the method of 'reflexive peasant studies' (Shanin 2002; Khagurov 2009).

In order to collect an empirical data set a semi-structured interview method was used, including a biographical block, and a block on consumption, employment, mobility, migration plans and the meanings of success (social and individual).

The data was analysed in *QDA Miner Lite – Free Qualitative Data Analysis Software* using procedures of descriptive and open coding (Corbin and Strauss 2014; Saldaña 2015). First, we determined relevant topics concerning various aspects of everyday consumption and the respondents' views on success and life career. Then, we detected interpretations of each topic using open coding. Finally, we identified several style groups (see below) based on similarities in consumption interpretations on the one hand and on shared views on success and life career on the other.

Rural youth's consumption in the context of the academic debate

It can be assumed that the key trend in the academic debate on rural youth's consumption is the shift from the discrete dichotomy 'city' – 'countryside' to the concepts emphasising the flexibility and diffusedness of boundaries, a variety of economic and consumer logics, lifestyles and the patterns of sedentarism and mobility, which can hardly fit into the binary model of 'urban-rural' contrasts (Newby 1977; Berreman *et al.* 1978; Lynch 2005; Paciorkovskij 2010; Halfacree 2012). Marsden (1999) notes that the modern countryside is increasingly becoming a 'post-industrial village', characterised by all the strategies that are typical for urban consumption. The term 'rurbanisation' (Eaton *et al.* 1980; Dagevos *et al.* 2004; Overbeek and Terluin 2006; Overbeek 2009) conceptualises the process of the transformation of rural spaces in the course of the so-called urban pressure, implying economic diversification, migration, development of the transport infrastructure, and the diffusion of modern telecommunications. In the course of rurbanisation, urban and rural areas become similar in terms of their social structure, occupational patterns, consumption standards and lifestyles.

The modern rural area in Russia reflects the shift from agricultural production as the most important asset of rural regions to the consumption of rural goods and services, which Dagevos *et al.* (2004) refer to as a 'vital characteristic of this process of "rurbanisation"' (53). Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, the number of workers in the agricultural sector has declined from more than half to one-third of the total working-age rural population (Tikhonova and Shik 2008; Bondarenko 2011). In our study, agricultural workers constitute only 10 per cent of the sample. Many rural informants work in district centres: in the manufacturing and trade industries, and in the municipal and the public sectors. However, there are also many cases when residents of district centres find employment in rural areas. The latter is usually the case with rural administrative authorities and top managerial positions in agricultural holdings.

In this instance, we can refer to such distinctive features of rural locations included in the study as a relatively well-developed retail and services infrastructure, represented by grocery stores and stalls, sweet shops, bakeries and bank branches. Thanks to this, a young rural resident is integrated into the system of market relations typical for big cities, and his/her consumption is predominantly constituted by market-based consumption.

Another issue is the landscape of rural settlements: there are one- and two-storey houses next to multi-storey panel blocks of flats, and the number of the latter is

constantly increasing. Several young rural residents do not only consume similarly to 'city residents' but are also born and live in standard flats, accustomed to the 'urban' standards of domestic comfort and the associated patterns of consumption from their childhood.

A significant impact on the pace and nature of rural life is also exerted by the inter-district mobility, which is particularly characteristic of young people: regular trips to the district centre and St. Petersburg for work, studying, leisure, entertainment, and meetings with friends and family are an integral part of young people's everyday lives. An important factor pertaining to the process of rurbanisation is the fluidity of boundaries between 'rural' and 'urban' youth: many young people living in district centres are first-generation city residents. After moving to the city for permanent residence, they tend to keep in touch with classmates, friends and family members who remain in the countryside.

In addition, this transformation of Russian rural spaces is accompanied by the process of suburbanisation (Jackson 1985; Mieszkowski and Mills 1993; Mason and Nigmatullina 2011), meaning that young people (mostly couples from big cities) are moving to the countryside for permanent or temporary residence, attracted by healthier living conditions (Bolotova 2002; Kulyasova 2004; Kulyasov and Kulyasova 2008; Shubina *et al.* 2014). The process of suburbanisation is encouraging the diffusion of the 'rural' and 'urban' lifestyles and closing the gap between them.

Undoubtedly, a significant impact on bridging the gap between images and lifestyles of the city and the country, as well as the formation of sufficiently stable relations and interactions is caused by information technology and new media becoming a part of everyday communication. Studies (Logunova and Davydov 2011) show that Russian rural residents are active users of the Internet, and the information gap between the city and the countryside is mostly being bridged thanks to its increasing coverage and use (Logunova and Davydov 2011), particularly that of mobile Internet, as it is the cheapest way to gain access to the Net. The rural locations in question have cable television, an Internet provider, and easy Internet access for phones and tablets via mobile modems and mobile Internet. Global network resources facilitate the convergence of 'urban' and 'rural' consumption patterns and standards.

At the same time, the boundary between 'the city' and 'the country' is not completely destroyed, and it is still an important constituent of social reality and an attribute of symbolic positioning. It can be said that the modern countryside has partially discarded the stigma of consumer deficit and lack of product range; however, it is still marked by a 'career deficit', a limited range of career opportunities, and status mobility: there is a lack of jobs, and as a result, limited financial resources, which in their turn significantly narrow the horizons of rural youth's consumer opportunities. Along with the general focus on the consumption of goods, there still remain traditional 'rural' practices of food self-sufficiency: horticulture, gardening, and animal husbandry, which may not play a significant role in the consumption of today's youth, but do exist as a background component of everyday life.

Finally, the phenomenon of a 'close-knit social community' remains important in rural areas, implying 'intensive communication' (Logunova and Davydov 2011, p. 41) and 'interweaving of family and neighbourly relations in the fabric of the work ones'.

Rural youth are included in rural communities, and they often identify themselves as members and participants of a particular one.

The distinctive features of such communities are the alienation from 'outsiders' (not to relatives and not to people from this village) (Little *et al.* 2005; Dyatlov 2008), low tolerance to individuals who, for some reason have deviated from the norms of rural life (Li 2011; Sortheix, Olakivi, and Helkama 2013), the dominance of the patriarchal gender stereotypes, in particular with regard to the professional and career role of women (Bezhan-Volk 2003; Olson and Adon'eva 2016).

The factors considered in this context determine the space and the scope of opportunities and limitations where rural youth's consumption patterns are formed. We analyse the consumer behaviour of rural youth from the perspective of 'the lifestyle' (Chaney 1996, 2002; Miles 2000; Omelchenko 2004), which connects everyday consumption practices with the construction of youth identities. Therefore, we assume that, just like their peers from cities with a population of over one million people, young rural residents are included in the context of 'late modernity' and can design their own 'lifestyle' – not through the assimilation, adaptation and mechanical reproduction of the existing social norms, but by acquiring the skills of self-sufficiency, organising their life as an open process (Giddens 1991) and choosing social, cultural, and economic resources as modes to express and assert their individuality (Chaney 1994; Bauman 2000). Thus, the standard biography has became 'elective', 'do-it-yourself', broken-down (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002, p. 24), 'a choice among possibilities, *homo optionis*' (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002, p. 5). Lifestyle is defined as a 'freely chosen game' in contrast to the way of life associated with a more or less stable community (Bennett 1999, p. 607).

In our opinion, the core of the lifestyle is constituted by the meaning of success (personal, professional, social) and the acceptable (available) ways to achieve it (Omelchenko 2002). This meaning helps people make pivotal choices and separate the significant from the non-essential, the desirable from the unacceptable. Lifestyle strategies, including the ones expressed in consumption, are construed in the context of maturing with the use of family, cultural, economic and professional capital. Without excluding the impact of rural residence on the development of a consumption style, we, however, see it as a structural context, along with the gender, employment and education of the informants, as well as the socio-economic conditions of a particular location. A consumption style is regarded as one of the aspects of a lifestyle in general.

What consumption styles are implemented in the context of small towns and villages?

Following the theoretical ideas listed above, consumer style can be represented as the sum of one's consumer behaviour (What and how do they consume?) and one's ideas about life career and success. We identified rural youth's lifestyles using the following process. First, data from relevant thematic blocks was encoded using a template of *a priori* codes and distributed according to the relevant topics (see Table 1). At the second stage we used open coding with the grounded theory technique in order to

Table 1: *A priori codes*

Categories	Subcategories	Codes
Consumption	Goods	Clothes and shoes
		Food
		Gadgets
		Household consumption
		Car
		(Other) big purchases
	Making purchasing decisions	Subjectivity
		Motives
		Circumstances
		Shopping locations
		Opportunity for food production'
Success and life career	Success	Personal
		Professional
		Social
	Career	Plans for the next 1–2 years
		Plans for the next 5–10 years
		Future, dreams

parcel out the interpretation of each topic (code, subcategory or category). Then, the informants were divided into groups according to two grouping principles: (1) those who consume and interpret consumption in the same way, (2) those with similar ideas of success and life career. Finally, the two groups were compared in order to find matches, overlaps, and inclusions. Socio-demographic characteristics (age, gender, marital status, employment, position on the labour market) are used to identify style groups, as well as to explain variability within the same consumption style.

Relying on the empirical data obtained through interviews with rural youth, we distinguish four consumption styles: family, status-oriented, individualistic, and 'indifferent'.

Family style

This style characterises the consumer behaviour of informants who connect their own life careers with marriage and self-realisation as spouses and parents:

> *'My goal is to build a house, have a big family – so that I have at least three children. This is my goal. So that people won't point a finger at the person and say that he is a lousy guy and spoils everyone's life but enjoys the fruits of others' labour – I do not want this. A successful person. I look – here is a man in a suit with a briefcase and a good watch, going to work, but is he happy? If he likes that he earns a lot of money, probably it is a good thing, and perhaps he is successful. As for me, I come home, I take my child in my arms and I am satisfied that I have a small child, I know that in the future I will probably have another one'* (male, 30, livestock expert).

Within the family consumption style, the already existing married couples adhere to the principle of 'children deserve the best': children's consumption is considered to be a 'barometer' of a family's well-being and the criterion of successful parenthood:

'What can you easily spend money on? Respondent: (thinks). I guess on children, it's more likely. I want them to be dressed well and beautifully, and the kids themselves ask for this... ' (male, 30, livestock expert).

The consumption of adult family members is often based on the remaining funds and focuses on meeting the basic needs. Saving practices pervade the entire system of everyday expenditures: from food to clothing and home appliances. Things are purchased only if they are necessary, and their pragmatic features, such as functionality, durability and convenience, are valued above everything else.

The dominant clothing styles are 'casual' or 'sports (for men)'. As a rule, new clothes are purchased 'once in a season'. Shops and products are chosen according to the following strategy: first, based on the available information (prior shopping experience, advertising, advice from friends and relatives), the respondents decide on a shop or a mall 'where it's cheaper', and they then choose goods which 'are better quality', which they 'like' or which 'suit' them from the 'cheap' range presented in this shop or mall. Footwear is an exception: the informants are willing to spend a bit more on it if it corresponds to their perception of 'quality':

'And which brands of clothes and footwear do you like and buy? Where do you buy clothes? Respondent: Before, I earned less and I used to buy cheaper shoes. I generally prefer more expensive shoes, but not very expensive, still affordable, but more or less good ones. In our town, I like to shop for shoes at "Burgershoes", because they are more practical, prices are more affordable, and the quality is a bit better... ' (female, 34, kindergarten teacher).

Reasonable minimalism in clothes is a distinctive feature of the behaviour of both respondent categories that already have a family or children and those who are just planning to have them in the future. Another integral attribute of the family style is the planning of expenses. Spontaneous purchases are either extremely rare (people say they 'liked the item very much') or not possible at all:

'First of all, my wife says, "We need this and that". I say, "Alright, let's go." So we go ... and choose everything. For example, I come home after a night shift, sleep till three o'clock, which means we leave at three if we plan to buy some appliances. If we need to buy some clothes, then she tells me at the weekend. So we plan two or three days ahead, I mean if we have this thing planned, I don't make any other plans' (male, 31, worker).

A constant lack of time (especially in families with two working spouses) and financial resources underlie the demand for the following economic practices in this category of informants:

1. individual wholesale purchase of food products: food is purchased in an amount sufficient to meet the needs of the family for a long time (a week):

'Interviewer: Tell me please, where do you usually buy things, such as clothes, food for every day? Respondent: I can't say we shop every day. After we receive our salary, we go to buy stuff, not for the whole month, but for a week, for example, meat; and if we need cigarettes or bread, we can buy these at the local shop' (female, 25, milking machine operator).

In this case, the priority shopping place is an economy class chain grocery store: 'Pyaterochka', 'Diksi' and 'Semya'.[4]

2. the tendency to buy everything one needs in one place: at weekends, married couples regularly go shopping to hypermarkets or shopping malls (Mega, Auchan), where they purchase food, clothing, goods for children and (if required) home appliances. Transport accessibility plays a key role in choosing a particular shopping mall: a mall must be located near major roads, which connect the countryside to the city and it must have parking places (as most trips are made by car).

It is worth noting that there is a certain 'gender division of labour' in the matter of shopping: men buy food, while choosing and purchasing clothes for the whole family is usually a woman's duty:

> *'I usually go to the shop to buy products, food, and my wife goes shopping if we need clothes, she is better at this. It's hard for her now, so I have to do something. It's good that we have a car, we can drive somewhere, bring stuff and go somewhere and look for something while the kids are at kindergarten. On the whole, we both take part in everything'* (male, 30, fodder manufacturer).

Home and housing is a key element of self-identity for informants with a family; it is an aspect strongly correlated with their social success. A lot of informants build their own house or are planning/dreaming to build it in the future:

> *'I want my family to live in one big house eventually at a piece of land... let there be fruit trees, a big house, a big piece of land'* (male, 32, veterinarian).

For young people who live in flats, taking care of their homes takes the form of 'permanent' renovation practices, a gradual 'upgrade' of their living conditions (as far as possible and as far as financial resources allow). In both cases, investing in the improvement of housing conditions is considered to be a priority expense category, in which people do not economise and for which they can cut back on everyday consumption.

> *'Interviewer: So sometimes you want to buy new appliances, right? Respondent: Well, when we want to buy new ones, we do, of course, but only if we have money; if there is no money, then we don't buy new stuff. Besides, now we need to renovate the house, so we are trying to save'* (female, 25, milking machine operator).

At the same time, interpretations of domestic comfort gravitate toward the commonly accepted 'average' standards ('*like the ones everyone else has*'), which include a TV, a washing machine and a microwave oven.

'Family' informants, as opposed to the other three groups, do not tend to distance themselves from the elements of the 'rural' lifestyle, in particular, from working in their gardens. Their land has a double value in their eyes: it is *'an additional way to feed the family'* (female, 32, accountant) and an additional source of family income:

> *'I think it is quite possible in the future to really have a huge yard, have some cows, for example, or chickens, we will be perfectly able to sell these natural products... we have only natural products, like in the past. Well, of course, I would like to have my own business'* (female, 21, forewoman at an agricultural enterprise).

Variations of this style of consumption can depend on the informants' cultural capital. For instance, in families where one or both parents have attended higher education,

in addition to spending money on essentials, toys and entertainment, this approach also includes investments in education and organised leisure (clubs, classes, etc.)

Status-oriented style

A symbolic benchmark for this consumption style is the change and strengthening of a class position through professional, educational and economic growth. The decisive factor for choosing this consumption style is the coherence of informants' views regarding social prestige within 'the whole society' and individual interpretations of success. An important role in this context is played by the image of 'the countryside' and 'kolkhoz' (collective farms) as an ontological 'Other', the epitome of low status and lack of prestige. For example, the informants' fashion choices are aimed at distancing themselves from any hints of the status of a rural dweller:

> *'Again, to dress yourself, to look not worse than others, not some "kolkhoz" style, I mean. Well, again, we choose good quality expensive clothes; we don't buy something that will fall apart in a week'* (female, 30, sales assistant).

A similar form of division between classes, which partly coincides with the division between generations, is the refusal to participate in the agricultural practices of food self-sufficiency (horticulture, gardening and animal husbandry) associated with the rural lifestyle and habitus of the older generation:

> *'Well, mostly it is my opinion, sometimes we tell mum, "Mum, stop spending your time on these vegetable patches, these potatoes, we can buy you some." As to my grandma, she is of the old generation, so she grows these vegetables. . . '* (male, 25, shop administrator).

Under the new conditions, said practices are either completely abandoned or redefined and legitimised as a form of ('urban') pastime:

> *'I.: And why do you grow vegetables? Do you like it or? R.: As a hobby, I guess. To do something, because you can't grow enough to eat. What can you eat there? Only during the summer we can eat some of our own herbs, tomatoes or cucumbers'* (female, 22, teacher/kindergarten teacher).

An important marker of social success within the status-oriented style is having privately owned housing and a car. Unlike in the family style, where purchasing property and/or a car is driven by family needs, in this case the horizon of consumption is formed by the ambitions of the professional self. As has already been noted, young 'careerists' are sensitive to the public opinion and to the way people assess their professional achievements, whose material correlates are, in particular, a large well-furnished house and an appreciated car brand:

> *'I think that earning enough money is important, especially for a man. A car is important not only because others will see it, but because this is the first sign that a man can earn money'* (female, 24, accountant).

However, the respondents' interpretation of their social career reflects their current employment. Young skilled and semi-skilled as well as sale and service workers believe that a higher status means moving from 'dirty' manual labour to mental, managerial

'clean' labour. Their idea of what exactly this job is supposed to be is not well-defined: *some* job. They are not as interested in a specific area of employment as in inter-class mobility. As a result, they see being an accountant, a shop assistant, a teacher, and a manager as prestigious forms of employment. On the other hand, young people with 'clean' jobs – low-tier employees, educators and office workers – usually structure their expectations in the form of a concrete plan. They are oriented towards mobility within the subjectively determined (by birth, level of education, nature of employment) social class.

> *'I mean, I am going to work in (name of the firm) for some time, get experience in civil cases, then I will find a job in the structure of the agency for internal affairs and get some experience in criminal law, so later I can become a criminal defence lawyer. This is one scenario. Another one is similar: I am going to work at the Prosecutor's office, just live and get my rank and position and serve till I get something stable and a high position'* (male, 23, lawyer).

These differences are also evident in the respondents' consumption. The first group plays out their upward mobility through consumption patterns that correlate with their career expectations; that is, they consume in the same way that, as they believe, people with 'clean' jobs do. As already noted, these ideas are rather blurry. Therefore, the narratives of young people from the working class demonstrate the prevailing desire to dress 'well'; however, the idea of 'well-dressed' is reduced to clothes from 'urban' brand shops.

The second group of respondents tends to consider individual (and often family) consumption as a rational investment in their social status. For example, when choosing clothes for work, young 'careerists' take into account how their appearance will be perceived by colleagues, superiors or clients.

Despite the fact that both groups seek to acquire a car as a status symbol, young people from the working class are more pragmatic about buying one: they purchase what they can afford at the moment given the available resources. A car is usually bought after a long period of a targeted accumulation of funds. White-collar employees' consumption often outstrips their actual resources, which is why they often make use of car loans.

Individualistic style

The individualistic consumption style is characterised by the following criteria of social success: individualism, independence (both economic and independence from the life trajectories imposed by the social environment), hedonism and self-expression. 'Individualists' construe their biography as a self-made narrative, a story of individual success and achievements:

> *'To be successful is... let me think (thinks ... well, it means achieving the goals you set. Once I had a goal to get a higher education qualification. I got it and I think that I am successful in this area. I really wanted to be a mother, and I am a mother, so I am successful in this as well. I really wanted to become financially independent by myself, without any lucky beautiful marriages, and this is enough for me, this is success. That's all; probably, achieving what you want is success'* (female, 33, teacher).

Individualists' consumption practices, from food to home improvement, are built around the creation of the individual self. They attach great significance to comfort, aesthetics and the hedonistic interpretation of consumption:

'I love beautiful things, I love a good and tasty meal, and now I am doing a renovation, so I have planned to reconstruct my flat, yeah, and I certainly want to buy a car in the future. So all my funds are spent on us, my son and myself. And we have also bought a Yorkshire terrier; we have spent a lot of money on him' (female, 33, teacher).

'Individualists' are well-informed consumers. They are familiar with modern fashion trends and the latest gadgets; however, instead of blindly following the examples of popular culture, they prefer creating 'their own' style. A decision to purchase things is often taken spontaneously, following the principle of 'I saw it – I liked it – I bought it':

'There are some shops. Adidas, Nike. I like Marks & Spencer. H&M is cool too. Because when my wife takes me there, I don't look at price tags. If you like it, you should buy it. In general, it's normal. My mum taught me that; if you like it, it doesn't matter if it's necessary' (male, 26, entrepreneur).

Individualisation in the context of married women's consumption with an above-average income often takes the form of automobile emancipation. It is typical for such families that both spouses have their own cars, selected to suit individual tastes and preferences; and their service is individual rather than a family responsibility. The determining factor in this instance is that the car is bought not 'for business' but rather 'for pleasure' and correlates with the values of free time and personal independence:

'For the purpose... of going to work, well, although here you can get anywhere on foot, I do not know, I just liked it, everyone in my family drives, and I just like driving somewhere, listening to music, going to work by car, or to a shop, or out of town with tents, barbecues, everything is easier when you own a car, you just get in and go. You don't depend on anyone, don't wait for anyone, you can take someone with you' (female, 23, bank employee).

The strategy of the individualisation and stylisation of everyday life can also manifest itself as 'the great refusal' to follow fashion trends (*'But no, I do not chase brands. Advertising works, I realise that all of these brands cost a lot'* (male, 30, IT specialist) and other forms of mass consumer behaviour:

'Interviewer: You have decided to give up meat, for what reasons? Respondent: Well, first of all, I watched some programmes that meat... Well, of course, first of all, you eat it, and it is an animal that has a soul, just like you do. So this is to start with, and well, I generally decided to try, and you see everything is alright, I manage without meat. It hasn't been a long time, I just started in November but still' (male, 25, shop administrator).

The individualistic style can also be called post-modern because it reflects such essential features of post-modernity as the individualisation of social differences, the reflexive and critical attitude to social institutions and generally accepted patterns of success, and the articulated desire to organise life as an open project (Giddens 1991; Lash and Urry 1993).

'Indifferent' style

The '*Indifferent*' style cannot be called a style in the full sense of the word, since it is not chosen freely, or even relatively freely, and does not imply any value orientation of consumer behaviour. Ideas about an acceptable/desired life career are formed here with an attitude toward social conformism – 'to live like others':

'Interviewer: OK. How do you see your future life in general? Respondent: (thinks) How do I see my future life? I don't know... Well, I'll start a family, have a job and will live basically like everyone else does' (male, 21, worker at an agricultural enterprise).

Within the framework of this style, everyday purchases are made automatically, for example, on the way home from work. The choice of a shopping location is determined by the logic of minimising the time spent, focusing on saving personal time and effort: the shop must be located within walking distance from home:

'Here, mainly at the shop near the bus stop. Basically, it is not expensive, and there is everything you need. In Luga, if you need something, there are shops like "Pyaterochka", "Diksi"... all you need is close by. We cannot complain' (male, 21, general labourer).

The same approach prevails in the choice of clothing. Minimalists' do not place a particular focus on what to wear; they have no preferences for labels, brands or practical characteristics of the items they purchase:

'Interviewer: What about clothes, shoes? Respondent: We buy everything in Luga. Interviewer: Do you have any preferences regarding brands? What do you like to wear in general? Respondent: I don't care, I need trousers and a top, what else?' (male, 23, general labourer).

Buying clothes is often delegated to older family members (mothers), or the choice is influenced by friends or acquaintances.

The fundamental difference between the 'Indifferent' consumer behaviour and economical strategies (which are popular, for example, in the context of the family style) is the lack of motivation to gather information in advance and to compare the advantages of goods:

'Interviewer: How do you decide what clothes or appliances to buy? Do you check on the Internet first or go to a shop right away? Respondent: I go straight to the shop and buy... Anyone can write anything on the Internet' (male, 23, tree feller).

'Indifferent' consumers never encourage any improvement of their living conditions. Their participation in the practices of home renovation is determined by the already established system of family obligations, which are not to be questioned: *'We should help the older generation'*.

Table 2 summarises the differences between the four consumption styles under four categories: 'food', 'dwelling', 'clothing' and 'car'

Who adheres to each style?

The family style characterises the behaviour of the majority of young people living in rural areas, regardless of their age or particular area of residence. This style is primarily adopted by married young people – both men and women with one or more children. The majority of the family style representatives are 30 to 35 years old.

The birth of a child forces young people not only to begin solving household problems themselves, but also to change their consumer styles. Among unmarried young people, the desire to start a family usually shapes (1) the consumer behaviour of unmarried women aged 20–25 (2) – skilled und semi-skilled workers both men and

Table 2: *Comparison of rural youth's consumption styles*

	Food	Dwelling	Clothes	Car
Family	Buying food in bulk (responsibility of men) Subsistence agriculture (gardening, horticulture)	- Home is the symbol of self-realisation - Constant renovations 'we are not worse off than other people'	Pragmatism (best price for best quality) Cost evaluation 'Children deserve the best' Women choose	Capacity Efficiency Car 'for business'
Status-oriented	- Commodity consumption - Distancing themselves from agricultural practices	House/apartment as a reflection of high social status	Brand Consumption	Prestigious brands, foreign cars
Individualistic	Eating what is tasty/healthy	Dwelling is the expression of one's individual 'self' innovative renovation	Wearing the clothes they like One's 'own' style; 'I saw it – I liked it – I bought it'	Car 'for pleasure'
'Indifferent'	Eating what is available/offered economy class grocery stores	- Renovations stem from obligations	Wearing what everyone else is wearing the choice is given to close relatives (wife, mother)	'if it works, it is good enough'

woman. The half of representatives have higher education. But only a quarter of them have a job that requires a degree.

The status-oriented style is chosen by 14 respondents, 8 men and 6 women; the latter are all between 20 and 25 years old. Most of them are single. This group can be further divided into two subcategories by occupation: blue-collar workers (skilled or semiskilled workers and those employed in the service industry) and white-collar employees (professionals, office staff, and government officials). As mentioned above, the difference between these two subcategories is reflected in their everyday consumption.

Young people practising the individualistic style are a homogeneous group in the socio-economic sense: residents of regional centres with a rather high level of cultural capital (education) and above-average income. They are the most active Internet users of all the four groups. They use the Internet not only for communication and entertainment, but also for self-education in the form of seminars, master classes and conferences. It is among the individualists that we meet young people who have consciously moved to the 'province' from big cities in search of a calmer life and cleaner environment. This is the only group that includes business owners and respondents with above average income.

Table 3: *Socioeconomic characteristics of the respondents*

	Family	Status	Individlualist	'Indifferent'
Gender				
M	9	8	5	7
F	18	6	6	
Age				
18–25	10	8	6	6
30–35	17	6	5	1
Higher education				
Yes	14	8	10	
No	13	6	1	7
Income				
Lower-middle (less than 30 000 rubles (≈416 Euro) per month)	17	9	5	
Middle (30–60.000 rubles (≈416–820 Euro) per month)	10	5	3	
Upper-middle (more than 60 30 000 rubles rubles (≈820 Euro) per month)	–		3	
Occupation				
Officials and Managers	2	1	2	
Professionals	5	3	3	
Office and Clerical Workers	5	2	3	
Technicians	3	1		
Sales and Service Workers	4	3	1	
Skilled/semiskilled workers	4	4		1
Unskilled	2			6
Army and police	2			
Self-employee/business owners			2	
Martial status				
Married	15	6	4	1
Unmarried	12	8	7	6
Parenting				
Yes	14	4	2	1
No	13	7	9	6
Total	27	14	11	7

Finally, the 'Indifferent' style is the consumer behaviour of a well-defined social group in terms of age, sex and employment: 20-year-old men, mostly single, who engage in unskilled manual labour and live in villages or small towns.

Table 3 summarises the socioeconomic features and number of youth adhering to each of the styles.

Do rural–urban differences matter?

Despite the diversity of the styles of consumption, the consumer behaviour of respondents reveals a number of common characteristics that can be considered 'rural'. For instance, the daily consumption of people from rural areas and small

towns does not include the catering industry, which is an important part of youth consumption in urban areas (Tinchurina 2009; Omelchenko et al. 2016)

Regardless of their consumption style, young people prefer to cook and eat at home. Eating out is possible only within the leisure and communication practices of 'hanging out, drinking coffee and talking' and even then it does not happen too often, mainly with young people (twenty-year-olds) who live in relatively large district centres. The transfer of these practices to the private space is a general trend manifested here, but what is also important in this respect is the lacking infrastructure of the 'social and cultural' catering and financial constraints of the young rural dwellers themselves.

An unexpected conclusion for researchers was that, despite the ubiquitous spread of the mobile Internet and new information technologies, the respondents do not consider gadgets (mobile phones, smartphones, iPhones, tablets) to be symbols of social status/class, even though urban youth do (see Novikova 2011). The informants' choice is guided by a purely pragmatic motive of sticking to what is 'essential':

> *'Yes. For instance, now that I have this job, I need Internet access; I know that I will go to court or the registration chamber and that I have a gadget where I can write everything down, where I have access to certain files, the Consultant-Plus system, for example. You can go online, look it up, and you have everything you need. Of course, there are many other functions: video, MP3-player, yeah, but for me they don't matter'* (male, 23, lawyer).

The overwhelming majority of respondents consider owning a car to be a necessary condition for career mobility and/or access to work. They either already own a car, or plan to purchase one in the near future. The total motorisation found in all the four style groups can be viewed as a 'rural' response to the underdeveloped transportation system in the rural–urban continuum.

The predominance of the family style in the sample can also be viewed as an attribute of the rural way of life that cultivates the early maturation of young people, as well as their everyday inherent inclusion in the special practices of 'labour education in families' (Shanahan *et al.* 1996a 1996b), and in the culture of the rural neighbourhood. The prevalence of this style among unmarried women reflects the traditional notion of marriage and motherhood as a mandatory stage in the institutional career of a woman (McLaughlin *et al.* 1993).

Conclusions

The urbanisation processes in rural areas take the form of economic diversification, migration, development of the transport infrastructure, and diffusion of modern telecommunications, which transform the consumer behaviour of young rural residents, generating hybrid rural-urban consumption logics. At the same time, these changes are non-linear, and lead to different configurations of 'rural' and 'urban' elements in specific consumer strategies. The consumption styles of young people living in villages and small towns depend on their lifestyles that are chosen on the basis of their economic, professional and cultural capital.

As a result of the analysis of 59 biographical narratives, we distinguish four consumption styles, namely family, status-oriented, individualistic, and 'indifferent'.

The family consumption style describes the behaviour of rural youth who primarily link the idea of a successful life with playing the roles of spouses and parents.

This style is chosen by young married couples and by unmarried women in the age cohort of 20–25.

In the status-oriented style, the key role is played by the orientation toward achieving success within 'the whole society'. This style has several variations linked with class differences: young people engaged in manual labour perform upper class consumption, while white-collar workers rationally invest in their careers. 'Careerists' find it fundamentally important to distinguish between 'urban' and 'rural' consumer logics. For them, 'the countryside' is the pole of repulsion, which defines their urban identity.

The individualistic style of consumption focuses on the values of independence, self-expression, and hedonism, and is usually chosen by young people with relatively high cultural and economic capital living in district centres. Individualists redefine and 'rehabilitate' the countryside as a place for a calmer life in a cleaner environment.

Consumption within the 'indifferent style' characterises the consumer behaviour of 20-year-old single men engaged in unskilled manual labour. This 'style' correlates with amorphous, weakly defined ideas about success and a life career. The coordinates of the 'rural–urban' continuum are not relevant in this context, since in this case neither 'the city' nor 'the countryside' has a symbolic value.

Structural factors that hamper the process of (r)urbanisation are the career deficit, underdeveloped leisure and transport infrastructures, and the phenomenon of a close-knit rural community, which retains its importance. For instance, regardless of their consumption style, young people living in rural areas do not have a regular practice of spending their free time in cafés and clubs. Young rural residents' desire for total motorisation is their reaction to the poor transport infrastructure. Finally, the predominance of the family style in the sample can also be viewed as gravitation towards the rural pole of the 'rural–urban' continuum, both from the perspective of success that emphasises the obligatory nature of family and childbearing, and in relation to consumption practices (combining commodity consumption with agricultural practices of food self-sufficiency).

Lifestyle as an individualised 'freely chosen game', detached from the institutes of both traditionally rural and industrial societies, and primarily based on competent consumption of material and cultural goods, is only available to a small group of city dwellers, who, in the context of the 'rural–urban' continuum, have the privilege to enjoy the access to economic and cultural resources. The other respondents view consumption as one of many ways (but not the main one) to demonstrate their identity, other ways being their family, parenthood and occupation.

That is why the typology of lifestyles exhibited by youth living in rural areas and small towns has to take into account the variety of possible combinations of consumption styles, matrimonial and parenthood-related strategies, and strategies used in the job-seeking process and career mobility. Creating such a typology is the next stage of our research project.

Notes

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[1] According to different estimates made by historians, mass starvation, which was provoked by the policy of total collectivisation and affected grain-growing regions of the USSR, took the

lives of between 2 and 8 million people (Lorimer 1946; Urlanis 1974; Anderson and Silver 1985; Conquest 1986; Maksudov 1989; Tsaplin 1989; Ivnickij 2000).

[2] This article presents the results of the project 'Work and Consumption in Russian Youth Life: Comparative Analysis of Rural and Urban Experiences' carried out within the framework of the Basic Research Program at the National Research University Higher School of Economics (HSE) in 2015.

[3] The Russian law on youth defines the upper age bracket as 30. Nevertheless, for a number of groups (for example, the category of 'young families', which is of great interest to us), the bracket is set at 35. Кроме того, using the 18–35 range is a common practice in public opinion polls (for example, the ones conducted by the Russian Public Opinion Research Centre https://wciom.ru/), and it is reflected in a number of monographs (see, Dubin 2013).

[4] 'Pyaterochka' is a Russian chain of neighbourhood grocery stores managed by X5 Retail Group. 'Diksi' is a large retail chain of neighbourhood grocery stores. 'Semya' is a Russian chain of grocery stores.

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