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# **BECOMING A SUBWAY USER: MANAGING AFFECTS AND EXPERIENCES**

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## **BECOMING A SUBWAY USER: MANAGING AFFECTS AND EXPERIENCES<sup>2</sup>**

This paper focuses on a subway user, one of the main characters of mundane mobility in big cities. It is based on the field research conducted by the author in two Russian cities (Moscow and Kazan) in 2013-2014. The subway is considered not only as public transportation, but more broadly as a regulation tool that is used by *homo mobilis* to construct a wide network of relationships: with a city, with time, with one's daily activities. The notion of “affect management” - the urbanite's ability to manage their own emotional states and experiences - is suggested to describe the role of the subway in everyday life planning.

**JEL Classification:** Z

**Key words:** mundane mobility, subway, subway user, affect management, Moscow, Kazan

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## BECOMING A SUBWAY USER: MANAGING AFFECTS AND EXPERIENCES

The discovery of *'homo mobilis'* brought to life new 'analytical Pantheon of heroes'. Almost for two decades the attention of researchers was centered not on common people whose daily travels along the habitual routes constitute the changeable landscape of move but "the central figures in the production of modern mobility" (Cresswell, 2011: 239): pilgrims, tourists (Bauman, 1996; Urry, 1990), vagabonds (Cresswell, 2011), – those who display the basic cultural and social conventions of modern traveling. This opting for a large-scale picture was pretty reasonable, as it enabled researchers to present mobility as one of the crucial assemblage points of contemporary society. It has also led mobility studies onto a new level and created a new analytic field out of disparate studies previously separated by disciplinary boundaries. And yet it was precisely this obsession with the large-scale picture that, at a certain point, turned out to be an analytical deadlock<sup>4</sup>. It formed over-researched areas such as 'structures', 'flows', etc., while disregarding the small-scale routine everyday travels.

A short time ago mundane mobility finally came to the front of attention, presenting trajectories of numerous 'new' actors such as commuters, passers by, etc. (Binnie, et al., 2007; Edensor, 2011; Wunderlich, 2008). The passenger was discovered as the central figure of everyday travelling (Adey, et al., 2011; Adey, et al., 2012; Bissell, 2009, 2010; Vozyanov, 2012). In this new situation, the experiencing of mobility requires a "detailed and rich ethnography of everyday life from which potentially new meanings, concepts and frameworks might arise" (Bull, 2000: 4) rather than ready-made theories for description of newly discovered reality.

The significance of the 'discovery of the passenger' notwithstanding, I think it is important to avoid the trap of preset analytical schemes. This is why I prefer to speak not about the *passenger* but about the *public transport user*<sup>5</sup>, meaning the *metro user* in the present case. The passenger experience is limited by the fragmentary character of the role performed and is typically confined to individual

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<sup>4</sup> See Ole Jensen on megalomania of mobility studies: '[T]here is a need to comprehend and conceptualise the interaction and everyday level of flow and mobility in the midst of an intellectual climate dominated by grand theories of networks and globalization'. Jensen O. 'Facework', *Flow and the City: Simmel, Goffman, and Mobility in the Contemporary City // Mobilities*. Vol. 1. No. 2. P. 144.

<sup>5</sup> This category is used by researchers, but usually it is not specially defined or considered as heuristically significant. See: Haddington P., Rauniomaa M. *Interaction Between Road Users: Offering Space in Traffic // Space and Culture*. 2014, Vol. 17(2). P. 176–190.

events (i.e. trips or preparing for them), whereas the suggested notion of public transport user allows to find the balance: while preserving an association with specific transit means, it makes it possible to appeal to broader contexts such as one's relationship with the city, with time, with one's daily activities, etc. Thus the traveling experience stops being an inherent value, turning instead into a regulation tool that is used by *homo mobilis* spontaneously or deliberately to construct a wide network of relationships. Such an approach seems reasonable, for its ultimate assemblage point is the mobile person (the transport user) who moves through various environments and is exposed to their influence but has an ability to manage his or her feelings, emotions, and experiences.

When centering the subsequent discussion on the figure of the public transport user, two circumstances seem of key importance. One should bear in mind, first, the importance of the basic skills enabling a transport user to regular travel; and second, the changeability of these skills which emerge, evolve and disappear rapidly as the circumstances change.

Basic passenger skills are not as spellbinding to scholars as the 'art of traveling' which involves users inventing scenarios of their own, not imposed by the environment or conventions: "Passengers are like artists as they seek to accomplish their purposes and interact with instrumental tools in reflexive and creative ways" (Vannini, 2011: 1032). The lack of interest for basic skills is understandable: they seem too banal and predictable, and hence not worth special attention; every day, typified actions are reiterated by millions of public transport users: "Although there are, of course, individual dissidents, it is remarkable how much these rules ... are obeyed" (Moran, 2005: 54). The high rigidity of the public transport system inevitably leads to automation of habits and synchronized behavior. New modes of urban transit, mostly described in sci-fi novels, are a matter of the more or less distant future. What urban dwellers use on a daily basis are buses, trolleybuses, tramways, and metro trains – many of which have a lifespan of decades.

Urban changes such as the growing migration to big cities, constituent sprawl and complication of urban transportation networks result in a steadily increasing number of new users as well as in occasional need for long-standing ones to refresh their skills. These phenomena turn the question at issue into a quite pragmatic one: to what extent are newcomers and old-timers prepared to use the urban transportation systems?

Among the many kinds of modern urban transit means, the metro (one of the most important transportation technologies of urban modernity) is of particular interest. The world's first underground railway was opened in London in January 1863. The underground added a new dimension to the urban environment. It contributed greatly to the emergence of the mobile mass city, shaped its contours and rhythms, and determined the urban life skills<sup>6</sup>. By the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the metro already became a hallmark of the modern city, technicalized and dynamic. Frequently, the construction of an underground reflected major events that brought a city into the global frame of reference; the opening of the Paris subway timed for the Exposition Universelle of 1900 being a good example.

### **Starting points, key contexts and research methodology**

This research is focused on metro users of two Russian cities – Moscow and Kazan. In fact, it is a study of two polar cases. The subways of Moscow and Kazan have differing histories. The Moscow system is Russia's oldest (opened 1935), while the Kazan one is the youngest (opened 2005). Furthermore, the two subway systems differ in their impact on everyday life (8 million vs. 100 000 daily uses) as well as in terms of presence in urban physical and symbolical space (194 compared to 10 stations, respectively).

The following questions are starting points for my investigation: how is the metro used in Moscow and Kazan? How do users get used to this kind of transport, space and technology? Which scenarios not implied by the metro system are played daily by its users? My interest in the present topic – in the changeable and fluid practices, in the users of metros and in the world of their everyday experiences – diverges from what is becoming the mainstream in the Russian metro research<sup>7</sup>. The latter is much more interested in (not to say obsessed with) the past, the technology, the material environment, or the 'big figures' involved in the construction of the subway. Such accents are actually typical of research on metro systems everywhere else<sup>8</sup>. Without denying their importance, I prefer to focus on ordinary users and their micro-practices so as to place them in the frame of big contexts instead of just describing these contexts. This study is of an

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<sup>6</sup> See: *Diehl L. B.* Subways. The Tracks that Built New York City. Random House, 2004; *Wolmar C.* The Subterranean Railway: How the London Underground Was Built and How it Changed the City Forever. London: Allen & Unwin, 2012; *Schivelbusch W.* The Railway Journey: The Industrialization of Time and Space in the 19th Century. Berkley: University of California Press, 1986.

<sup>7</sup> See: *Paperny V.* Architecture in the Age of Stalin: Culture Two. NY: Cambridge University Press, 2011; *Neutatz D.* Die Moskauer Metro. Von den ersten Plänen bis zur Großbaustelle des Stalinismus. Köln: Böhlau Verlag, 2001; *O'Mahony M.* Sport in the USSR: Physical Culture - Visual Culture. London: Reaktion Books, 2006.

<sup>8</sup> See: *Day J.R., Reed J.* The Story of London's Underground (11<sup>th</sup> edition). London: Capital Transport Publishing, 2010; *Wolmar C.* Op.cit.

ethnographic kind; it is based on a series of regular participant observations, two go-alongs, 25 semi-structured interviews with metro users (the interviews were conducted by the author between January 2013 and February 2014 in Moscow and Kazan), analysis of related weblogs and forums, as well as journal and newspaper articles about metro transport. This study is the first step in a study on the daily uses of metros as an urban technology.

Research on public transit users (equally to urban studies) often distances itself from particular cities, cultural conventions, or broader contexts. To some extent this is justified by synchronization and standardization of transport technologies in modern cities. The similarity of basic logics of urban life is clearly visible when one travels from city to city. It is this similarity which permits visitors to feel rather confident in unfamiliar cities, relying on their basic knowledge of routines and rules when following the road signs, using ticket barriers, or getting geographical bearings. Such skills have become 'urban automatism', i.e. body techniques activated in certain situations. However, ignoring the uniqueness of particular spaces, urban environments, and cultural contexts is not always justified.

To comprehend the role of the metro in Russian cities today it is important to understand its intended role from 1935, when the first USSR metro was opened in Moscow. "Hardly any other construction of the former Soviet Union enjoys such popularity and symbolism as the metro does. Hardly any other construction has been covered so actively and for so many years by contemporary propaganda along with being estimated by Soviet authorities as one of the most important, if not the most important project of 1930s" (Neutatz, 2001).

The creation of '*Homo soveticus*' was based on a transformation of everyday life in a way that was intended to form the skills of collective life. Among other things it included the design of the urban material environment. A special role was assigned to the public transit system, which was to serve ideological functions along with pragmatic ones. The first Soviet metro was opened in Moscow – the symbolic center, the capital and the 'heart' of the state. For Soviet cities, the subway was absolutely new both as a mode of transport and as a way of space organization. It was a radical breakthrough in technology and politics. Interlaced into the daily life of the millions, the metro served as a regular memento of the success of Soviet power: "Throughout the spring and summer of 1935 metro fever gripped the capital. Posters promoting the metro were disseminated throughout the city; official hymns in praise of the metro were written and published in the press. And for days after inauguration, Muscovites walking through the city were likely

to encounter large-scale marches in honour of the metro" (O'Mahony, 2006: 100-101).

The initial construction and further development of the metro in the USSR remained a political affair in many senses. Metro systems were awarded as an honor prize to cities with extra significance for the Soviet state. Formally, only cities that reached the population rate of one million could expect to receive a metro. In practice, this pragmatic logic of growing demand for public transit means was broken from time to time. For example, in 1960-1970s metro systems were constructed in the capitals of Soviet republics with less than one million inhabitants<sup>9</sup> in order to underline their political meaning, while other 'million-cities'<sup>10</sup> were waiting for their turn.

Having a metro means high-cost large-scale technology, and this was heavily affected by the economic crisis of the 1990s. The expansion of existing subway systems was frozen, not to speak of the building of new ones. Kazan, the capital of Tatarstan, one of the richest and most influential sub-sovereign entities of Russia, is the only Russian city where the metro system was planned and built after the Soviet Union's collapse. It was inaugurated on August 27, 2005, with the leaders of Russia and Tatarstan present.

It was called into existence for a number of reasons. Certainly, the growing demand for public transit means and the need to ease the load of Kazan's above-ground space played their role. The city was facing especially pressing public transport issues in the early 2000s. The existing road infrastructure could not cope with the surging number of cars, buses and shuttle-vans. The high building density in the historic center and the bridge across the river acted as 'natural' barriers slowing down the traffic. However, no less important were the political ambitions of the city authorities and the Tatarstan Republic government who used the city as a showcase to demonstrate their achievements. Known since Soviet times as an emblematic urban technology, the metro was intended to become a convincing symbol of a city's high status. Interestingly, back in the 1970s, the future of the Kazan transport system was mostly associated with express streetcars. A metro was a probability, a hope, but not the plan at that time: "We plan the open express streetcar lines on which the trams will reach the speed of 25-30 km/h... To avoid

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<sup>9</sup> The number of residents in Tbilisi (the capital of the Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic) was less than a million by the time the subway was planned and built (1966). The number of residents in Baku (the capital of Azerbaijan Soviet Socialist Republic) by the time the subway was planned was much less than a million (652,507 in 1960), though it became 'the million-city', when the subway was constructed in 1967.

<sup>10</sup> For instance, Novosibirsk.

the intercrossing with other transit modes, the tramlines will be laid in shallow tunnels. This will enable transforming the express tramway into a metro in the long run" (Ostroumov, 1978: 264). The changing ambitions of city and republic authorities led to a revision of transit system development plans. The tram, even a fast one, was something many cities already had, while the metro persisted as a persuasive sign of exclusiveness, especially in 2000s.

Kazan confirmed its claims for special status among Russian cities after receiving the title of 'the third capital of Russia' in 2009. This brand distinguished it (at least, in a declarative sense) from other Russian large cities, and associated it with the present and the historical capital, Moscow and St. Petersburg. From time to time, Kazan reaffirms its status with big resonating events such as the celebration of its millennial anniversary in 2005 or the 2013 Summer Universiade.

### **The metro and its user: peculiarities of interaction**

Both contemporary culture and research often present the metro as a kind of conveyor, a rigid system that is almost impossible to change. Its user is expected to adapt and to act according to given parameters. This representation is confirmed and maintained by the widely replicated image of the metro during rush hours, when one's freedom is not just limited but minimized: "During rush hours, squeezed by the dumbly moving crowd, trying not to get hit by the sliding doors, one minced, constantly pushed from behind, to reach at last the endless belt of the escalator" (Neutatz, 2013: 9). Yet, important and problematic as they are, rush hours are far from being the only state of the metro. Indeed, they are much shorter than the regular traffic phases in which users do have the freedom of choice and maneuver.

Another doubt about the supposed full predetermination of the metro is based on the fact that systems do not work exactly as they were initially planned, and their total control is impossible. John Bushnell notes in his description of the Soviet city in 1970–1980s that even the most authoritarian regimes are unable to provide constant control over the whole urban space with all its folds, bends and entwinements (Bushnell, 1990). Despite all the spatial limitations (ironically described by one research participant saying, "The metro is not a park, you couldn't walk across the lawn and wear a path."), despite all the restrictive, prohibitive and alarmist rhetoric of the metro announcements, users do not perceive it as a narrow gauge or a total predetermination zone. There are spaces of variation that allow

alternative scenarios as long as these scenarios do not contradict the metro's basic principles or the rules of behavior in public spaces. As a designer of metro-based city quests notes:

In principle, we keep to the metro's rules of conduct. We do not vandalize... what else is forbidden there? People arrive at a station, count the lamps on its right side and go away, having taken a picture of themselves with those lamps in the background. I mean, we do not whoop it up, according to our rules... We warn [the players] that in Moscow you'd better carry your ID with you... What else? Running? Running is allowed in the Moscow metro, people do run along the connecting passages, on elevators they run. (Dmitry Slavin, designer of 'EGame urban quest' and 'Podzemka metro quest')

Using the areas of weaker regulation, the opportunities offered by the system and its failures, metro users create scenarios that were not foreseen either in the initial plan or by the functions of the metro. Thus they contribute to the diversification of its usage modes. Surprisingly, Kazan and Moscow subways turned out to be very humane, with people regularly helping one another to overcome the physical constraints such as inconvenient descent passages or absence of elevators:

It is always right to help. Because in Yasenevo, where I live, mothers can never get into the metro without assistance from the others. Thank God there are a lot of good people round. I have never seen a situation when a mother with a baby carriage would stand before the stairs for 10 minutes with no one coming up to help her. In a matter of seconds somebody comes and helps. In this respect the people are very nice. Sometimes it was fathers who helped me. I am a guy with a baby carriage, and they helped me. We would carry the baby stroller downstairs together. Such things happen, too. (freelancer, 30, has lived in Moscow since birth)

Besides, spaces are never closed or open to change absolutely<sup>11</sup>. Apart from the inherent possibilities for change they have, the degree of openness in a space varies depending on their relations with other spaces or technological systems. This allows us to regard the metro as a zone of considerable freedom, offering more options than many other modern systems, e.g. the GPS-navigators with their cryptic ways of fractioning routes.

Therefore, in what follows the metro user will be approached not only as one who adjusts to pre-defined scenarios, but also as a creator of their own trajectories and interpreter of existing spatial scripts; all the more so as the very design of the metro makes this possible.

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<sup>11</sup> For basic ideas on the relativist approach to space, see: *Massey D. For Space*. London: Sage Publications, 2005.

## **The Metro User These Days. Getting Used to the Subway**

It is not easy for urbanites to talk about their getting used to the metro and developing the skills of metro users. Being an inherent part of everyday life, metro trips rapidly become a routine that is hard to articulate: "Somehow this has quickly become something natural". (freelancer, 30, has lived in Moscow since birth)

Thus, eight years after the subway was built in Kazan, many conversation partners of mine believed it had always been there. They gladly shared memories of their first 'metro tours', their anxieties and delights about the new transit mode, but the further conversation was not so lively: right before one's eyes the metro turned into just another 'invisible' urban infrastructure. The interviewees were genuinely puzzled by the interest I took in their everyday stories. In this sense, the metro cannot be regarded as an exclusive experience; it is trivial and imperceptible like many other inseparable parts of urban everydayness.

While the Kazan subway has become *a habit* within eight years, the nearly 80-year-old Moscow one can be called *a habit with a history*. For Muscovites, it is good manners and a shibboleth of a long-term capital resident to disparage the metro. Their saying (or, more often, pattering), "Well, what's so special about it?" is not just showing off their status as Muscovites but also a tribute to habit, for since their early childhood they have been accustomed to the metro as an inevitable and permanent element of big city life. Metro user skills are instilled in the body of a child urbanite via co-actions of a parent-kid 'mobile hybrid':

Mom would press me to her belly, and we would pass the ticket-barrier in one – 'like a fat man', as we called it. I was small, I did not have to pay yet, but I couldn't go through on my own. (historian, 42, has lived in Moscow since birth)

Yet even for Muscovites the metro has not always been mundane. It is a breakage of routine and a distinctive sign of the metropolitan city or 'something bigger' when locals as urban experts present their city to visitors:

In olden times, I was a schoolgirl yet, our relatives would come from Ukraine, and the first thing to show the guest was the metro. (pensioner, 76, has lived in Moscow for 64 years)

At one time there were tokens in the metro, and they were different [this difference was only about the look, not about the functional side of the tokens – O.Z.]. One could make a joke on newcomers: 'This token is for your way there, and that one is for your way back.

You see, they are different. Don't mix them up'... Well, I am a metropolitan snob; I liked to joke with country cousins. (historian, 42, has lived in Moscow since birth)

For visitors to Moscow, the subway has long been a major attraction, affordable fun, and a source of intensive urban experiences – delights and fears alike:

I remember we were shown the main sights like the Mausoleum, the Kremlin... But the subway made the brightest impression... It was like a fairy tale, being carried by that staircase somewhere, up or down... And the second was that experience of trains running under the ground: how they arrive, and how these beautiful lights shine in the tunnel, and how they dash out to the platform. And when coming up to the edge of platform you would be afraid to fall down there. (lecturer, 42, has lived in Kazan for 25 years)

For non-residents the metro was a different world with its own borders. The escalator served as one of them until the recent time. This technological wonder, the 'fairy staircase', was perceived by many as the main symbol of the metro.

I suppose I stepped down into the metro when I came to Moscow with my parents. I was about eight or nine years old... I definitely remember that the metro impressed me a lot, and I rode on an escalator with my father and mother a number of times. And my parents asked the permission from the woman sitting there: 'Let us go up and down once more!' And she permitted us to ride the escalator several times without paying those five kopecks. (lawyer, 34, has lived in Moscow for 13 years)

The narration about recent metro experiences forms a map of trips. This map is predominantly 'Moscow-centric': Moscow, far less often than Leningrad/St Petersburg, was the central 'metro initiation site' for plenty of out-of-towners. Journeys to the capital were part of Soviet citizens' tourist experience, but also part of quite down-to-earth life strategies, including studying or shopping. The shortage economy concentrated consumer goods in the capital, transforming visits to Moscow into an annual ritual for millions of Soviet people who also acquired city life skills during these trips:

Given the foodstuffs shortage here at that time, all Kazan used to go to other cities. So it was nothing new for us as a transport means. When we all stayed in Moscow... All of us commuted there... In the evening we departed from here, spent a day over there and then came back here". (employed pensioner, 62, has lived in Kazan since birth)

The subway systems of Moscow and (less often) Leningrad were regarded as samples of 'true' metros as opposed to those in other cities which were less extensive, less complicated, and definitely less impressive:

I remember some nice station in Yekaterinburg. Couldn't recall [its name] anymore. But it was Novosibirsk and Yekaterinburg where I got metro experience. And then there are the Moscow and the St Pete metros. But they are something different, of course. (employee, 33, has lived in Kazan for 2 years)

Present-day stories of metro users show that the 'magic' of metros gradually recedes into the past. At some point in time its meaning changes: from a technical wonder it turns into a city museum, a manifestation of technological progress and becomes a retro-exhibit. As a part of urban imaginary, the metro failed to compete with the sophisticated media and urban attractions and with more advanced urban technologies or extreme experiences. From this perspective, the logic of the Kazan authorities proved to be rather vulnerable: they aimed to get something exceptional, but what they got was only exceptional by obsolete standards. The metro is the 'ideal technology of the past' (which by no means lessens its value as a transportation mode). In today's symbolic frame of reference, the metro is no longer a breakthrough urban technology but rather a curious object. It catches the visitor's eye with its novelty to the same extent that other urban innovations do; they all dissolve in the flow of new urban impressions and multiplying attractions. Whereas previously it was typical of Muscovites to conceive of the metro as something common ("I have never discerned the subway as something... as a specific object", says a freelancer, 30, who has lived in Moscow since birth), today this inattention is equally widespread among Kazan residents, as well. For many, the first underground trip was not associated either with strong emotions or with substantial difficulties. It was rendered habitual in advance:

Q: Can you remember your first metro trip?

A: Well, it was ordinary... After all, what is special about that? Escalators are all around now, in any shopping mall. (student, 21, has lived in Kazan for four years, never used the metro before coming to Kazan).

Why are metro passengers prepared for their trips in advance or at least have no difficulty joining the large flow? How are the metro user skills formed? I suppose all the diversity of techniques, knowledge, and intuitions of metro users can be narrowed down to three (as a minimum) components: interaction with materiality and technology (hardware skills), interaction with other people (software skills) and interaction with the space (spatial skills). Of course, the suggested classification is relative; these three kinds of skills are closely intertwined, but it is these sorts of 'underground experiences' that are most frequently identified by users as something that requires special competencies.

Undoubtedly, as every other formal system, the subway offers its users a set of formalized instructions. Reading them persuades that their addressee is not a novice who goes underground for the first time but a competent metro user. They do not explain how to behave underground, assuming that the basic relevant skills have already been learned somewhere. Instead, they enumerate certain actions that a metro user must not undertake (for instance, walking without shoes). How are basic skills acquired? Metro researchers today are inspired by the idea of the underground material environment itself being instructive. They suppose that the very organization of space, the technologies and the orientation schemes generate specific ways of conduct (Denis, Pontille, 2010). Along with that, one can spot other ways of becoming an advanced metro user as well, e.g. skill transfer, imitation, sharing 'secret' knowledge, or independent acquisition of skills.

Today a metro user easily applies the skills acquired in other cities or other urban spaces to the subway:

People are well trained by the buses... We don't see any crowding or boorishness here: everybody stands and waits calmly. (employed pensioner, 62, has lived in Kazan since birth)

Our people are already advanced in this respect [i.e. using the metro]. Everybody was socialized in Moscow and learned [how to behave in the subway]. (employed pensioner, 62, has lived in Kazan since birth)

This is especially true for hardware such as turnstiles, escalators, and sliding doors. The easiness of *transfer* is explained by the fact that the city has finally caught up with the metro or even outstripped it as to the level of technical equipment. The degree of technical complexness and automation in many urban spaces outside the metro is such that people who acquire new skills there are prepared to face the underground environment. In Russian cities, the role of such 'exercisers' was played by modern shopping malls that have substantially changed the urban environment since the early 2000s. They set new standards of space organization and technical equipment (Zhel'nina, 2011):

Ok, well, we constantly pass through arches (of metal detectors – O.Z.) in shopping malls. Why would it scrape us in the metro? (analyst, 30, was born and used to live in Kazan, moved to Moscow 3 years ago)

Yet the transfer of skills is not always possible or reasonable. In such cases, it is imitation that helps. The metro is an ideal urban platform for 'learning by doing':

with numerous examples of action right before their eyes, the newcomer imitates the movements and the individual gestures of occasional travel companions. Of course, a newcomer is noticeable. He is given away by unconfident footstep, constrained motions and looking about (Auge, 2002). However, the adaptation proceeds rather quickly, as the examples are permanently observable. A person entering the metro gets caught and carried away by a more or less dense flow of passengers; sometimes the automatism of this flow is viral: novices are misguided by the confidence and purposefulness of their fellow travelers, follow them and finally find themselves on a wrong platform.

Imitation may be impeded by desynchronization of usage scenarios. For example, in the Kazan metro there is no unitary subway choreography yet. Here, one can observe typical urban space usage practices and unhurried rhythms as well as specific underground motion scripts implemented. The latter are promoted both by subway staff and some of the passengers but have not become the commonly shared rule yet.

Honestly speaking, this enrages me, I mean the escalators. If I want to go along the left side, I have to spurn them all. People are not accustomed to [using the escalators properly]. People have no idea. They all just stand there in a very, very sedate way and chat, notwithstanding the announcements sounding from loudspeakers that tell them to stand on the right side and let those going along the left side pass by... Zero [attention]. (employee, 32, has lived in Kazan for 15 years)

The absence of a synchronized choreography in Kazan is not surprising: until very recently the metro here was rarely used. A small number of stations served a scanty passenger flow. Occasionally, a metro trip even was an experience of extreme solitude in a huge space designed for masses of users; this situation required adaptation as well:

At first, not many people used the metro. Sometimes I happened to be traveling alone in the train car, if not in the whole train. To tell you the truth, that was scary, and I sang. Yes, I sang, because something had to be done to overcome the fear. (analyst, 30, was born and used to live in Kazan, moved to Moscow 3 years ago)

Though the rules of metro use have existed for decades and seem universal, it turns out they are not set in stone. Recently, the Moscow metro introduced changes which affect, in the first place, behavior on escalators. In order to increase the capacity of escalators, passengers going up are requested to stay by two on each step. This could be seen as an erosion of the habitual freedom of traveling and pace choice. Passengers are approached as cargo with certain dimensions that have

to be delivered to a destination in a strictly regulated way. They are not viewed as metro users who more or less successfully make their way on their own.

Though their trajectories are prescribed and their skills work automatically, metro users have to act by themselves. To plan their travel route and to choose the right direction, they have to be very attentive and thoughtful. When going underground, one cannot rely on the familiar urban navigation means anymore, since the semiotic environment of the subway is artificial and devoid of common orienting points (Auge, 2002). Underground, the 'extended vision', which one mainly relies on above the ground, is limited by the walls of stations or passages. One the key subway skills is the ability to find one's way in branchy and trickily organized interchange passages. Moving through such labyrinths takes more than knowing one's final destination: one has to decide all the time when and where to turn, and when to change the platform:

The Moscow metro. I didn't crack it, I get snarled in these passages... There is a station here that has one line on one side of the platform and another line on the other side. I was so stressed about it because I had no idea of how it could be possible. It turned out that the system of interchange passages splits the lines, too. It is very complicated for me. (lecturer, 42, has lived in Kazan for 25 years)

So far, our subway has no interchanges. So far, our subway experience is that of the classical suburban train. That means, one embarks at a station, rides to the station one needs and gets off... As yet it is a very simple thing to learn. All one has to do is enter and exit. (translator, 37, has lived in Kazan since birth).

Scrutinizing the metro and grasping the logic of its spatial and motional organization, urbanites make their own paths. "Let's come up to the third car, it will be a shorter way from there", "Which car should I get in so as to get off closer to the exit I need?" are phrases we can regularly hear in the metro. The precision and detailing of the route may vary, from figuring out the optimal car, and even door, to just a general idea of the proper moving direction. Mass transit technology is only partially friendly to an individual, but laying one's own routes transforms it into a more or less cozy environment, something like a tailored coat or suit. Like clothes, it can be put on or taken off, mended and renewed, reacting to changes in underground space and its owner's needs. One gets accustomed to this shell and attached to it like a good old jacket. The routes one lays create the feeling of a familiar and understandable subway. One can share them with other users. These routes can eventually become shared knowledge on how to make a shortcut, how to avoid staircases by using an escalator instead, what to pay attention to, etc. This knowledge can be transferred orally from person to person in contrast to the

usually depersonalized written metro instructions. Together with many other practices, this oral information is layered over the obvious and constitutes a porous multi-layered subway, creates secret metro expert communities.

### **The Use of the Metro for Affect Management**

Why do urban residents use the metro? The answer to this question has remained unchanged for a century and a half, coinciding with the metro's ideology: a subway passenger was viewed as an urban 'utility maximizer' who aims to reduce the trip duration by choosing to travel under the jammed city streets. However, this explanation is just the tip of the iceberg. Narratives of metro users demonstrate a much more complex reasoning. When taking the metro is really the choice one makes and not an 'inherited practice', not an automatic urban practice, and not the only option one has, it can mean more than just preferring some routes to others. Sometimes this choice is well reflected upon, but sometimes barely realized; it is always the choice of emotional and mental states to be experienced as well as the choice of spending one's time. This choice is made by the numerous 'daily travelers' who plot and adjust their habitual routes every day.

That urbanites use the metro as an affective management tool was quite a surprising finding. Both in Kazan and in Moscow users kept emphasizing that emotions connected with metro trips meant a lot to them. In Kazan, they noted that the new transit means gave them tranquility and reduced the transport stress, thus providing a good mood for the whole day. Muscovites were not that univocal in their comments on the metro, especially as far as the rush hours were concerned; still, in general they recognized the metro's capability to shape one's mood. But when speaking about their emotions, metro users made a point of stressing their own ability to manage their emotional state to some extent – whether by choosing an alternative transport mode, by somehow keeping themselves busy during the trip, or just by closing their eyes and turning in upon themselves.

The concept of affect management – an urbanite's ability to manage their own emotional states – contradicts the traditional concept of 'unilateral' relationship between humans and the city, which supposes that the city 'starts and wins', causing certain feelings in humans. The city's impact on individuals is described by a number of classical categories such as 'blasé attitude' (Simmel) or 'psychogeography' (Debord). According to Simmel, the modern city attacks one with a variety of rapidly changing states, abundance of objects and human diversity, causing the 'blasé attitude', universal and efficient in any situation. It is an attitude typical of an everyman perplexed by changes, a vitally important urban

life skill. Though very different, the 'situationist' approach is based on an original assumption that is quite close to Simmel's idea. According to it, the city does not respond to the desires and intentions of the individual. On the contrary, it is the individual who reacts to the city, experiencing various feelings in an urban environment: "Psychogeography will aim to study the precise laws and specific affects of the geographic milieu, consciously planned or not, acting directly on the affective comportment of the individuals" (Debord, 2009: 59). The picture imagined by situationists is a bit more diverse since it supposes that there are sources of various emotions present in the city. However, it also gives the priority to the city and its ability to provoke emotional feedback.

The supposed objectivism of urban environment was first called into doubt by researchers who studied urbanite use of modern devices – the 'Walkman' (Bull, 2000), mobile phones (Geser, 2004; Kopomaa, 2004), etc. – to transcend the experiences determined by certain spaces. Later on, this was described as the idea of a mutual impact of the individual and the urban environment (Brighenti, 2010). Its basic theses were in tune with current theoretical queries (Ahmed, 2004).

City dwellers nowadays are sensitive to their emotional states, not to say obsessed with them. It is the human-focused organization of modern life that teaches individuals to pay attention to themselves. Modern 'city neurotics' are extremely sensitive to the world and endlessly attentive to the self, yet their main distinction is that they possess a plentitude of routine skills and options of managing their own experience. To a great extent, their expertise in affect management is accumulated and augmented due to everyday life skills such as using devices, creating imaginary worlds, working on the relationships, etc. People use things and devices on daily basis to create a comfort artificial mobile environment ('encounters shield' (Goffman), 'audio bubble' (Bull, 2000; 2007). They dive into the world of the imagination to be able to reach the desired state of mind. They work on the relationships with their nearer circle and their own emotions (Giddens, 1992). Finally, they try to manage the intensity of urban routine through free-will reclusion, escaping from the city while remaining in the city (*hikikomori*<sup>12</sup>). Along with that, competences built in the sphere of affective labor play a significant role in the managing of emotional states.

At some point using the public transport becomes an essential component of affect management<sup>13</sup>. This has to do both with increased trip duration and with

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<sup>12</sup> For more information on urban escapees - *hikikomori* or NEET (not in employment, education or training) see: Goodman R., Imoto Y., Hannu T., Toivonen I. (eds.) *A Sociology of Japanese Youth: From Returnees to NEETs*. Abingdon, Routledge, 2012.

<sup>13</sup> See: Bissell D. *Commuting stress, affective labour and the transformation of urban subjectivities*. Available at:

emotion control skills growing more complex. The role of public transport is only beginning to be discovered by analytics. Previously, the transport was considered a source of 'physiological arousal, task performance and negative affect' (Novaco, et al., 1979), but not an affect management tool. Under the old approach, the passenger appeared as a 'commuting stress' victim with little possibility to influence what was happening to them (Novaco, et al., 1979), with trips reducing their working capacity, making them feel unwell and facilitating depression (Koslowsky, et al., 1995).

Nowadays, metro users definitely cannot be described as victims of the transport system. The city-dwellers themselves assign it a more complex role in their everyday life planning. Planning in this case would mean not the maximum saturation of trips with activities but understanding their part in the variety of everyday actions, relationships and moods.

### **Choosing the relationship with the transit means. Metro as an urban tranquilizer**

Apparently, something similar was felt by residents of different cities where the subway was introduced throughout the last century and a half. This was a feeling of a newly established stableness, predictability and some kind of peace. The Kazan metro users began to have such feelings in the late 2000s, after the subway line became longer and turned from a tourist attraction into the main connection between opposite ends of the city. At one point, it was truly a chance for the inhabitants to escape the above-ground chaos. They could avoid the congested streets along with endless construction sites, roads under repair, and temporarily changed public transit lines – the effects of preparations for the 2013 Universiade:

It is true, this is what our city looks like lately. I think this has to do with the construction, with the Universiade. Construction sites and traffic jams are all around. But I like the metro very much. I only use the metro. It is very convenient, and it takes me to my job location. It satisfies me. (employed pensioner, 60, has lived in Kazan for 35 years)

In May 2013, the Kazan metro was extended to reach 10 stations. It took part of the load away from the overcrowded surface transport and made urban travels more predictable and comfortable. The regularity of its operation, small amount of passengers (in relation to other transit modes), friendly design, as well as many other unarticulated and poorly reportable details, 'tranquilized' the residents of

Kazan. A metro trip was perceived as something pleasant, providing a good mood for the whole day:

When going by bus, it was always an endless traffic jam... lingering round traffic lights, those doors opening everywhere, the bus conductor goes back and forth... Everybody is angry... Everybody is standing on each other's feet. Now [that the metro is there] you just go down calmly, if the train has gone, the next one arrives in a while. You enter it and ride. Everybody's time is saved, and so are the nerves, which is the main thing. (employee, 30, has lived in Kazan since birth)

Taking the subway in Kazan is just one of a number of possibilities to move around the city. Making up their daily routes, locals switch quite freely between metro, car and bus, especially since the bus efficiency has substantially increased after new roads were put into operation in summer 2013. Traveling in a less full vehicle and reaching a destination within a more or less predictable time (which produces a tranquilizing effect) are their top priorities. In autumn 2013, when many people returned to the city from their summer vacations and realized the advantages of the subway, it led to crowds in metro trains, causing some metro users to turn back to buses. The bus was a re-discovered tranquilizer providing for desirable relationships with the city, with fellow travelers and with one's time:

Well, I don't use the metro anymore. I have returned to using the bus. After new stations were opened, the horror began: you can neither sit down nor stand normally. It takes about the same when you take a bus. But now I am traveling calmly and looking at the city. (lecturer, 42, has lived in Kazan for 25 years)

### **The metro makes the city simpler and more bearable**

By choosing the metro as a way of transit urban dwellers also choose a relationship with the city. In big cities this relationship is especially noticeable. It can be described as 'the simplification of the city', meaning a deliberate reduction in the number of encounters with the urban environment. Big cities are literally larger than life. They are too big to fit in people's everyday experience and too complex for them to get their bearings. Through simplification a city 'collapses' to a few points and adjacent areas on the city map, which one can get familiar with, make sense of and somehow get used to.

The darkness inside the metro tunnels, thoroughly adjusted sounds, and standardized inscriptions protect metro passengers from the stunning multiplicity of the city's sounds, smells, signs, and collisions. The subway offers a guaranteed

refuge from urban diversity, as well as an effective connection between urban spaces. That is why the metro is so much adored and at the same time so much feared by out-of-towners (Brednikova, Tkach, 2010).

Some people perceive the metro (from the outset or from a certain time on) as a self-sufficient subspace, almost devoid of connection to the outer world. Metro users get accustomed to the reduced and flattened underground version of the city and have a hard time imagining the configuration of what is on the surface:

Since I was born in Moscow, I poorly orientate myself in Moscow. I don't know the city well, and I do not co-pose the places that I am passing by: what is above the ground and what is underground. So, and when I am below the ground at *Okhotny Ryad* station I cannot say what buildings are above me. (freelancer, 30, has lived in Moscow since birth)

They poorly find their way up there, though they can 'come back to the city' if necessary:

I began to get to know Moscow some five years after coming here. Cause I didn't go walking in downtown Moscow. When going to the theater or to friends, I took the metro and switched the lines. For instance, I didn't get to know the *Chistye Prudy* area until I began to frequent the Latvian Embassy and the History Library. (researcher, has lived in Moscow for 48 years)

Walking-out to the surface becomes an adventure for metro users. This adventure can be desirable and planned or spontaneous. When planning it in advance, a metro user often seeks the diversity he or she has earlier withdrawn from. A surface trip turns into a thrilling tour:

We would get on the trolleybus and look out of the window, and I would discuss with her, say, the architecture... This house is constructivist, we would say to each other, and that one is Stalin era... And this is much more interesting than riding the metro. (lawyer, 34, has lived in Moscow for 13 years)

Such a transition from the relative simplicity of the metro, to the dense semiotic environment of the city requires special skills, which a metro user may not possess. Sometimes, following the metro logic, they temporarily lose the capability for orientation in the city and continue to search for familiar systems of underground signs in the street. If they fail to unravel the logic of the city, a frightened metro users seeks a secure means of getting to their destination, be it a taxi or a GPS navigator.

### **The Metro as a 'Last Refuge'**

When planning a relatively long metro ride, urbanites include it into their schedule and assign certain functions to it. A short trip, by contrast, may not be regarded as something significant; its time may not be filled with any specially timed activities such as reading, listening to music, working, or preparing for classes. Quite often a metro user simply does not have time to switch to a new activity:

I am simply traveling. I am usually not pottering around in my mobile phone... It's not a lot of time I have. Literally 15 minutes. So I usually... well, sometimes I read a newspaper. (employee, 30, has lived in Kazan since birth)

When a metro trip is longer it makes it valuable, turning it into a special period of time, deliberately planned and used. The most typical way of using this time is maximizing its utility by filling the journey minutes with actions that turn the subway car to an office, a reading-hall, or a cinema. Filling the travel time with useful occupations and avoiding idleness are long-standing traditions: the London Transport Museum has knitting-pins and a crossword book among its exhibits. With the help of these and many other pastimes, the passengers of the London Tube used to cheat the journey decades ago.

Lately, however, a remarkable shift has occurred in travel time use. It is given more and more often to relaxation or reduced activity, such as sleeping. Not long ago, when permanent business was an imperative, these activities were referred to as 'doing nothing' or even 'anti-activities' (Mokhtarian, et al., 2001). To a large extent, this change is due to the current transformation of the spatial structure of work. Thanks to the Internet and mobile phones, the working space has expanded and has no limits anymore. Home has become for many an extension of their office or simply the work place proper. Given this, neutral spaces have come to play the role of 'resorts' to escape from the intensity of urban life<sup>14</sup>, work, and various obligations. This is particularly true for the metro, which is easily accessible and integrated into daily travel schemes:

Metro is the only place that is not penetrated by work yet, unlike home where work has already come. [The place] where I can have rest and relax... Because you have already done a lot in the morning. When you get to some place, you'll be busy there. You know that you are going to rush to your computer at once to reply to emails. For me, the subway is the place, probably the only place, where (if I am not going to my own lecture, one which I am to deliver) I can stop working... I try not to do it in the metro. (researcher, has lived in Moscow for 48 years)

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<sup>14</sup> Similar ideas can be found in: *Jain J., Lyons G. The gift of travel time // Journal of Transport Geography 16 (2008) 81–89.* However, the authors are pessimistic about the future of the 'transport refuge' in the face of technology development. By contrast, I think this function will be effectively maintained by the social control as well as by the mere presence of other people which makes the use of electronic devices physically and psychologically uncomfortable.

The metro's role as a 'refuge' is largely based on the still limited (though growing every day) access to mobile communications. A reliable 'protection' from the outer world is also provided by the presence of co-travelers. Traveling in a congested space, in close proximity to other passengers, makes communication inconvenient either in terms of physical closeness (a phone or a tablet is hard to produce and to hold), public transport etiquette or one's own need for privacy.

The metro is the only place where I can easily miss phone calls and reply later: 'I could not answer, I was in the metro, it was awkward.' I can omit checking the mailbox, well, because there is no signal. (postgraduate student, 28, has lived in Moscow since birth)

Created as a technological breakthrough, the metro eventually comes to protect its users from constantly developing technology and from the ever more complex and multiplicitious urban experience. Metro becomes one of the few urban locations that are capable to serve as resources for resistance. By choosing the metro, the passengers get a chance to leave, albeit briefly, the non-stop circle of business and duties, and devote some time to themselves. In this sense, a metro trip is the quintessence of individualism. But this individualism is not of estranged, isolated, traumatic kind; subway individualism liberates and legitimizes one's right to solitude, which is so hard to find in the public spaces of Russian cities (Samutina, Zaporozhets, 2012).

## **Conclusion**

The subway is a technology and a spatial organization that has become a key metropolitan symbol for Soviet (and later Russian) cities. Frequently, Soviet cities were 'decorated' with subways: in the first place, the construction of a subway was intended to demonstrate their special status. Still, despite the highly predetermined usage scenarios and reference frames of meanings, the metro is perceived by contemporary urban residents not only as a transit mode but also as an important tool for affect and experience management; that is, for building relationships with a city and with everyday experiences. This re-interpretation of the metro by common people is especially important since it undermines the indiscriminate image of the metro as an urban conveyor and a technology that excludes or minimizes alternative ways of use. In a city, with its semiotic oversaturation and diversity of the above-ground world, the minimalistic subway environment is utilized by urbanites as protection against the factors of urban life such as intensity, modern communication technologies, permanent business, and involvement in institutional and informal networks. The 'good old' technology of the subway might be viewed

as one of the last urban frontiers defending people from the constantly perfected devices and technical systems.

The present-day technologies (Wi-Fi, mobile phones, TV) are gradually invading the metro and involving it into the customary life rhythm. It is not quite clear whether the metro will be able to act as an affect management tool in the future. What is clear is the possibility for urbanites to transfer their life management skills acquired in the metro onto new urban environments. Ostensive democratization of such practices is a distinct feature of a contemporary city and its residents. Indeed, it is only a century since urban dwellers, wishing to escape the noise and hustle of the city, would leave for the countryside or take shelter in private spaces, homes or closed clubs, like the famous Diogenes club from Sherlock Holmes stories that required absolute silence at all time. Today, to sort out one's relationships with the city, one only has to enter the metro.

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