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To cite this article: V A Plekhanova *et al* 2021 *IOP Conf. Ser.: Mater. Sci. Eng.* **1079** 042018

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240th ECS Meeting ORLANDO, FL

Orange County Convention Center Oct 10-14, 2021



Abstract submission due: April 9

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Historical and Cultural Features of Russian Home Interior in the Context of Daily Routine

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Abstract. The article presents the analysis of the daily urban culture dynamics of the Russians and the interior design features of the urban Russian Home in the Soviet and post-Soviet periods. The interior, being the embodiment of the material and symbolic human environment represented by Home, is considered as a source of historical and cultural information about a person. The daily routine of a mainstream citizen was studied, reflecting the dynamics and contradictions of drastic historical changes and allowing to understand the cultural mentality at certain historical stages. In addition to photographic materials of the Russian housing interiors in the Soviet and post-Soviet periods, media resources data, such as: mass media publications, Internet sites materials, the article also contains the results of the authors' interviews of the residents of the city of Vladivostok. The peculiar features of the Soviet and modern Russian mentality of the average urban resident were highlighted, the trends in the development of Russian urban daily routine were identified. The history of the mainstream Russian interior dating from 1917 up to 2018, represented by the examples of typical housing for its time, clearly reflects the complex path of transforming Russian daily routine from asceticism and sacrifice of the 1920s to the apparently prosperous everyday life of the 1980s and its modern inconsistency. A comparative analysis of the mainstream and elite Russian home interiors reveals significant differences in their quality and, accordingly, the incomparability of daily household culture of different social layers of Russian society. These contradictions in society can be traced throughout the post-revolutionary period and are increasing in modern Russia.

1. Introduction

In the 80s of the last century, the perception of daily routine as the basic and necessary background to sociocultural studies of a person's life and understanding of his being in the context of specific cultural and historical conditions, became practically all-civilizational. The most significant for the scientific research of daily routine is the everyday life of the average mainstream person, reflecting the



dynamics and contradictions of radical historical changes and allowing to understand the cultural mentality at certain historical stages.

A concept of Home takes a special place in the studies of daily routine. The daily household culture depends on the natural and geographical conditions, economic relations and the social structure of society. Home is considered to be the material and symbolic human environment, which is embodied in its interior. As a phenomenon of daily routine culture, it is identified as an important source of historical, cultural and social information about a person. Analyzing the history of Home and, in particular, its interior design, it is possible to study both the culture of daily routine and the culture of a certain historical period as a whole. Being a reflection of the daily routine culture, housing and its design are the key factors for its optimization.

Despite its large volume, the studies of the Soviet and post-Soviet daily routine culture are still very fragmented, discrete in space and time. The daily life of mostly big cities was thoroughly researched, and the periods which caused the greatest interest among scientists were the ones of certain radical restructuring associated with revolutionary and modernization transformations or other extreme situations in the country. The contemporary correlations of the daily routine culture and the household design of the Russians have not been practically studied. Accordingly, the objective of this work is to analyze the dynamics of the daily urban culture of the Russians and specific interior design features of the peripheral Russian Home in the Soviet and post-Soviet periods in order to identify certain changes in the mentality and daily routine of a modern Russian citizen.

2. Materials and methods

The study is based on formal-stylistic, historical-genetic and sociological methods.

The article contains photographs of home interiors of the Russians in the Soviet and post-Soviet periods, media resources data: mass media publications and materials from Internet sites. Another important source for the study is the interview data obtained from the survey conducted by the authors among the residents of Vladivostok. The chronological framework of theoretical analysis (early 1920s-2018) covers a period of historically significant events which influenced the development of the country's culture, including the daily household culture.

The main features of Soviet daily routine in the context of historical changes in our country throughout the twentieth century were analyzed according to the scientific literature and Internet sources devoted to this issue, and in relation to the deep, socio-cultural features of the Russian mentality, predetermined by the natural factors of the Russian Earth, socio-economic conditions and ideological influences during its formation. The daily routine is viewed in the context of one aspect of material routine structure - the internal ambience of home, specifically, in the interior design features of different Soviet periods since the socio-economic conditions, moral state of society, religious and aesthetic views of a person are primary reflected in the household design [1-4].

3. Discussion and results

By the beginning of the 20th century, to have individual housing was considered a norm for the daily routine of a Russian city resident. The events of October 1917 became a highly destructive "explosion" for the binary Russian culture. It broke a stable concept -norm "Home" as a closed sphere of private life which had been long preserved in a city citizen mentality. After October 1917, a progressive collapse of household started in Russia, instead of which a communal apartment appeared, which became a part of the urban subculture [5]. The features of communal housing (constant conflicts, mismanagement of the tenants, resulting in housing damage) are best reflected in the interiors of some public zones (Figure 1a). The devastation after the Civil and Great Patriotic wars, a seventy-year period of the deficit of goods, intensive ideological brainwashing of population, as well as pressure from enforcement agencies consolidated many negative features in the Russian mentality: unpretentiousness, self-restraint, the habit of queues, the habit of substandard living conditions, blind obedience [6]. Only socio-economic conditions of the 1960s-70s, primarily a skip from mass communal housing to individual one, led to significant changes in the Soviet mentality: the loss of

blind faith in communist ideals, a surge of religiosity on this basis, and the revival of national consciousness. The daily routine of the 1980s, despite the growing deficit of both industrial goods and food products, was perceived by the majority of the population as relatively stable and sustainable due to a higher living standard comparing to the previous years and encouraging prospects for solving housing problems.

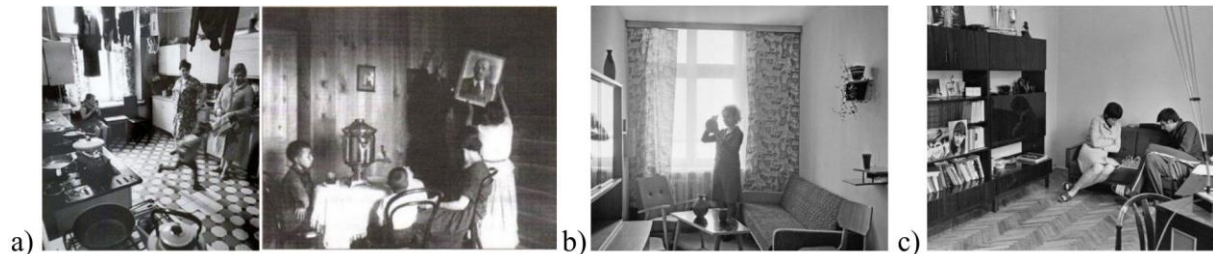


Figure 1. a) communal apartments of the 1920s-1930s. [7; 8]; b) the interior of a studio apartment, 1963 [9]; c) Soviet interior of the 1970s-1980s. [9].

The history of mainstream Russian interior from 1917 to the end of the 80s of the twentieth century, presented in Figure 1, clearly reflects the complex nonlinear path of the Soviet daily routine transforming from asceticism and sacrifice of the 1920s to the apparently prosperous life of the 1980s. However, such views on the last decade of the USSR's existence did not reflect the actual outcomes of the country's seventy-year development, but rather were the results of the ideological brainwashing process of mass consciousness, double morality of the elite, inaccessibility of information about the real state of the economy, and the removal of people from conscious participation in the country's fate. All this led to the revolutionary events of the early 90's of the twentieth century, to a new explosion, collapse of the socialist system, the Soviet Union, the established daily culture of almost the entire population of the country.

The goal of this work was not to analyze the extremely complex and continuous socio-political processes of the post-Soviet period, but to make an attempt to assess the occurring transformations of the Soviet mentality judging by the current state of housing of the average Russian citizen, to identify trends in the development of the Russian daily household culture, to navigate in its possible directions in the context of global transformations. We focused on the daily routine of the average Russian citizen, owner of individual urban housing in the far outskirts of our country – in the city of Vladivostok.

A comparative analysis of the Soviet interiors (1960s-1990s, Figure 1b, 1c) and the real modern ones of the average urban resident (Figure 2) allows us to note that the well-being of the population in the post-Soviet period has certainly increased comparing to the last Soviet decades. An opportunity to purchase a variety of household possession, furnishings, modern decoration materials has recently appeared. In accordance with the Western trends, corner sofas, folding beds, block furniture, hidden wall closets now appear in the apartments. Such pieces of furniture as cupboards and secretaries have disappeared along with the “exhibitions” of dishes, cheap souvenir statues. Instead, various magnets on the walls of refrigerators have become available memorable souvenirs about foreign travels (Figure 2). The most important feature of the internal area of home is its informational content and equipment with inventions. Answering the question of the authors’ interview: “What is the difference between modern housing and the older one?”, more than half of the respondents highlighted the technical equipment of modern housing. The fact that almost each apartment (regardless of its area) has a computer is a typical feature of the time. Today’s daily household culture can not be viewed without the Internet, which means without social networks, online stores, online libraries. Accordingly, the bookshelves and bookcases which used to be integral parts of furniture in previous times, now have almost disappeared (or have been camouflaged) in modern apartments. There are no more “ideological icons”, for example, the portraits of past or current political leaders. Among the modern decoration pieces are various paintings, vases, photo frames, decorative pillows instead of carpets, curtains,

tablecloths, crystal glassware and wooden souvenirs which used to prevail in Soviet interiors (Figure 2).



Figure 2. Modern interiors of a mainstream city resident (author's photo archive).

Meanwhile, the common and permanent housing feature of the average Russian citizen is a space limit. Using of multifunctional and built-in furniture allows us to partially solve this problem, as well as a problem of “household rubbish”. However, it is absolutely impossible to allocate some zones for additional purposes, for example, for a working office, a workshop, a laundry room, or a gym area. The interior content, styling and shaping of standard apartments are mostly the same. It means that “like everyone else” principle is still prevailing in the household design for a mainstream city resident, although none out of the 20 respondents noted it as determining their housing interior. As in the Soviet period, the perception of modern interiors of the average urban resident (Figure 2) is deteriorating due to inadequate compliance with aesthetic design principles: lack of rational functional zoning; the use of content elements disproportionate to the space available; lack of a perspective view on the possible space transformation; ignorance of the color harmony laws.

Comparing the interiors of the Soviet period and the modern ones, the following positive changes are revealed in the mentality of the average Russian, representing his daily routine culture: the rejection of communist ideology, a break with the deficit psychology, the development of aesthetic ideas about interior design which is related to the communicational and technological progress. At the same time, a modern city resident still indirectly reveals the authentic rooted traits of the Russian mentality: self-restraint, tolerance and the habit of communal life cultivated by the Soviet housing policy. To overcome these traits is apparently problematic due to the poverty of the major part of the country's population, inability to defend their rights, insecurity of legal protection. The negative impact of the last two reasons is supplemented by an increasing social distance of Russian citizens, a switch from the Soviet collectivism and priority of social values to individualism and the paramount value of the family. This is confirmed by the answers to the authors' interview question: “What are your core values?” - 75% of the respondents noted the family, another 10% - the children, and only one survey participant from the older age group marked the universal value - “peace”. These results confirm the data previously obtained by sociologists, who noted that in recent years in Russia there is an increase of indexes indicating the strengthening of individualistic orientations leading to the preference of personal interests over the public (collective) ones, the “small world” of daily routine over the “big world” of civil society, political initiatives and market entrepreneurship [10].

In response to the interview question: “What does your home mean to you?” – 75% of respondents rated it as an important part of everyday life (“fortress”, “place of established daily routine”, “personal

space”), and only 25% of respondents assessed it negatively – as “temporary shelter”, “overnight”, “irritant” and even “a prison with a computer”. Despite the small number of interviewees (30 people), these data are consistent with the questionnaire survey results (encompassing 546 people). The above information allows us to make an assumption about a significant role of household life in the modern daily routine structure of the given contingent. Moreover, the answers to the interview question “What are your core values?” as “education aspiration”, “development of creative abilities”, “religiosity” representing spiritual sphere are not a value priority for 90% of respondents. Considering that we can conclude that this assumption is quite reasonable. The modern post-industrial civilization has formed another system of values, the most important positions in which are proactive, creative transforming initiatives of a person, scientific knowledge and human personality itself [11]. Here we have to agree with I.P. Polyakova’s opinion that the main direction in the Russian mainstream daily routine transformation in accordance with global trends should be a change in the ratio of its spiritual and material spheres.

If we compare the mainstream Russian interior to the elite one (Figure 3), it is necessary to pay attention to significant differences in their qualities and, accordingly, to the incomparable daily life of different social layers of Russian society throughout the post-revolutionary period. Moreover, according to the Federal State Statistics Service, this gap as a consequence of real income decrease for 90% of the country's population, has grown over the past three decades [12]. It is noted in the World Inequality Report that income inequality is growing almost all over the world, but Russia in recent years has become one of the leaders in this indicator. The above mentioned data make the authors to once again draw attention to the authentic Russian trait strengthened by the years of the totalitarian regime – tolerance.



Figure 3. a) the interior of N.Milyutin’s penthouse, 1929-1933. [13]; b) the interior of G.Ya. Chaltykyan’s 2-room apartment, 1969 [9]; c) a modern elite Russian interior [14].

4. Conclusions

1. Seventy years of the totalitarian Soviet regime have consolidated many negative features in the Russian mentality: unpretentiousness, self-restraint, the habit of queues, the habit of substandard living conditions, blind obedience.

2. Changes in the post-Soviet mentality are primarily associated with the loss of trust in communist ideals and Soviet collectivism, a break with the psychology of deficit, and the development of aesthetic ideas about interior design which is related to the communicational and technological progress.

3. The modern mainstream home design reflects the ethnic mentality manifested in the original Russian character traits (tolerance, self-restraint) and the Soviet psychology of communal life that has been preserved to these days.

4. The household life takes a predominant place in the daily routine of the average city resident, therefore, the main direction of its transformation in accordance with global trends should be a change in the ratio of its spiritual and material spheres.

5. Significant differences in the quality of mainstream and elite interiors and, accordingly, the incomparability of daily routine of different social layers can be traced throughout the post-revolutionary period and are increasing in modern Russia.

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