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**ABOUT CHILDREN'S TRAVEL: THE GEOGRAPHY OF  
MOBILITY**

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**Abstract**

Children travel is an important part of the daily life of any modern child. Traveling expands the child geographic outlook, forms spatial skills, self-sufficiency and responsibility. The article presents the results of the empirical study on children travel. The data were collected by the questionnaire survey. In total, 724 Russian schoolers (10-11 years) from 10 various populated areas took part in it. Two open questions were selected for the analysis. The first question referred to the last trip made outside the children's populated area. The second concerned the desired trip destination. The data obtained were analyzed by the criteria of sex, age and the place of respondent residence as well as by the criterion of the interconnection between the journey made and the journey desired. The study of answers from schoolers living in Russian cities and rural populated areas showed the impact of the social and economic inequality factors defined both by the area dimensions and its remoteness from Moscow. The impact of other factors (sex and age) is feebly marked. Also, the answers contain very few facts unveiling the child participation in the process of choosing the destination points nor they provide enough information on the child self-sufficiency or the maturity of spatial orientation skills. The place of the last journey and the desired destination were virtually not correlating. Generally, primary school students want to travel across their country regardless of the previously visited place. The exception were the children from the megacities: they prefer to travel to Europe.

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## 1. Introduction

Children travel as well as children trips comprise the topic at the interface of social studies of childhood and humanitarian geography. This new interdisciplinary major was denoted as childhood geography (Filipova et al., 2018; Tolvaishis & Filipova, 2019)

In compliance with the Federal law of the Russian Federation “On Basics of Tourist Activity”, children traveling denotes children trips with certain purposes - educational, pedagogic, health improving, social, etc. That is why scientific papers frequently use the notion of “children travel” as a synonym for “children tourism”. Surely, one should point out that the notion “tourism” regulates children mobility. Thus, according to Gomilevskaya (2017) children tourism can be both commercial and social (by funding sources), short-term and long-term (by duration), educational, sports, active, health improving, etc. (by purposes).

Note that children tourism does not relate to family tourism: children travel implies traveling without parents while family traveling as a rule implies joint trips of parents and children.

Traveling helps children resolve a whole range of important objectives: acquiring a comprehensive experience, revealing talents, getting exciting impressions, communicating with various people, cultures and generations. The research of children journeys still questions the division into age subgroups; they should be divided into childhood and youth to reflect cognitive abilities of the underage children and their perception level.

Most Russian researchers (Bakhvalova, 2015; Golovanov, 2010) distinguish a social&pedagogic function of children journeys in the formation of patriotic, humanitarian, educational and career guidance focuses and study the psychology of tourist&country studies activity thus highlighting an important role of children tourism.

The foreign research highlighted the problem of the lack of attention to children journeys as early as in the 1980-s (Graburn, 1983; Poria & Timothy, 2014). Most research papers by foreign authors confirm a significant part children journeys have; thus, Alegre and Pou (2006) state that journeys comprise an important experience for growing people in a modern world. Dickinson and Lumsdon (2010) consider that the main purpose of journeys is to learn how to live in new conditions. Indeed, being a tourist means to change the place of residence and building communications with a new place, networking and integrating into a new lifestyle. This encourages people to experiments with situations different from their daily routine (Edensor, 2001).

Contemporary research establish the connection between daily children journeys and psychological and cognitive areas of welfare (Westman et al., 2020).

However, the topic of children’s travel, or children journey, is mostly considered within a small route “home-school” in foreign works. Thus, the article (Ikeda et al., 2020) points to significant differences in the organization of the environment around school, traffic regulation, school social&economic status existing between the children who traveled to school independently by public transport or using active mobility means and those who traveled to school by private transport.

These research correlate to the paper studying the impact of geographic and social environmental characteristics (public transport organization, availability of open and green spaces and recreation objects, etc.) on active school children travel (Leung & Loo, 2020).

The ability to make your own choice from an early age in a spontaneous, free and conscious way facilitates the formation of a rich emotional experience influencing the children potential. As a result, children tourism is a strategically important and developing topic in the childhood research.

## **2. Problem Statement**

Scientific approaches towards the phenomenon of children tourism are still very few. Such factors as the number of children involved in traveling, the time and frequency of traveling, what they do and what experience they obtain, are still being ignored comparing with other age categories. However, traveling has a great importance for the personal and social child development:

- it facilitates the child self-sufficiency development;
- expands children outlook;
- facilitates the child spatial orientation.

## **3. Research Questions**

3.1. Are there any correlations between the places of children travel and their sex, age, the size of a populated area where they reside and the federal district?

3.2. Do family journeys comprise the most part of children travel?

3.3. Is there any correlation between a last real journey the child made and a desired destination?

## **4. Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of the study is establishing the peculiarities of children spatial movement by the example of the journey the child made outside the populated area he or she lives in.

## **5. Research Methods**

The questionnaire-based survey was selected as the research method. The structure of the questionnaire is represented by the question blocks: “Moving and difficulties associated”, “Traveling”, “Populated area”, “World around”, “Way to school”, “Journeys”.

724 people took part in the survey. These were primary schoolers (age group 9-11 years) from 10 populated area of various types in 5 federal districts of the Russian Federation, boys - 49%, girls – 51%. When building a sampling, the authors use a random type of sampling population and applied a multi-stage cluster method for building such sampling.

To reach the study purposes, the populated area surveyed were divided into groups according to the size: village, towns - population size up to 50 thousand people; medium-sized cities –50-100 thousand people, large cities– 100-250 thousand people, major cities – 250 thousand -1 million people, megacities – more than one million people. In compliance with the specified types of populated area the sampling

distributed as follows: megacity - 24.5 %, major city - 9.5%, large city - 34.4%, small city - 15.6%, village - 16.0% of respondents.

To analyze the obtained empirical data, the authors use correlation analysis and monodimensional descriptive analysis. The array of data, obtained in the course of the questionnaire survey, was processed with the help of the software for statistical data analysis SPSS.

## 6. Findings

The questionnaire section “Traveling” included the questions on where the child has traveled during the previous year, who accompanied the child and what was the travel purpose, what transport was used. In addition, the child was asked about the future journey - where he or she wanted to come and why.

While describing the last journey, most children indicated they traveled within the country - 31.2%, at the second place were the journeys within the home region - 28.1%. Traveling abroad to Europe comprised 15.1% and ranked third.

Journeys abroad, to Europe (including Turkey) were mostly made by the residents of the Severo-Zapadny federal district - 37.3 % and the Privolzhsky federal district - 12.6 %. The children living in the Far Eastern and Siberian federal districts more frequently traveled to the Asian countries which is explained by their territorial proximity (15.7% - Far Eastern federal district, 8.9% - Siberian federal district) (see Table 1).

**Table 1.** Last journey (by Federal districts), %

Region	Central federal district	Privolzhsky federal district	Severo-Zapadny federal district	Siberian federal district	Far Eastern federal district
within the home region	68.8	20.7	12.3	22.2	32.9
to the neighboring region	6.3	11.5	1.3	4.4	24.3
within the country	20	44.8	37.7	60	19.2
former Soviet Union republics (CIS countries)	0	3.4	5.3	0	1.2
abroad to Asia	0	3.4	3.5	8.9	15.7
abroad to Europe	1.3	12.6	37.3	0	3.1
abroad to Africa	0	0	1.3	0	0.4
abroad to America	0	0	0.4	0	0.4

4% of children fell into the category of missing values. This number includes 29 people while 5 children stated they hadn’t traveled anywhere.

In the course of the research the authors revealed an inverse correlation between the place of the previous journey and the size of the populated area where children live. Thus, 35.6% of respondents from the major cities traveled within one country, 30% - to Europe while 16.9% of them traveled within the home region. For children living in large cities the distribution of answers on the last journey is the opposite: journeys to the neighboring region - 31.1%, within the country - 29%, to Europe - 19.7%. The schoolers living in large cities mostly traveled within the country - 39.3%, 19.6% traveled to Europe, and 13.2% of children made journeys within the home region. The priorities of children living in towns and villages coincided. They mostly traveled within the home region – 44.7 % and 67%, correspondingly, within the country – 33% and 18.3%, of children. The third place was taken by journeys to the neighboring region – 9.7% and 10.1 %.

The questions about the journey companions showed that 49.3% of respondents made journeys together with their parents, 30% of children traveled with a whole family, 6.9% of children traveled with other relatives, 6.3% of respondents traveled with their peers, 3.2% traveled together with brother and sisters. Other adults accompanied 2.7% of the respondents, “unaccompanied” journeys were made by 0.7% of children, other variants - 0.3%. Addressing the description of “unaccompanied” journeys allows identifying the companions of children journeys. They are not parents or other relatives but institutional employees - teachers of additional education institutions, school teachers, et al.

Naturally, traveling with adult people is explained by a young age of respondents. Journeys with peers are also journeys arranged by the adults, not by parents, but by teachers, teachers of additional education institutions, sport club teachers. However, these journeys are very important for children as children have a possibility to stay with their peers for a long time while their communication extends beyond the school and other lessons and is free and non-regulated.

The purpose of the journeys made by respondents mostly was recreation (51.5%), the second place was taken by the option “other” (14.2%). Visiting relatives ranked the third (12.2%). Further, the answers distributed as follows in the descending order: social program - 10.2%, shopping - 4.5%, communication - 3.1%, treatment - 2.5%, education - 1.6%, work - 0.1%. The case related to some professional traveling included the description provided by the girl from Saint-Petersburg who went to the summer house with her parents for working.

“Other” included the definition of the journey purpose. As the purpose children stated: participating in competition, contests, passing physical training standards (GTO, “fit for labor and defense”), performing as part of children ensembles as well as “getting acquainted with the world”, “traveling”, “learning and viewing something new”, “getting abroad”, “helping relatives”, “planting cedars”, “watching squirrels”, “gathering mushrooms”.

Considering the purpose of the journey as related to the populated areas, the authors stress the difference in the answers for the 3d question. Those living in the megacities stated a social program; the residents of major, large cities and towns indicated visiting their relatives while those living in village specified shopping (see Table 2).

**Table 2.** The travel purpose as related to the populated areas, %

	Megacity	Major City	Large	Town	Village
Recreation	55.80	59.70	55.70	46.20	37.40
Family Reunion	5.80	14.50	14.20	18.30	11.20
Education	3.20	0	1.40	1.90	0
Social Program	12.20	8.10	14.20	5.80	6.50
Shopping	1.90	1.60	0.50	7.70	16.80
Work	1.30	1.60	0	0	0
Treatment	0	1.60	2.40	3.80	6.50
Communication	4.50	3.20	1.90	2.90	2.80
Other	15.40	9.70	9.90	13.50	18.70

The answers to the question of the transport used were more or less evenly distributed: 33.6% - by plane, 32.9% - by car, 22.5% - by train. The rest 10.5% of children traveled by public transport and 0.5% indicated ship as the transport means.

The questionnaire also included the question on the preferred places for traveling. The children were asked where they want to come and why. Thus, most children wanted to travel in Russia – 33.2%, the second place was taken by journeys abroad to Europe (including Turkey) – 22.8% while the travels to the USA ranked third with 8.2%.

The authors point to the reverse correlation dependence between the desired destination and the populated area size. Thus, children from all types of populated areas except for megacities indicated the journeys within the country first; this choice was especially characteristic for the village residents (50.9%) and town residents (46%). The respondents from megacities ranked first the journeys to Europe - 35.1%, the second place was taken by the answer “abroad to Asia” - 24.7%. The third place was taken by traveling within Russia - 15.6%.

The children living in major, large cities and villages ranked second traveling abroad to Europe (24.1%, 22.6%, 14.8%, correspondingly). The third place was given to the option “traveling abroad to Asia” by those living in these populated areas - 2.0%, 16.1%, 10.2%, correspondingly.

One could trace a direct and feeble correlation between a desired place of travel and the place of the last journey of the respondents. The analysis shows that generally, primary school children want to travel within the territory of their own country regardless of the previous trip destination except for the children from the megacities.

These children gave the following answers ranking first “other” as the purpose of the desired journey - 33.1%, the second place was taken by a social program – 28.3%, and the third - by recreation, 25%. Further, in the descending order, they indicated family reunion - 5.4%, “visited once and liked it” - 3.9%, communication – 1.9%, shopping - 1.3%, treatment - 0.4%, education - 0.1%, work - 0.1%, moving – 0.1%.

The option “other” in relation towards the purposes of the desired journey demonstrates, on the one hand, the impact school lessons have on children, especially, English and History (“*I want to England to see Big Ben*”, “*I want to see Buckingham Palace and Big Ben*”, “*In Egypt to visit pharaohs*”), on the other hand, here one can see the impact of social stereotypes of the place status. In the latter case children cannot

provide clear reasoning for their choice using general statements: “Moscow is large, and it is good there”; “Because there are lots of monuments”; “This is the main city of Russia. It’s interesting”.

Using the descriptions of the real and desired journeys made by the children, the authors compiled the word clouds providing a general idea about children travel. In the first case this was recreation accompanied by the objectives “meeting, watching, viewing”. The second case reflects the impact of social stereotypes as it’s been stated above. The respondents cannot give clear reasoning for their choice in all cases using general statements: “beautiful, warm, interesting”, “there is sea”, etc.



Figure 1. The cloud of words “Purpose of the journey made”



Figure 2. The cloud of words “Purpose of the desired journey”

## 7. Conclusion

Therefore, the analysis of answers from the schoolers living in Russian cities and rural populated areas showed the impact of the social&economic inequality factors defined both by the populated area dimensions and its remoteness from Moscow. Also, the children descriptions contain very few facts unveiling the child participation in the process of choosing the destination points nor they provide enough information on the child self-sufficiency or the maturity of spatial orientation skills.

The data analysis showed the predominance of pre-arranged family journeys for recreation in the description of journeys made by children.

The authors established the correlation between the places of children journeys and the size of a populated area. Additionally, the authors also point to the correlation between federal districts and foreign routes of children journeys: children from the Western part of Russia more often travel to Europe while children from Eastern Russia more often travel to Asia.

The questionnaire demonstrated that children want to travel within the territory of their own country regardless of the previous trip destination. The exception were children residing in the largest cities.

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