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Enhancing the capabilities of young Russians

Russia is a country with high regional differentiation, where higher incomes are increasingly concentrated in the largest cities, while the transformation of the economic structures in the 1990s in smaller settlements is impeded by the underdevelopment of the necessary infrastructure (Mikhalev, 1998). The focus of the present doctoral research is on the well-being of adolescents with different socio-economic backgrounds and from different regions of Russia, and on their expectations at the stage of transition to adulthood.

The research is conducted in the framework of the Capability Approach (CA), which is a broad normative framework for the evaluation and assessment of individual well-being (Robeyns, 2005). "Central to the CA is the concept of individual agency freedom, and a recognition that genuine freedom for a person to 'choose' has to be underpinned by resources and by personal, social and environmental factors that affect the ability to transform resources into opportunities" (Crompton, Lewis, Lyonette, 2007).

The aim is both to find out if there is a difference in the capabilities state of young Russians at the age of 16-18 and to analyze their well-being under the conditions of the socio-economic and socio-political transformation in the Russian Federation.

The general research question is: Do the young Russians at the age of 16-18 have equal opportunities to choose the way of life they have reason to value under the conditions of the socio-economic and socio-political transformation in the Russian Federation? Among the specific research questions the researcher will try to analyze the differences in young people's capability states between the small and big city in Russia; and between low income and better off families.

The focus of the research is on 16-18 year olds adolescents who are at the stage of taking important decisions: the choice of profession, the way of living, and the acquisition of independence. The adolescents are from better off families and low income families, living in small cities and in the big economically developed cities. Opportunities in small cities are fewer than in big cities due to badly developed social and transport infrastructure, fewer opportunities to study so well-being and the expression of "good life" between cities could differ.

The centres of family support of the different regions (Saint-Petersburg, the Leningrad region and the Novgorod region) as well as the schools have been contacted by the researcher to further select the interviewees. Two main tendencies of the behaviour of the social work agencies and schools with the external researcher have been found out:

- 1) to provide "the best respondents" who can give "correct" information from the perspective of the schools or family support centres;

2) to follow their own perspectives in order to resolve the problems of the most “difficult” clients with the help of new researcher from outside, so to give to the researcher the most difficult clients in order to pursue the goals of organization.

Moreover, the difficulties of conducting research without the permission of all agents of the controlling levels from the “top” (for example, the Committee of the Education) to the “bottom” (the social pedagogue at school) played a negative role in the data collection. So, organisational context of the social work agencies, institutionalised as public agencies plays enormous role in the success of the conducting research.

References:

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