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**«*Basic concept of goodness*»: justifications of everyday pro-
environmental practices of young Muscovites**

Over the past few decades, the problem of environmental degradation has become particularly significant in public discourse. According to opinion polls, there has been an increase in environmental awareness and concern about the ecological degradation and the request for preservation of the environment within the population [Changes and assessment..., 2019]. Even though the ecological involvement of the Russian population is gradually increasing, individuals are prone to paternalistic patterns of behavior in the sphere of care for themselves and environment [Global environmental problems, 2019; Care for the environment..., 2019]. And even the active young people (18-30 years old) are partially paralyzed by the state paternalism [Russia's "generation Z"..., 2020].

In this regard, in the present paper we aim to investigate how those who engage in the care for the environment, make sense of their practices, as they probably experience the most pronounced contradiction between proactive attitudes towards the environment and paternalism, ambiguous signals from the state regarding environmental regulation.

Focusing on the justifications of environmental practices for the individuals, from the point of their daily experience, we apply the qualitative methodology [Strauss, Corbin, 2008]. The empirical basis of the study was the data of 21 semi-structured in-depth interviews with ecologically oriented young Moscow residents aged 16-37 years old, who are involved in everyday environmental practices. The sample also included experts in the sphere of environmental studies and public administration, and people of other age cohorts.

As the empirical data suggests, everyday pro-environmental activity of young people is seen as the integral component of the new social order, and taking real actions to care for the environment normalizes. Following the pragmatic turn in the social order, the personal efforts (which might be small but meaningful) are crucial in the care for the environment, as individuals actively contribute to minimization of ecological risks and '*help the environment*'.

According to the narratives, proactive young people prioritize personal interest in motivating practices – and not only pro-environmental, but in everyday life in general. It appears important for them to be able to take responsibility for their lives, which is perceived not as a burden and obligation, but as an opportunity to make decisions in spite of coercion, restrictions, and prohibitions. Eco-friendly activity is perceived by them as their personal interest while

responsibility “*does not kill but encourages to go ahead and strive*”. Young people demonstrate the shift in the relationship between the natural environment and mankind, which seems to be framed as the reflexive ownership “*of the master*” rather than a wasteful destruction and reckless consumerism.

The orientation towards the personal interest might seem rather pragmatic, but in fact it is not absolutely embedded in industrial anthropocentric logic and market-based motivation. Being pro-environmental is seen as a new social norm, presenting moral guidelines and imperatives regarding the “human-environment” relationship. For young people, care for the environment becomes one of the central features of the modern subject from a moral and practical point of view, being embedded in civil liability and everyday habit. We suggest that by engagement in environmental agenda, they take up the issue of not only “*What kind of person I am*”, but also “*What kind of environment I want to see around me*”. And following the logic of “*simple solutions*”, by the “*small but personal contribution*” young people acquire agency in the ecological domain, constitute their subjectivity and define who they are for themselves and others, approaching the desired ideal type of a “*decent modern person*”.

The depicted ideal type of a “*good person*” is aware of the value of the environment and exhibits the real involvement in caring for it as a part of his/her daily routine. We suggest calling this ideal type of the modern social actor *homo ecologicus*. This desired subject, depicted by the young people in their narratives, is expected to be proactive, individualized, responsible.

What is more, the justifies by young people modern eco-friendly subject reflects the actualization of their demand for human rights (such as a decent environment and quality of life), social justice and citizenship [Nartova, 2019], socio-democratic values. Pro-environmental activity expands the field of political activity of young people [Russia’s “generation Z”..., 2020]. This is especially important in the Russian context of limited access to legitimate forms of political engagement [Yudin, 2020] and establishing communities, which are not represented by the “*marginal greens*”, but constitute an essential form of citizenship.

By applying the qualitative methodology, we relied on the interpretative paradigm of social analysis and focused on how individuals subjectively mark the particular practices as significant for saving the environment. It seems to be an important theoretical contribution of the study, as in the previous sociological work on the issue of pro-environmental attitudes and behavior little attention has been paid to one’s personal arguments of ecological activity in favour of studying strictly operationalized practices and their determinants.

As for the practical implications of the study, we suggest that the results could form the basis of public policy in the ecological domain, promoting pro-environmental activity among the population. For the proper legitimation, its directions should be embedded in the “close-to-

experience” categories and attitudes of individuals, in particular, emphasizing the importance of citizenship and the idea of a “*good person*”. By focusing on the younger people with pronounced pro-environmental attitudes, we challenge the claim that they can be considered a more progressive social group and become a driving force for environmental concern and proactivity. They not only actively initiate public environmental discussions, but also become a real example of how everyday eco-practices can be enacted.

However, it is important to note that in their narratives young people depict a pretty optimistic picture of personal pro-environmental practices (which still indicates the shift in social order and the guidance for the young people). In reality, they are not fully prepared to take on personal responsibility in caring for the environment, as they rely on governmental support, its institutional and infrastructural impact. And this request seems to be an important direction of further empirical research and real policymaking in the sphere of pro-environmental activity.

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