

SELF-ORGANIZATION IN OLDER AGE

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Abstract. The article shows a relatively new form of self-organization of the elderly in Russia, which has been actively developing since 2018 on the basis of Centers of Moscow longevity and Youth (CML). Every senior citizen can apply to any CML in the city and organize their own club for the similar elderly people as well. Because of the enthusiasm of older Muscovites the total number of self-organized clubs by interests is increasing every year and, according to statistics (on January 2024), it is already more than 5 thousand. The self-organization of elders as a social phenomenon arouses research interest. The article presents a secondary analysis of available publications on the research topic based on quantitative and qualitative methods, as well as the results of the authors' research on the possibilities of representatives of the older generation to independently organize their free time, on their preferences in leisure activities in accordance with individual motivation, on the possibility of building new external and internal social connections. A total of 203 interviews were conducted with older Muscovites (55 y.o. and over), the leaders of the CML clubs in the Central and Southwestern districts of Moscow.

Keywords: *Self-organization, older age, active longevity, older generation, elderly Muscovites, Centers of Moscow longevity and youth, senior's leader club.*

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1. Introduction

Older people are one of the most numerous groups of the Russian population. By "elderly" we mean the totality of all people aged 55 y.o. and over, to show that self-organization, as well as active longevity, is possible at 60, 70 and 80 years old. The authors are interested in the very fact of self-organization at an older age, without dividing into age intervals and comparing within a group (Kornilova, 2023).

This age range was chosen according to the retirement age settled by 2019 for all Russians: women at 55 y.o., men at 60. Until 2028, there is a transition period in Russia, according to which the retirement age increases gradually. In public institutions – the Centers of Moscow Longevity, which provide services for seniors, the lower age limit remained unchanged in order to make the most comfortable transition and involve new

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older participants in the activities of organizations in general, and in the process of self-organization of clubs and events, in particular.

2. Methodology and sources

Self-organization as a social phenomenon is viewed from different angles. Bronnikova (2013) notes that self-organization is the foundation for the organization and management of others, but Osintseva (2022) emphasizes that "self-organization is the management of a person's own activities". Bogomaz (2011) considers self-organization from the point of view of a person's personal potential as one of the most important characteristics that allows one to be both stable and flexible. In the works of Vinogradsky and Vinogradskaya (2023) Self-organization is presented as "a system of active initiatives initiated by subjects (individual or collective) in order to optimize the parameters of their daily existence in the life environment entrusted to their care".

The above-mentioned authors agree that an important component of self-organization is defined as the ability of an individual, social group or society to act independently.

Ivanova (2007) focuses on the interaction of individuals as a product of self-organization. Leonov and Pronin (2016) note that for self-organization it is necessary to have purposefulness, a desire to achieve a certain goal with the coincidence of "possible forms of its implementation". Zubok (2020) connects self-organization with self-regulation for achievements of "independence", "self-sufficiency" and "sustainable social status". In these formulations, another important property of self-organization is "visible" – its length over time, which can be defined as a process.

Thus, self-organization works as an initiated activity of an individual, a social group, a social institution in the process of achieving a certain goal.

One of the first definitions of the concept of "self-organization" was presented by the British cyberneticist William Ashby (1947) in the context of a self-organizing system. Later, this term began to be used in other fields of science, including sociology.

Shevtsova (2017) introduces the term "dynamics of self-organization", according to which the evolution of self-organization as a system-forming factor can be divided into three stages: "the origin of the collective, its functioning and development" and the "universal" stage, a high level of development of the collective, providing full conditions for the self-realization of all its members". This judgment can be transferred to the plane of the formation of such a system using a specific example of the club activity of the "Moscow Longevity" project. At the first stage, there is an influx of club members, according to their primary interests and needs, then the club functions and develops due to compliance with certain norms and rules, both built independently and obtained from outside. This is expressed in the quantitative and qualitative dynamics of the elements and turns into the development of opportunities, the expansion of needs and the effectiveness of their implementation.

Self-organization at an older age is studied in the context of dedication and service to society (Shchukina, 2004), adaptation (Mayurova & Lavrenova, 2016), empowerment (Kienko *et al.*, 2022) and specific practices for applying existing talents and knowledge (Pevnaya *et al.*, 2021).

Research interest is also directed towards studying private aspects and conducting narrowly focused research on the self-organization of elders: from the point of view of the family and the experience of joint longevity of elderly families in one of the Russian

regions – the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia) (Vinokurova & Barashkova, 2021), integration of older people in Essen (Germany) (Piterski, 2021), social activity of older people in Moscow (Russia) and in Paris (France) (Kushtanina, 2009).

In connection with the above, the purpose of the research is to study the ability of representatives of the older generation to independently organize their free time, build new external and internal social connections in accordance with individual motivation and capabilities.

The "Moscow Longevity" project is considered as an example. It is originally existed as a separate program to activate Muscovites 55+ (start: 2018). The program was implemented at a variety of sites in the city relating to both the social protection system and other areas: education, culture, sports, etc. Further, specialized institutions were opened in the social protection system of Moscow to activate older people: Centers of Moscow Longevity (start: 2019). In January 2024, an important stage of consolidation of the CML and the Mayor's program "Moscow Longevity" was completed. And now it is unified by general name "Moscow longevity".

It should be noted that the ecosystem of "Moscow Longevity" is based on two fundamental directions:

1. Interaction of an older representative with a teacher at external sites outside the Center, which are pre-certified in accordance with the requirements of the resource center. Classes take place on the territory of the service provider, represented by a teacher who has a package of certificates or other documents confirming his professional qualifications. The participant acquires knowledge and new skills from a specialist;

2. Transfer of their own experience to other participants of the ecosystem within the framework of club activities based on the Centers of Moscow Longevity. Despite the fact that the phenomenon of self-organization manifests itself in both directions, our research focuses on club activities, in view of the obvious homogeneity of the social group (age category) on the one hand and its heterogeneity (different social status of participants, education level, skill set, etc.) on the other.

The Moscow Longevity project within the framework of the state policy for the development of the social sphere has been implemented since 2018 in a pilot mode ([https://www.mos.ru/upload/documents/docs/63-PP\(4\).pdf](https://www.mos.ru/upload/documents/docs/63-PP(4).pdf)), and since 2019 on an ongoing basis ([https://www.mos.ru/upload/documents/docs/d_663779044\(1\).pdf](https://www.mos.ru/upload/documents/docs/d_663779044(1).pdf)). The goal is "to create on a permanent basis a system for organizing active leisure activities for older citizens and other categories of citizens, expanding forms of social communication, further increasing the vital activity of these categories of citizens, contributing to an increase in the life expectancy of the population of the city of Moscow" ([https://www.mos.ru/upload/documents/docs/d_663779044\(1\).pdf](https://www.mos.ru/upload/documents/docs/d_663779044(1).pdf)).

An individual who has consciously decided to become a participant in the project makes a choice in which social status of further interaction with other elements within the system will take place: the leader of the club, a member of the club, the initiator of the event, a participant in the project. These statuses (roles) can be changed and combined.

The logic and procedure of the research

Moscow is divided into 12 administrative districts, which comprise 125 subdistricts. Now (for the information on January 2024) there are 121 Moscow Longevity Centers already operating in the capital of Russia, i.e. the project covers 97% of the city's territory. There are interest clubs in each Center. Since the study was conducted during the period of reform (unification) of the Moscow Longevity project (in January 2024),

the research opportunities allowed to cover only two administrative districts of the capital of Russia: Central and Southwestern.

The main focus of the clubs is a healthy lifestyle, the disclosure of creative potential, the development of intellectual capabilities. The total number of club leaders, as of January 2024, amounted to slightly more than 5000 people.

A total of 203 club leaders were interviewed using a standardized online survey in Yandex Forms[†]. The questionnaire included the following thematic blocks: socio-demographic characteristics, subjective attitude to financial status, health status, social well-being, safety, leisure and recreation, classes in the Centers of Moscow longevity, leadership as a phenomenon, belonging to the system of active longevity and club activities.

3. Results and discussion

Socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents.

154 women and 49 men participated in the research, which is 76% and 24%, accordingly. The minimum age of the participants is 55 y.o., the maximum – 88. The absolute majority of respondents (96%) have close relatives (children, spouse). At the same time, the responses of the respondents about living conditions were distributed almost equally: 34% live alone, 34% with a spouse (partner), 32% with relatives (children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren).

43% of respondents are married, 23% are widowed, 21% – divorced, and 5% of respondents live with a partner without marriage status. Never been married – 8%.

The level of education and professional status.

Most of the leaders (80%) have a high level of education (75% of those who graduated from university, 5% of the total number of respondents with a scientific degree).

83% of the respondents confirmed the status of a non-working pensioner. The analysis of past professional affiliation revealed a diverse distribution of participants by working field. Dominant industry compared to the education sphere (18%), followed by culture – 11%, industry – 7%, science, healthcare and public service - 6%, accordingly, 5% and less fall on the sphere of construction, trade, communications, military service, transport, etc. At the same time, 53% of the respondents held senior positions during their working life.

Features of living and financial situation.

The absolute majority of respondents live in separate housing. Only 2% of survey participants share household amenities with neighbors in a communal apartments.

The respondents' subjective assessment of their financial situation was distributed as: 42% believe that their financial situation has not changed in the previous year, 25% of respondents noted an improvement and 33% of participants believe that their financial situation has worsened.

Self-assessment of health and self-importance.

Most of the respondents have a positive assessment of their state of health (the proportion of responses "good" and "rather good than bad" are equal and together

[†] A questionnaire for studying self-organization as a system-forming factor of active longevity. Russia. Moscow. January, 2024. URL: <https://forms.yandex.ru/cloud/65a691e1f47e73120f612dc9/> (date of access: 02/24/2024).

amounted to 72%). Well-being at an average level was established in 19%, the remaining 9% were not satisfied with their state of health.

More than half of the respondents did not notice any changes in their health status in the year preceding the survey, 27% of the study participants noted improvements in well-being and another 17% admitted that their health had deteriorated.

The data on respondents' responses to predetermined judgments about the relevance and necessity of the older generation demonstrate optimistic judgments: the majority of respondents (73%) consider themselves necessary for the country, 80% noted the pricelessness and indisputable importance of their own accumulated life experience, which is respected by other people. Retirement for 87% of respondents is not the end of life, but on the contrary – new opportunities.

Recreation and leisure in the Centers of Moscow longevity and youth (CML).

Among the main preferences in the organization of leisure activities, the first place is occupied by "visiting events and clubs in the CML (75%), followed by "hobby activities" - 54%, "socializing with friends" – 51%, "reading books" – 44%.

At the same time, 65% are convinced that visiting the Moscow Longevity Centers makes life more intense and 14% of the total number of respondents feel more confident "in the walls" of CML. Some leaders admitted that they visit the Centers because of boring and having no better alternative right now.

The ability of the leaders of the CML clubs to self-organize their own activities.

Since the core of self-organization and the driving force is the leader of the club, the first question of this chapter was addressed to the period when the feeling as a leader first appeared.

Almost every third (30%) respondent noted that they felt like a leader during their professional career. At the same time, 25% of respondents noted that they felt leadership qualities in themselves, due to participation in the "Moscow Longevity" project, right at the moment of making an independent decision to transfer experience to other like-minded people and this is every fourth respondent.

79% of respondents are able to unite like-minded people and intentionally organize activities around themselves, having satisfied by doing that.

The directions of a healthy lifestyle and the disclosure of creative potential are the most popular among club leaders – 42% and 41%, accordingly. 17% of respondents are interested in activities related to intellectual activity.

The actual number of clubs run by the respondents was distributed in a similar ratio (one leader can lead several clubs in different directions). Total: in the areas of healthy lifestyle – 44% of clubs, creativity – 46%, intellectual development – 22% of the total number of research participants.

85% of respondents are ready to take on the role of a mentor of a higher order and encourage potential leaders to act, 15% of the surveyed active leaders do not share this idea.

4. Conclusion

Self-organization is a self-sufficient phenomenon in society life, which can manifest itself in the behavior of individuals, social groups or institutions.

The research results of self-organization based on the Moscow Longevity and Youth Centers shows that 73% of respondents consider themselves necessary for the society and the government and every fourth respondent discovered the opportunity to be

a leader precisely through participation in the "Moscow Longevity" project. Most club leaders have a high level of education (higher education (75%) or a scientific degree (5%)) and have already completed their careers (83%). The professional affiliation of the leaders is very diverse: from educators to specialists in the field of transport and military affairs. Every second respondent held a senior position at the working age. This distribution of responses about the socio-demographic data of respondents clearly shows the ability to educate and organize people around. 80% noted the invaluable value of their knowledge, accumulated life experience, which people respect.

79% of respondents are able to enjoy uniting like-minded people and purposefully organize events around themselves and 85% of club leaders are ready to play the role of mentors for potential leaders.

CML's working results is confirmed by the respondents' optimistic assessments of their future. Retirement for 87% of respondents is not the end of life, but on the contrary - new opportunities and expanding horizons. CMLs were created in 2018 to achieve this goal, so that every elderly resident of the city after retirement does not feel abandoned and unnecessary, but can rebuild / build the own life based on own interests and desires. 65% of the surveyed club leaders have a more intense and interesting life by having an opportunity to visiting CMLs.

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