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To cite this article: Yana Krupets, Jeremy Morris, Nadya Nartova, Elena Omelchenko & Guzel Sabirova (2016): Imagining young adults’ citizenship in Russia: from fatalism to affective ideas of belonging, Journal of Youth Studies, DOI: 10.1080/13676261.2016.1206862

To link to this article: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13676261.2016.1206862

Published online: 22 Jul 2016.
Imagining young adults’ citizenship in Russia: from fatalism to affective ideas of belonging

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ABSTRACT
This article contributes to a comparative analysis of the meaning of citizenship for youth. Young people, traditionally seen as ‘incomplete’ citizens in the process of transition to adulthood, possess their own everyday understanding of what it means to be a citizen in the contemporary world. Based on empirical qualitative material collected in two Russian cities, it is argued that there is a disjunction among young Russians between the ideal-typical perception of citizenship and the practical realisation of it. Particular emphasis is put on the ‘emotional’ understanding of citizenship by Russian youth involving the experience of particular feelings towards fellow citizens and the country.

ARTICLE HISTORY
Received 17 February 2015
Accepted 24 June 2016

KEYWORDS
Youth; young adults; citizenship; Russia; everyday citizenship

Introduction
Citizenship today is a complex concept: contemporary social and scholarly perspectives conceptualise and problematise the category in numerous ways. Scholarship has shown how definitions of citizenship in theory and practice are historically changeable, contextually relative and socially differentiated. These definitions depend on geopolitical and macroeconomic changes and also on individual experience and local contexts. These are particularly thorny issues in Russia where the norms, forms and lexicons of political and social collective and individual life have been intensively defined and redefined over the course of the last three decades, and the cultural differences between generations can be thought of as being characterised by rupture (Yurchak 2006; Peacock 2011; Ule 2012; Haukanes and Trnka 2013).

The course of the first decade after the collapse of the USSR characterised by the rejection of Soviet ideology, political democratisation, openness to the West and market liberalisation shifted in Russia at the beginning of the 2000s towards authoritarianism, the centralisation of power and a harsh domestic policy. The image of a strong power was projected at home and abroad. This occurred against the backdrop of the neo-liberalisation of
the social sphere, a widening of control over the activities of foreign and domestic NGOs and a number of new laws which severely punish street protests and/or demonstrations.

Youth is subject to the gaze of the Russian state primarily as an object of ‘vospitanie’. ‘Vospitanie’ is more than its literal translation of ‘upbringing’. Vospitanie is a hangover from Soviet concerns about the moral and social education of youth (Muckle 1988; see also Disney 2015). Sidorkin (2012) characterises vospitanie as a continual process of educational interventions. The purpose of producing a ‘morally educated’ person was so that they would always know how to act in the spirit of the social and political aims of the state. Unsurprisingly, given its materialist philosophical basis, Soviet approaches to youth emphasises the plasticity of personality particularly during young (Furlong 2009) or ‘emerging’ adulthood (Arnett 2000). The right training could produce not only a collectivised citizen, but also a collectivised body and personality (Oushakine 2004).

While in Soviet times the accent in moral education was put on civic-mindedness and communist (collective) duty towards labour, today’s Russian state sees civicism as inexorably connected with patriotism and loyalty, reproduced through activism of a narrowly prescribed kind and also displayed through the holding of patriarchally normative values (the marginalisation of homosexuality and the promotion of traditional gender roles through marriage and fecundity).

This tendency became most pronounced from the middle of the 2000s when governmental national youth groups were organised. Groups such as ‘Nashi’ and ‘Young Guard’ were supposed to mobilise youth for social and political activism in the format proposed by the state. The most important accent was put on patriotic moral education, which was mainly about bringing historical memory to life: victory in the Second World War, and also the opposition of Russia to the rest of the world as a ‘superpower’. The state’s idealised conception of youth as malleable to the short-term and often cynical citizenship needs of its leaders remains.

State youth movements played an important role in the election campaigns for the State Parliament in 2011 and the Presidential election in March 2012. This period proved a turning point in understanding the limits of legitimate forms of political and civic engagement. In 2013, when the interviews for the current research were carried out, a number of participants in Moscow protests had already been prosecuted. In addition, the Pussy Riot activists were imprisoned. It was during this period that the first signs appeared of a new Russian politics aimed at isolation from the West. Symptomatic were laws such as the so-called Dima Yakovlev Act which banned US citizens from adopting Russian orphans and was later extended to those states where gay marriage had been legalised.

Our previous research has argued that a precise definition of the political profile of youth and young adult groups or individuals in Russia is problematic. They have been eclectic and pose a politics of the private and individual against ‘big politics’ (Omelchenko and Zhelnina 2015). The civic youth sector remains relatively narrow in terms of its links with various forms of social activism or subcultural protest and mostly restricted to large cities. Nonetheless, Russian youth are well connected to global cultural youth trends, mainly thanks to the Internet, even though the use of social networks is marked by cultural difference among youth and others alike. These differences coalesce around shared and affective meanings of place, civic engagement and patriotism that are similar to those explored in this article (Morris 2013). In this article, we show how in
today’s social-political conditions, Russian young adults define and perform everyday citizenship.

**Citizenship in youth studies**

Citizenship in contemporary scholarship is an umbrella term which covers contradictory ideas, including *belonging* and simultaneous *exclusion* of people; *passive membership/status* and *active participation*; *legal political membership*; and *extra-political involvement* in various groups and practices or *non-political participation* in them on the basis of new shared solidarities. This plurality of meanings, on the one hand, allows citizenship to be understood as a complex phenomenon. On the other hand, it leads to a debate over what actually qualifies as citizenship and, consequently, how to judge the level of civic engagement of a particular group.

The multifaceted meaning of citizenship is also evident in the possible diversity of its types. Traditionally it was divided into legal, political, economic and social types (on the basis of the classical understanding by Marshall (2006)); however, now the purview of what constitutes citizenship has expanded further, particularly with regard to culture (Stevenson 2003) and everyday life (Harris, Wyn, and Younes 2007). Youth researchers are particularly interested in everyday citizenship, which we expand on below.

One of the key groups that had garnered attention in terms of problematising the study of citizenship is youth (France 1998; Hall, Williamson, and Coffey 1998; Hall, Coffey, and Williamson 1999; Lister et al. 2003; Gifford, Mycock, and Murakami 2014). Traditionally, the gaining of the status of citizen was connected with the transition to ‘adulthood’ (Thomson et al. 2004). Chronological maturity was connected with a change in legal status (staged access to a range of state-provided rights and duties); exit into the educational and labour markets; economic independence from parents; the acquisition of social, professional and political competencies; etc. Young men and women go through a process of mastering an understanding of what it means to ‘be a citizen’, interiorising the dominant cultural codes and transforming them on the basis of their own accumulating experience. However, before this, children and youth are seen as ‘incomplete’ citizens, ‘pre-citizens’, citizens ‘in the making’ or even ‘second-class’ citizens. Recently, this approach to understanding youth citizenship has been problematised in scholarship (Lister et al. 2003; Thomson et al. 2004; Cohen 2005; Smith et al. 2005; Gordon and Taft 2011).

Current research on youth is increasingly critical of narrow conceptualisations of citizenship as the involvement of young peoples solely in the space of formally institutional politics. The reductiveness of seeing political citizenship exclusively as involvement in the traditional forms of party politics and elections has revealed a crisis in the meaning of citizenship. However, increasingly scholars attempt to redefine citizenship to avoid reductiveness (Henn, Weinstein, and Wring 2002; Lister et al. 2003; Vromen 2003; Smith et al. 2005; Harris, Wyn, and Younes 2010; Wood 2014). They note that the distancing of young people from politics is not evidence that they lack citizenship or that they are incomplete citizens characterised by an absence of interest in community life and participation in its affairs (Hart 2009). Harris and her colleagues note that it is necessary to move on from ‘the “civics deficit” thesis’ to ‘the “new engagement” thesis’ (Harris, Wyn, and Younes 2007).

New understandings of participation might be studied using the concept of ‘everyday citizenship’, which is also defined as ‘living citizenship’ or ‘DIY-citizenship’, and may
become the basis for a more inclusive sense of what it means to be a citizen (Lister 2007). Citizenship here is more a kind of practice realised in everyday life on a local level, which incorporates the rich life experience of youth (Lister et al. 2003; Harris and Roose 2014). This ‘inclusionary’ understanding of citizenship allows us to see all marginalised groups, including youth, as citizens and study their biographical everyday experience of being a citizen.

Thus, for example, Harris and Wyn (2009) show that Australian youth are not apolitical, but realise citizenship in spaces of everyday life and their immediate circle of experience: family, peers and neighbours. On this level, youth have the opportunity and desire to discuss politics and social issues and take actions, including work-on-the-self, even if they are excluded from formal politics. Citizenship is thus a question of both identity and recognition (Stevenson 2001; Lister 2007). At the same time, activism is evident in those spaces that are most meaningful for youth – in leisure, sport, consumption and culture (Vromen 2003; Harris and Roose 2014). Leisure becomes a much more important sphere for the construction of new identities (Haste 2004). Citizenship is more often connected not only with rights and duties, but also with certain pleasures (Riley, More, and Griffin 2010).

A number of researchers focus on how ‘ordinary people’ understand their citizenship. Such commonplace understandings become the basis for participation and sense of being a citizen in everyday life (Lister et al. 2003; Miller-Idriss 2006; Wood 2014). At the same time, these interpretations combine life experience and learned representations of citizenship. The latter are transmitted through media and state discourse, and together with life experience form a complex web of meanings. At the level of the everyday, there is no common and shared by all understanding of citizenship. Everyday meanings are multiple and can both coincide and diverge from theoretical and political concepts.

Lister and her colleagues were some of the first to pay attention to questions of the understandings of citizenship and self-identification as citizens by British youth (Lister et al. 2003). They encountered methodological difficulties: in everyday life young people rarely used the concept of citizenship. However, according to the researchers, direct questioning about citizenship allowed young people to reflect on what was meaningful for them in terms of their place in society (Lister et al. 2003, 237). Hart also noted how young people do not operationalise the concept of ‘citizenship’ and as a result approached the question indirectly, allowing informants to pursue their own topics: respect, belonging and the rights to a voice in community (Hart 2009). Both approaches had their drawbacks and the question of whether it is meaningful to speak of citizenship if it is not clearly articulated in the speech of youth themselves remains an open one. While this discussion lies outside the scope of this article, we note that in our research we preferred to ask questions about what it meant to be a citizen directly, but we did this in the second part of the interviews. In the first part, we collected information about the lives of informants and their involvement in various communities.

Lister’s work presents the meaning of everyday citizenship in terms of five models: starting from that most commonly encountered among informants to the narrowest view: ‘universal status’, ‘respectable economic independence’, ‘constructive social participation’, ‘social contractual’ and ‘right to a voice’. These models are not seen as mutually exclusive and young people can subscribe to more than one at a time. Lister also highlighted both ‘positive’ and ‘negative’ conceptualisations of citizens, respectively: ‘caring attitude towards others’ and ‘a constructive approach towards and active participation in the...
community’, versus ‘selfish, uncaring, lazy and lacking in respect’. In conclusion, British youth are shown to strongly favour a duties, rather than rights, perspective on citizenship. This puts their everyday understandings closer to a communitarian theoretical model (the necessity of undertaking action for the good of the community).

Similar observations were made by Miller-Idriss on working-class German youth (Miller-Idriss 2006). For the majority of research participants, citizenship contained multiple contradictory meanings. Miller-Idriss also directly asked informants about how they defined citizenship and what it meant to be a citizen of Berlin, Germany, and Europe. In addition, she asked questions about how informants felt about Germany, and how they defined the German nation and Germans. The first meaning of citizenship for most informants was linked to their place of birth and residence/belonging to a particular state (the ‘universal status’ of Lister et al. (2003)). However, Miller-Idriss notes that for many young Germans, citizenship was also closely linked with a sense of ‘Germanness’ – cultural identity and assimilation to norms regardless of origin. In contrast, Lister’s research did not reveal a similar level of awareness among British youth. At the same time, the German youths’ commitment to Germanness was a key criterion for their understanding of what it meant to be a German citizen (although this was possibly due to the prompting of interviewers). Miller-Idriss emphasises that this is primarily a cultural rather than an ethno-biological criterion. She also presented youth understandings of what they considered good and bad citizens, which were very similar to the British findings. In addition she makes the conclusion that citizenship for youth today is displayed primarily in particular acts (for the good of others), not just as a status; it is a particular practice and way of life, which are complemented by the attitudinal criterion: desire to be German.

It is noteworthy that the category ‘feeling of belonging’ appears in the German research; to be a citizen means to feel one’s co-belonging as a German. In most Western research, citizenship is interpreted as a reflexive project of the subject under conditions of an individualised society (cf. Vandergrift 2015). Affective considerations are mainly left to one side. Miller-Idriss in one sense attempts to bring to the fore feelings too, although she does not put a particular emphasis on this; rather, she puts ‘feelings’ on the same level as a sense of belonging to a community. In our research, we have tried to bring out affective elements and pay closer attention to feelings and emotions of our informants than has occurred in prior research.

To conclude this short literature review, we emphasise that the turn in youth research towards everyday citizenship and to the meanings produced by ‘ordinary people’ extends beyond the global north (see for example the review of youth research in South America: Coe and Vandergrift 2015). Our research makes a contribution to that extension at the same time as building the empirical depth of research available. At the beginning of the 2000s, Lister and her colleagues noted an ‘empirical void’ (Lister et al. 2003) in youth citizenship research; today the situation is changing and the field is benefiting from a growing scholarship that adopts a non-marginalising, inclusive approach towards the understanding of youth citizenship. However, if in Western countries such research has increased significantly, in the post-socialist East there is still a serious deficit of cases.

Most Russian scholars speak of citizenship in ethico-moral terms (Nikiforov and Skalina 2007; Smirnov 2011). Citizenship indicates ‘spiritual’ development of both person and society. To be a citizen means being a ‘good person’ with high moral standards and sharing a ‘national idea’ (Kapustina 2009; Shungalov 2012). Often citizenship is
synonymous with patriotism. This understanding also dominates in pedagogical research, where citizenship emerges from a special moral education and forming of the young person. (Gavriluk and Malenkov 2007; Puzikov and Zhigadlo 2009). The tradition of researching citizenship as an active participation of the person in civil society also is present, but is much less important, particularly given the recent conditions of so-called crisis of civil society (Levashov 2007; Patrushev 2009; Semenova 2010). There is also research on activism of youth in Russia, involvement in civic and state initiatives (see for example Hemment 2009; Krivonos 2015) and anarchists (Litvina 2014). However, the citizenship of ‘ordinary youth’, and their experience of everyday existence remain unexplored in Russian sociology. In this article, we attempt to go beyond the view of citizenship as participation in formal politics, examine it as local practice of everyday life and uncover those meanings which young professionals link to citizenship in the context of today’s sociopolitical Russia.

Methodology and empirical data

This article is based on the analysis of 40 biographical interviews with young Russian ‘professionals’, collected in 2013. While the term ‘professional’ may appear to lack sociological precision, in the Russian context it has relatively clear and narrow connotations: it is broadly synonymous with the more traditional Russian and Soviet term ‘specialist’ – a person undertaking 5 years in Higher Education – usually for a named vocational role. In addition, this term was a clearly preferred interpretative category among respondents: this self-descriptor was dominant. Our ‘young professional’ respondents were all 22–30 years old, with at least 3 years’ work experience. The young professionals were recruited to represent different spheres of employment according to official classifications of economic activity: (1) business, (2) education and science, (3) Public Relations and media, (4) IT sector, (5) service sector, (6) public sector, (7) art and culture, (8) industry, (9) health services and (10) construction and real estate.

In each employment cluster, informants were recruited through the social networks of the researchers, through social media and snowballing methods. Gender, age and employment balances were observed. The aim of the study was to extract multiple and ‘floating’ meanings of citizenship. Biographical interviews were used including questions on civic activity in biographical life stories, which allowed the researchers to analyse this experience in the integral context of everyday practices and values. The second part of the interview was thematic on understanding citizenship, political views and activity, and migrational expectations. The interviews lasted from 90 to 130 minutes and were recorded and transcribed.

Our research took place in two Russian cities: St. Petersburg and Ulyanovsk. St. Petersburg is the second-largest metropolis in Russia after Moscow. It is a large cultural, political, economic and educational centre. St. Petersburg is one of the main destinations for internal migration in Russia. Many young professionals, including those in our research, came to the city from other regions for work and study. Ulyanovsk is a city situated in the central part of Russia. During Soviet times, as the birthplace of Lenin it was a symbolic centre with well-developed tourist, cultural and educational infrastructure. However, after the fall of the Soviet Union it experienced hard times. Many industries were closed or bought by businesses from more successful Russian regions. A total of 30 interviews
were conducted in St Petersburg and 10 in Ulyanovsk. Despite the significantly different socio-economic conditions in the cities, interview analysis showed that in most ways young professionals’ interpretations of the meaning of citizenship were similar. In this article, we focus on general and typical meanings and practices encountered in our interviews. Biographical narrative analysis (Rosenthal 1993) allows, firstly, for the reconstruction of life experiences of informants (stages, events and practices); and, secondly, for the analysis of the informants’ interpreted meanings of such experiences. Biographical analysis was widened using the conceptual model of the ‘experiential triad’ (Rotkirch 2000, 42), which proposes that subjectivity is formed through three interdependent, but analytically distinct, structures: practices, interpretations and feelings. ‘Feelings’ relate to emotions, bodily sensations and affective forces. Thus, the classic model of biographical analysis with the addition of reconstructed experiences of feeling allowed us to track the nascent emotional component of citizenship in its interpretation by young professionals.

**Citizenship in everyday imagination**

Our analysis reveal’s ‘citizenship’ as a complex and problematic phenomenon evoking special reflection. Moreover, citizenship interpretations by young adults are influenced not only by ideological metanarratives around loyalty and patriotism, but also by the sociopolitical context of Russia. These include a sense of belonging according to birth, performativity and affect.

The first basis for defining citizenship in respondents’ speech relates to the ‘traditional’ definition of citizenship: the legal status of belonging to a particular country by birth or by long-term residency. In this scenario, the acquisition of this status is seen with a degree of ‘fatalism’, as something ‘inevitable’ and ‘inherited’ from the parents. Thus, Mikhail, a 29-year-old doctor working in a pharma company in St. Petersburg, is convinced that,

> You cannot be born and not be a citizen. If your parents are Russian citizens and they have a baby, the baby has no choice but to become a Russian citizen. (Int. №10, St. Petersburg)

However, this starting interpretation of citizenship as ‘fixed’ and ‘formal’ is not sufficient for our informants. For them citizenship is more than just having a passport. This status requires confirmation through some special actions and practices – a second main component of the interpretation of citizenship. Stepan, a 27-year-old IT worker, expresses it thus:

> It is when you live according to the laws of your country, pay tax, as it is an essential part of it, and possibly when you try to do something for your country. (Int. №36, Ulyanovsk)

At the same time, the absence in Russian society of a consensus on the aim of civic involvement, its end result and the common good leads to a floating idea about the importance of action in itself, and not the result. Young professionals envisage an ideal or imaginary citizenship as performatve, based on taking part in the sociopolitical life of society. This reflexive involvement, active civic actions for the benefit/development of society and an opportunity to influence decision-making, in the opinions of young men and women, constitute an ‘idea’ of the citizen. Twenty-nine-year-old lawyer Andrei who works in a social rights centre confirms this:

> How to be a citizen? To be, to take part in the life of society, your town, your country, in other words to take part. (Int. №29, St. Petersburg)
A third component is the affective or emotional aspect of citizenship. For young Russian professionals, ‘genuine’, imagining citizenship demanded not only goal-rational investment and involvement, but also affective attachment. Sensual empathy and concern for the fate of the country were established as part of civic identity. Anna, a 23-year-old primary school teacher, emphasises this:

I think pensioners, as a social group are the real citizens of their country. [...] Well, I think that they care about their country more, they have seen a lot, changes in power, the collapse of the Soviet Union, so they are more emotional and they care about their country, yes, care about what is happening, the changes that are taking place. I think the older you get, the more you feel like a citizen. (Int. №5, St. Petersburg)

‘Emotional citizenship’ prescribes particular regimes of feelings in relation to one or another topic or issue and produces emotional communities of citizenship. Affective attachment replaces a rational and pragmatic relation to the state and constitutes a citizenship that is sensually experienced by attachment.

In this way, interpretations of the imagined concept of citizenship for young Russian professionals are based on the fact of their birth in the country, produced and realised performatively through ‘doing’ (active involvement in social and political life), and emotionally, through affective attachment. If the formal basis of citizenship such as birthplace, or passport status is not worthy of note in the individual biographies of informants because they are considered fatalistically ‘given’, then the performative and emotional aspects are problematised and reinterpreted in everyday life experience in which the imaginary and real collide.

**Citizenship and everyday practice**

The formation of imagined citizenship for young professionals is accompanied by, but not always coincides with, the real experience of citizenship in everyday life. Interview analysis showed that there is a disjuncture between representations of ‘ideal’ citizenship and real practice which defines the perception of self as citizen. Young people problematise their desire for the performative aspect of their own civic identity, experiencing limited access to involvement in social-political life, the possibility to express their opinion or make their selves known, notes Mikhail:

To be a citizen means taking part in decision-making. I do not always feel that I am taking part in making decisions, so I feel left behind. It makes me feel less of a citizen.

Young adults articulate the sense of a deficit of legitimate, accessible and effective means for public articulation and civic influence. Twenty-six-year-old Irina, an IT specialist, comments sadly:

... But on the other hand, I really cannot see any opportunities for myself to demonstrate that I am a citizen. /.../ As I have said earlier, handcuffing myself to the doors of the Legislative Assembly would only leave me with bruises but would achieve nothing. So, on the one hand, I hold a certain position, I have an opinion on what is happening in the country, but, on the other hand, there is absolutely nowhere to express it. (Int. №15, St. Petersburg)

Moreover, the established practice of democratic activity and expression through elections, protests and petitions in the Russian context is interpreted by young people as
either ineffective from the perspective of influencing events, or as dangerous for the individual and collective well-being of those taking part in civic space. Marketing worker, Olga, 27 years old, has experience of involvement in non-governmental organisations and underlines that,

… If you express your protest without any negative actions, then it is ignored for a while but if you start demonstrating your opposition in a more aggressive manner, try to involve other people, then you will be silenced one way or another/…/. I think it is not without a danger to express your citizen views freely in our country. (Int. №8, St. Petersburg)

And for many informants public protests were seen as actions with dangerous or other ominous consequences. Thus, 23-year-old actor Oleg from Ulyanovsk reflects,

If there is no alternative, and in our country there is no real alternative, then I support the state that we have got, rather than have chaos, revolutions and civil war. (Int. №40, Ulyanovsk)

Such interpretations of the varieties of civic involvement reduce practically to naught the possibilities for young adults. One of the results of such social order is a distancing from the state and a depoliticising of young people in everyday life, or even a refusal of civic identity in principle. Ilya, a 27-year-old engineer, says,

Yes, I do not feel like a citizen. A citizen is closely connected to the state. The state is predominantly formed of power, so the state is mainly politics /…/. I would not like to be a citizen. /…/ I do not see a need. /…/ The state is over there somewhere and I am here. We exist separately from each other. (Int. №16, St. Petersburg)

The perception of self as citizen in the context of adopting models of performative citizenship stressing activeness for the sake of others was particularly problematised. In such a situation, the correlating of one’s own behaviour with such an understanding of citizenship results in the interpretation of oneself as a ‘bad’ citizen. Twenty-six-year-old doctor Elena comments about herself:

So, I believe that I am a citizen, but I do not vote, of course…, so maybe I am not such a good citizen. It is just that some people have a responsible attitude towards citizenship and some do not, like me. (Int. №11, St. Petersburg)

Some young people completely exclude citizenship from their life priorities. Thus 26-year-old architect Ivan, answering the question ‘Is it important for you to be a citizen?’ answers ‘Let’s say that I do not notice that I am a citizen’ (Int. №38, Ulyanovsk).

On the other hand, the gap between the imaginary interpretation of citizenship as performative participation in the sociopolitical life of the country, and the existing everyday conditions for implementing this in practice calls for a different interpretation of citizenship by young people, based on people’s individual biographies (‘lived’ citizenship). Young professionals reinterpret citizenship, moving away from ‘big ideas’ to practical individual strategies.

Analysis of empirical data demonstrated several dominant strategies: obeying the rules; economic activity; the politics of ‘small things’; individual responsibility and personal development. It is important to mention that the same individual biography may embrace several strategies that form a personal portfolio of interpretation of citizenship for an individual.
In particular for some young professionals, citizenship is experienced as obeying common rules and norms. Distancing oneself from the political aspects is transferred to everyday cultural reproduction. For 26-year-old economist Kirill, to display one’s civic consciousness means:

To obey the laws of the country that you live in, the order of things, moral principles, unwritten. (Int. №1, St. Petersburg)

For other informants, the practical application of citizenship is found not in the political sphere, but in the economic one. For example, young men and women demonstrate their citizenship by choosing to buy Russian goods, making a contribution to the economy. Thus, doctor Mikhail emphasises:

I do not beat my chest and shout – Russia, our great power. However, I would support Russia.
For example, I prefer buying Russian food, goods and services, where possible. I understand that it is not a responsibility, I just want to encourage development in the country I live in.

A third strategy towards citizenship is demonstrated through the rhetoric of ‘small things’, involving not collective solidarity and responsibility, but individual local actions aimed at improving the ‘prosperity’ of the country. Similarly, citizenship becomes individual responsibility for oneself and people close to the individual. ‘A proper citizen should take responsibility for his dwelling, his family and his kids’, underlines Andrei.

Another strategy of including citizen participation in the life project of an individual is to ‘start with oneself’ and develop desirable personal qualities. Olga articulates:

… If you are really worried about bureaucracy or some other problems in politics or society, then the only thing to do is to make sure that you do not do the same.

In other words, one can say that the aspect of citizenship that can be referred to as performative in everyday life of young professionals is privatised, reassigned to the sphere of individual responsibility and choice and becomes a local strategy in individual biographies. In the process of implementing these strategies, an individual perceives himself as a state-independent entity. This conscious minimalist relationship-building with the state assumes the creation of autonomy from the state social system, based on the following principles: ‘I live on the money that I earn – I only use private medical services – I am saving for my own pension’. This logic aims at minimising the state involvement in the person’s private space, which is still present through the tax and legal systems, and children’s education (cf. Harboe Knudsen 2014).

Citizenship as everyday feeling

In our research, the emotional aspect of citizenship for young professionals was displayed and articulated in the context of discussing possible migration plans. Frequently globalisation and increased mobility of the population are seen to problematise and re-inflect both the ideas of citizenship and civil participation practices. In turn, this identifies possible new meanings of citizenship, beyond national borders. However, when discussing migration plans, young professionals did not expand or challenge existing notions of citizenship, but on the contrary, narrowed their focus, emphasising primarily their personal attachment to country, national roots and integration into a particular society. Citizenship, as social status – ‘predetermined’ by particular territory, mentioned earlier – also became
a marker of one’s ‘own’ space that the informants would not want to leave. In other words, in the process of discourse on the possibility of emigration, informants constructed and reinforced their civic (i.e. national) identity and ‘own’/‘respectful’/‘comfortable’ place in Russian society.

Interview analysis shows that a form of emotional citizenship as fuzzy patriotism is developing among young professionals. It is difficult to identify factors contributing to it, as well as the cultural context that defines this new form. However, this is another reason to talk about growing feelings towards the Motherland (a standard term in Russian to refer to one’s native land), not in the context of ‘pride’ but love and attachment, that are not rational but that exist as persistent feelings of attachment not ‘because of’ but ‘despite of’. Thus, Oleg very emotionally states:

I would never leave … It may sound strange, silly but I am a patriot. I would miss it /…/ I was born here, my home is here, I will die here. I will do my best. Not to die, but to make sure that this home gets a bit better. I am Russian. I am Russian and I cannot be any different. Yes, I would be with other people but I need the Russian Language, the Russian mentality. I would not be happy if I was a long way from it. Yes, I might live abroad for a year or two but I would always come back because you cannot escape from yourself, no matter where you go. It is inside you.

Twenty-six-year-old construction engineer Vasilii also stresses that,

to be honest, I am not planning to move abroad because I, well … It would be difficult for me to live away from my Motherland, even if it is a bit rubbish, a bit something else, but it is what I know, what I am attached to. (Int. № 21, St. Petersburg)

‘Emotional citizenship’ in the context of migration planning acquires additional meaning: the feeling of emotional attachment and closeness to one’s Motherland and parents. Maria, a 25-year-old English teacher, states:

To move to a different country, of course, leaving my parents would be a problem. Even though I don’t live with them at the moment but to imagine that here you can visit any time and still sometimes. (Int. №6, St. Petersburg)

The roles of parents and close relatives in relation to those plans are ambiguous. Informants’ parents are in their 50s and 60s; they experienced the first and hardest wave of Perestroika and the turmoil of the post-socialist transformation of society: prolonged economic crisis, unemployment and the disavowal of traditional values: all the ‘turbulent’ 1990s. Many stories were told of relatives who had emigrated and with whom the family kept in touch. Quite often those stories were not positive, sometimes connected to the loss of social status, which was made even worse by the current economic crisis and a drop in living standards.

The majority of those who consider moving abroad would prefer only temporary migration. The idea of gaining experience of ‘living and working in another country’ has become more prevalent than the recently popular ‘make money abroad’, which is now rare, especially in relation to Europe (both Eastern and Western), given the current world economic crisis and the rise of unemployment.

However, there is much reluctance regarding both possible long-term emigration and short-term temporary work abroad; this is primarily associated with possible loss of status, and lack of professional skills and career progression. This is somewhat in contrast to the
idealised notions of globalisation among young Russians found by Vandergrift (2015). Young men and women often referred to the USA’s ‘Work & Travel’ visa programme. The majority of work available was in cleaning, agriculture or road construction. Even though there were stories about making good money through the programme, the experience of feeling like ‘second-class citizens’, as well as the perceived preconceptions about Russian people, created a notion that emigration meant losing a ‘place in life’ and becoming a ‘loser’. Thus, 30-year-old tour manager Karina from Ulyanovsk notes:

... people who emigrate do not become anybody, as a rule. In other words, most of them spend their whole life working in service support roles or similar professions, mainly as service staff. (Int. № 39, Ulyanovsk)

As already mentioned, most informants do not envisage emigrating. Those from Ulyanovsk that do consider moving would mainly choose other Russian cities. The main reasons are fear of insufficient skills, lack of language skills and cultural difference or patriotic feelings.

On the whole, the high level of cultural competency of this group, their high career and professional aspirations and demands, is reflected in the wide variety of reasons for (im)possible emigration. In addition, there is an acute perception of both positive and negative consequences of including (or not including) emigration in one’s life scenarios. Along with the fear of loss of professional and social status associated with migration, a key barrier is the feeling of emotional-affective attachment to one’s country. Patriotism is a constitutive element of the sense of cultural and social community, belonging and attachment through birth, parents, language or ‘mental set-up’. As made routine in everyday life, emotional citizenship is actualised in situations where the person considers migration abroad and which then becomes a border greater than the literal one and more difficult to cross.

Conclusions

Today, on the one hand, increasing globalisation and, on the other hand, resurgent nationalism make any analysis of the subjective understanding of citizenship highly problematic. The classic conception of citizenship is insufficient to grasp the shifting processes that lead to the creation and interpretation of everyday citizenships. Our analysis of biographical interviews with young professionals in two Russian cities allows us to draw the following conclusions: citizenship is a composite category; it is important to remain open to the various interpretive understandings of citizenship by the young adults themselves. Similarly, instead of speaking of various models of citizenship, as in Lister et al. (2003), it may be more appropriate to consider both the relative conventionality of an interpretation and its composite nature – drawing on conflicting elements in a particular national context. Indeed, national and even local context remains relevant, as do temporal factors. The Russian case shows how quickly the concatenation of economic, social and political circumstances can affect subjects’ appreciation of what at first may appear as an unchanging set of assumptions about what a citizen is.

In the Russian context, the imagined model of citizenship for urban young adults is based on three components: belonging according to birth, performativity and affect. However, the first is insufficient for ideal citizenship; it is produced and realised through performative practice of involvement in the social-political life of the country. On the
level of ideal representation, through such performativity, the individual and state are connected – by the traditional participation in elections, parties and civic actions such as protests, rallies, etc. At the same time, actions and participation take on meaning and value only in the presence of affective attachment and concern for events. Affect acts as an emotional anchoring effect, but not towards the state – the patriarchal vertical of power politics, but towards the Motherland. It is no coincidence that the opposition of Patria and Motherland – two terms for native land in Russia, has historically been divided in terms of loyalty-to-state versus affective love of country. In the Russian language, one ‘serves’ the fatherland, but struggles/fights for (in desperate times) and loves the Motherland (Hellberg-Hirn 1998). In this way, the ideal model of citizenship includes birthplace, performative involvement and affective tethering to one’s native land.

At the same time, imagined citizenship comes up against everyday limits for its realisation. Young adults are reflexive about their civic identity and the opportunities for realising their citizenship (Vandergrift 2015). Performative citizenship, because of the limited access to political participation, is privatised and removed from formal politics to the politics of ‘small things’. Just as ‘patriotism’ can be associated with loyalty in domesticated, familial and feminine terms through the choice of ‘motherland’ over patria, the kind of fellowship that citizenship entails can be reimagined in practice. In other words, it is constituted as ‘living’ everyday citizenship (Lister et al. 2003; Harris, Wyn, and Younes 2007). This phenomenon is similar to that found by other research on experiences of youth elsewhere – depoliticisation and civic activism limited to local communities (Vromen 2003; Hart 2009; Harris, Wyn, and Younes 2010; Harris and Roose 2014; Wood 2014). At the same time, this turning inwards of younger people has echoes of earlier tactics associated with the personalisation of ethical life under socialism in the face of the perceived impossibility of enacting change in the public space (Yurchak 2006). The brief and curtailed period of democratisation in Russia and the experience of the previous generations in terms of non-involvement, along with global processes of individualisation in the epoch of late modernity, are the cultural backdrop against which citizenship as an individual practice of everyday responsibility for oneself, one’s family, becomes legitimate and normative concerns.

The emotional character of involvement in everyday life is thought of as necessary for one’s own civic identity. Affective attachment acts as the basis and guarantor of belonging. This is partly similar to the ‘feeling of belonging’, identified by Miller-Idriss (2006). However, for German youth, what is important is co-belonging to Germany as a community, which to a great extent is based on ethnical–cultural ties. For Russian young adults, such co-belonging is thought of more as a connection to a place than in terms of the ‘classic’ imaginary community of Anderson (2006). The absence of a consensus about the nature of the common good or the result of civic involvement intensifies the affective components which construct citizenship as unconditional love towards the Motherland and which is not connected to rational or pragmatic concerns. As was mentioned, in numerous senses this is love ‘in spite of’. State rhetorical discourse of the last few years has actively used the category of citizenship as patriotic loyalty and non-critical attitudes towards the government, the distancing of the country from the ‘other’ or Western world and the cultivation of the uniqueness of Russia. Emotional belonging also begins to be redefined as fuzzy patriotism. This displaces discourses of rights and duties in the representation of ideal and personal citizenship and narrows the understanding of duties to one thing.
alone: love of the Motherland. The significance of the feeling of place grows in the context of everyday patriotism and identity among Russian youth and young adults (Omelchenko and Pilkington 2012; Pilkington 2012).

The importance of examining citizenship as a multidimensional phenomenon and bringing out its various elements, rather than thinking of it in terms of different models, allows us to see the specificity of the realisation of citizenship in the Russian context. From the interviews collected, it is clear that in the composite form citizenship takes the affective components as more significant than the performative ones. This undoubtedly reduces the critical and activist potential of Russian youth, yet points towards youth as active in redefining civil participation in terms of a patriotism that is not necessarily confined to state-directed ideology and rhetoric.

Note

1. The ban on US adoptions was in response to the 2012 US Magnistky Act.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

References


