

## **A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK FOR THE SOCIOLOGICAL STUDY OF THE LIFE STRATEGIES**

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*This article analyzes the life chances and opportunities of the individual provided by the society through the prism of implemented life strategies. It is noted that in the context of large-scale changes in the social structure, taking place in the group, institutional and individual levels and concerning changes in social norms, values, ideas, etc., is particularly important to study the life strategies of individuals. The concept of «life strategies» is defined as a set of ideas, beliefs and attitudes of the person, based on his/her life meaning value orientations, and aimed at achieving the goal of own life. The key empirical indicators of life strategies, in particular their focus, stability, long-term, mindfulness identifies. It is emphasized that the implementation of the individual life strategy involves not only his willingness and readiness to work in a certain direction, but also his organization, commitment and activity in the choice of means and methods to achieve strategic objectives. The process of formation of the individual life strategies in their social, cultural and psychological conditioning is analyzed. The author's vision of the structural components of life strategy is offered; options for a possible adjustment of their individual strategic plans are considering. The focus is on the theoretical analysis and the definition of multi-level factors in the formation and implementation of strategies for a person's life in a social transformation conditions. The possibility of the application submitted by the theoretical approach to the analysis of life strategies in the context of an empirical study of this phenomenon is considered.*

**Keywords:** life strategies, life chances, life opportunities.

*Статья посвящена анализу жизненных шансов и возможностей, предоставляемых индивиду обществом, сквозь призму реализуемых им жизненных стратегий. Подчеркивается, что в условиях масштабных изменений социальной структуры, происходящих на групповом, институциональном и индивидуальном уровнях и касающихся, в том числе, изменений социальных норм, ценностей, идей и т.п., особое значение приобретает исследование жизненных стратегий индивидов. Понятие «жизненные стратегии» дефинируется как совокупность представлений, убеждений и установок личности, основывающихся на ее смысловых ценностных ориентациях, относительно действий, направленных на достижение цели своей жизни. Определяются основные эмпирические индикаторы жизненных стратегий, в частности, их целенаправленность, устойчивость, долгосрочность, осознанность. Подчеркивается, что реализация жизненной стратегии индивида предполагает не только его готовность и подготовленность к деятельности в определенном направлении, но также его организованность, целеустремленность и активность в выборе средств и методов достижения стратегических задач. Анализируется процесс формирования жизненных стратегий индивида в их социальной, культурной и психологической обусловленности. Предлагается авторское видение структурных составляющих жизненной стратегии; рассматриваются варианты возможной корректировки индивидом своих стратегических планов. Основной акцент делается на теоретическом анализе и определении разноуровневых факторов формирования и реализации стратегий жизни личности в условиях социальных трансформаций. Обосновывается возможность применения представленного теоретического подхода к анализу жизненных стратегий в контексте эмпирического изучения данного феномена.*

**Ключевые слова:** жизненные стратегии, жизненные шансы, жизненные возможности.

*Стаття присвячена аналізу життєвих шансів і можливостей, які надаються індивіду суспільством, крізь призму реалізованих їм життєвих стратегій. Підкреслюється, що в умовах масштабних змін соціальної структури, які відбуваються на груповому, інституційному та індивідуальному рівнях і стосуються, зокрема, змін соціальних норм, цінностей, ідей і т.п., особливого значення набуває дослідження життєвих стратегій індивідів. Поняття «життєві стратегії» дефінуються як сукупність уявлень, переконань і установок особистості, що ґрунтуються на її смислових ціннісних орієнтаціях, щодо дій, спрямованих на досягнення мети свого життя. Визначаються основні емпіричні індикатори життєвих стратегій, зокрема їх цілеспрямованість, стійкість, довгостроковість, усвідомленість. Підкреслюється, що реалізація життєвої стратегії індивіда передбачає не тільки його готовність і підготовленість до діяльності в певному напрямку, але також його організованість, цілеспрямованість і активність у виборі засобів і методів досягнення стратегічних завдань. Аналізується процес формування життєвих стратегій індивіда в їх соціальній,*

*культурній та психологічній обумовленості. Пропонується авторське бачення структурних складових життєвої стратегії; розглядаються варіанти можливого коректування індивідом своїх стратегічних планів. Основний акцент робиться на теоретичному аналізі та визначенні різнорівневих чинників формування та реалізації стратегій життя особистості в умовах соціальних трансформацій. Обґрунтовується можливість застосування представленого теоретичного підходу до аналізу життєвих стратегій в контексті емпіричного вивчення даного феномену.*

**Ключові слова:** життєві стратегії, життєві шанси, життєві можливості.

In this article I will turn to the behavioral aspect (individual preferences) realized in the used life strategies and taking different configurations depending on the existing life chances and opportunities of individuals in the special social and cultural conditions of the borderlands.

Among different models of studying social changes in different social and cultural spheres the modernization theory takes an important place. It can present a special interest to try to broaden the horizons of modernization analysis using structural approach which was done by the Swedish researcher G. Therborn in historical-sociological analysis «European Modernity And Beyond: The Trajectory of European Societies, 1945-2000». Discussing the problems of identity of European «modernity» G. Therborn worked out his own analytical model («a compass which helps to orient in the myriads of continuing social processes») which can be called *structural* and is based on action theory (structural perspective) and structural approach [1, p. 164]. In G. Therborn's opinion, the social world can be viewed from two positions covering the elements inherent to the person as an actor, these are culture and structure. Individuals act in a certain way as a result of their being a part of a certain culture and/or their certain place in the structure of resources and restrictions [2]. The author understands culture as something, which is shared by people and ensures inner guidelines in the framework of society. The structure in its turn includes, in his opinion the following components:

- borders of social system and mechanisms regulating membership;
- positional models in the framework of social system which in their turn are determined by institutionalized providing resources and restrictions; non-institutionalized, «unofficial», maybe «deviant» but nevertheless structuralized access or, on the contrary, lack of access to the resources of action; structuralizing probable sets of chances, risks and opportunities for the future. Resources and restrictions take a series of concrete forms, which, in the author's opinion, can be determined as the tasks, the rights and the means [1, p. 165].

As for the problem of life chances they while being a certain social construction are perceived by individuals as a solid basis of potential opportunities for projecting their lives and working out the life strategy.

Life chances can be also used as a rational notion and then they are theoretically divided according to:

- spheres of life activity;
- ratio and proportion;
- scale of individual claims, expectations and preferences;
- type of qualification as more or less constant factors of biographical trajectory, etc. [3].

Correlation of life chances with the structure of social opportunities occurs in the process of estimation by the individual of his/her primary position (being satisfied with different aspects of life) which is necessary in building of life strategies. It is essential for connecting the individual's current and perspective social position with institutional and everyday opportunities of a system of statuses, prestige, etc. The process of such «connecting» depends not only on the system of values and norms but also on the type of individual adaptation of personality to the existing social and cultural traditions, and, thus, it depends on the types of social behavior in R. Merton's terminology [4, p. 193–194]. For example, in the conforming type of adaptation it is logical to coordinate cultural aims and institutional means; and in the innovative type of adaptation a conflict of aims and means is characteristic, and as a result it is presupposed that an individual will take the risks caused by choosing not typical means of achievements and social practices [3].

A. Sogomonov emphasizes that in the Soviet and early post-Soviet period every subject of action was prescribed to the society, group, organization etc, in which he/she had to live and work, that is why he/she had nothing to do but to consume and not produce his/her life chances. The chance was not a subject to either free choice or creative forming, in other words, it was not created but chaotically consumed. In the ethos of consuming a chance an achieved subject naturally aimed to use situational opportunities given to him/her for him/her to start regular consuming those authority or economy chances which are provided to him/her by his/her «place» in the system taking a «comfortable» place in the shade of redistribution economy [3]. That is why he concludes that consuming but not producing life chances was so deeply rooted in the minds of Soviet people that the situation has not critically changed during the 1990s. It is difficult not to agree with one of the main conclusions of the authors of the book «A Common Soviet Person», who write that «a post-Soviet person will stay Soviet during a long period of time and will find appropriate conditions for his/her life in the shade of redistribution economy and bureaucratic system of personnel circulation» [5, p. 265].

I will try to prove or refute this statement in the process of analyzing the self-esteem of existing life chances and opportunities in the sphere of consuming and taking a definite position in the system of stratification of Ukrainian society in the next article.

To start my analysis I will turn to the international research showing the objective conditions for producing and reproducing chances and opportunities supplementing them with the estimation of existing inequality in incomes and self-esteem of consumer status and with strategical aspects of life in the sphere of health and work. I will view the theoretical background of the question and components and producing elements of life strategies explaining the necessity of turning to such issues as objective and subjective components of life strategies.

The aim of next part of this article is theoretical analysis and defining split-level factors of forming life strategies of a personality in the conditions of social changes for their further empiric studying in Ukrainian society. For this reason it is necessary to specify the components and the process of building life strategies; and it is important to mark its objective and subjective sides, schematically visualize the components of a personality's life strategies.

In the conditions of global social changes taking place at the institutional and activity levels and concerning the structure of a social system, the connections between its elements (social norms, interests, values, ideas and relations), its borders and functions, its social surrounding it becomes crucially important to study life strategies of individuals.

The importance of the above-described studying is explained by the fact that the most widespread life strategies show the degree of adaptation of individuals and separate social groups to the existing social and economic situation in the society, to the changes in all spheres of their lives, normative and value systems and expresses certain life expectations, so present the reflection of a subject's preferences and the extent of their realization in the present conditions.

The representatives of psychological analysis take an important part in studying this problem. Mainly they emphasize different aspects of forming life strategies of a personality while analyzing this process:

- 1) problem of life journey (B. Ananyev, Sh. Byuler, S. Rubinstein);
- 2) building time perspective (A. Bekasov, A. Kronik);
- 3) building life perspective (R. Kastenbaum, K. Levin, L. Frank);
- 4) building certain life scenario and life style (A. Adler, E. Fromm); 5) forming life strategies (K. Abulkhanova-Slavskaya, Ye. Demchenkova, T. Reznik, Yu. Reznik, Ye. Smirnov).

It is worth mentioning that conceptualization of the notion «life strategy» was for the first time fulfilled by K. Abulkhanova-Slavskaya: the author defined its basic characteristics, factors of forming and realization and also compiled the typology of life strategies. In her opinion, a life strategy consists the ways of changes, transforming the conditions and life situations according to the values of a personality [6].

Different directions are pointed out in sociological studying of life strategies. The most common one is studying life strategies from the point of view of personality viewed as an active subject of strategic planning of one's own life.

Firstly, this is phenomenological approach emphasizing the criteria of value actualization of life space (the concept of subjectivity and inter-subjectivity of personal behavior – «the world of life») (P. Berger, T. Luckmann, A. Schutz).

Secondly, these are the representatives of activity approach who view the life strategy as an element of individual activity, and its main quality is the type of activity (A. Giddens, M. Archer, A. Turen, P. Bourdieu, P. Sztompka, T. Zaslavskaya, S. Babenko).

Depending on activeness / passiveness of individuals (a series of similar choices made by social actors in the framework of their daily life which are the most widespread in a certain social surrounding) the typologies of their life strategies are built.

It presents special interest to turn to P. Bourdieu who states that life strategies are constructed by an individual on the basis of habitus and other actives but this does not mean that people do not have variants of choices and should not show their own initiative and take decisions [6].

The second direction of research emphasizes the objective side of forming life strategies: they are provided to an individual through the functioning of social institutions (e.g., building life strategies as a process of involving into the structure of employment and receiving the appropriate status (V. Shubkin).

The intermediate position between the above-described directions is taken by the concept of a personality's life plans in which subjectivity of life strategies is presented as a result of objective needs of the society and life conditions of the population (M. Rutkevich, L. Rubina).

T. Reznik and Yu. Reznik understand a personality's life strategy as a choice of priority directions of his / her development depending on perspective and long-term orientation of an individual concerning his / her future [7].

But other researchers mark that situations of constant social changes, existing risks, transformation reforms together with anomic condition of the society do not contribute to long-term life planning, so individuals' life strategies in such conditions should be mainly viewed as strategies of adaptation and survival (N. Naumova, N. Davydova).

Among Ukrainian researchers it is worth paying special attention to the works of S. Babenko (life strategies and social practices in institutional space of a society in the conditions of transformation) [8; 9], M. Kuhta (interrelation

of life chances and activist component of life strategies) [10], A. Yarema (analysis and interrelation of the notions «life strategy» and «success», «symbolic capital») and others [11].

This is not a full list of directions of research concerning life strategies. In one way or another, this concept is analyzed from different viewpoints:

- through the needs as an important component of personal activeness;
- through value orientations and aims as key elements of life strategies;
- through tasks and resources as indicators representing life aims of individual and group achievements.

Life strategies are analyzed in the connection with different social-demographic, economic, professional, generation groups etc.

The analysis of literature and the results of empiric studies allows to emphasize combining institutional and activity methodological approaches to viewing life strategies which lets the researchers take into account the existing institutional resources and their availability together with the needs, value orientations, life aims being determiners building personality's life strategies. This allows to talk about subjective and objective sides of the process called forming life strategy.

The objective component includes the surrounding in which the institutional opportunities of realizing the individual's potential are present. And the current social norms and concepts of certain models of social behavior are being prestigious at the level of mass consciousness, etc.

The subjective side presents a kind of filter in the process of building a life strategy of an individual, which is represented by needs, interests, value orientations, life aims, etc.

As many authors mark, in the context of sociological analysis «life strategy» refers to a rational way of treating life. Related notions here are the concepts of life aims, life preferences, life values, life orientations, etc.

A life aim is an ideal image of the future effect of the activities, which should result in realizing one's own needs. The term «life preferences» is connected with the previous one and emphasizes the role and meaning of aims, which are set by an individual independently in contrast to those which he / she should set feeling the pressure of circumstances.

Life orientations are objective orientations of an individual regarding the situation of his/her life activities.

It is important to pay special attention to the notion expressing real possibilities, which are provided to an individual by the society for reaching the concrete goals and forming a life strategy – an individual's life chances – a set of definite variants and ways of life planning.

Chances are something greater than prerequisites of action but smaller than practical action. People need the access to markets, processes of taking political decisions, possibilities for cultural self-expression but in all these spheres they should be provided with a lot of different chances of choices.

In R. Dahrendorf's opinion, the progress of modern society is connected mainly with the fact that many problems of survival have been solved, the life level has been increased, most countries have broadened their legal framework and the borders of political democracy, and the level of individual mobility has considerably increased [3]. A special place is given to the marked growth of the general amount of life chances and the amount of those who can use them [12, p. 16–20].

With the help of the working «concept of life chances» R. Dahrendorf tries at the same time to make certain corrections in his earlier approaches to the theory of conflict and change. The theorist presupposes that with the help of the concept of life chances one could better understand the essence of social conflicts: in his opinion, social conflicts occur more often because of life chances or because of asserting the level which has been reached. In his terminology, life chances are based on the combination of options and ligatures, i.e. opportunities to make personal choice (options) and use social ties (ligatures) [13].

Life chances are opportunities for individual development provided by social structures. They present certain «matrixes» allowing, from the one hand, to realize such valuable principles of free choice for individuals and, from the other hand, to take into account the rules of «game» defined by the society.

Both options and ligatures are the elements of social roles. Each society has a balance of opportunities of choice and social ties keeping an individual in a certain position. The society gives every individual opportunity to use his / her life chance, to show his / her individuality in the conditions of competition. To some extent, R. Dahrendorf in working out this theory was inspired by Max Weber's reflections on the role of life opportunities, which each individual has in the society [3].

In such way, a life strategy is proposed to be interpreted as a mean of planning by an individual of his / her own life consisting of:

- prior constructing of way of life (choosing aims, priorities);
- realization (activities aimed at meeting life needs and problem solving);
- life satisfaction (self-esteem of the achieved).

The author's viewpoint on this complicated complex of social, cultural and psychological projection of an individual on his / her own future life is schematically reflected in my previous article [14].

It is important to stress that forming a life strategy is strongly connected with the function of goal-setting on the condition of a short-term or a long-term goal reaching of which becomes the main aim of the subject's activity.

It is worth explaining that the situations, which recur are socially significant and also arouse the needs – definite life events – become an object of personality orientation in time and space. In the process of evaluating the achieved and the extent of satisfaction a personality gets emotional satisfaction resulting in long-term following the chosen life strategy.

In the structure of life, strategies values and value orientations should be pointed out separately. Value preferences and their hierarchy present a dominating factor in planning the future and certain social practices, which, in their turn, are connected with the existing needs of an individual, and their actualization leads to the choice of life values.

Life values are interpreted as objects, which have a purposeful significance for the members of a social group, in accordance to this, value orientations include public recognition of certain values and value oriented subjectively significant choice of personality.

Value orientations are understood as an attributive quality of an individual, which contributes to self-identification with the most significant for it values of a society / group, which allows making a motivated choice and influences forming social practices. An essential dynamic aspect of value orientations and their role in forming life strategies is shown here.

Depending on the level of social, economic and cultural development of a society, the level and quality of life, which act as the conditions of realizing the subject's practices of influence, traditions and ideology, one can single out the spheres of distribution of life strategies types.

As it is marked by T. Reznik and Yu. Reznik, the most widespread types of strategies found in everyday life can be singled out by a series of institutional signs: social and economic position, the way of reproduction and transmission of cultural standards, the system of regulation and control, the social character (collective mentality), the professional ethos [7, p. 104]. Altogether these signs form a complex criterion for sociological typologization of life strategies; its content is determined by the character of social activity of a personality. Receptive «acquired» activeness is the basis of the strategy of life welfare and its anomalous forms – consumer and accumulator, exploitative and parasitic, etc. The prerequisite for the strategy of life success is presented by motivational «achieved» activeness meant for public recognition (entrepreneurship can be an example here). Creative activeness aimed at creating new forms of life regardless from their external recognition (non-recognition) is characteristic for the strategy of self-realization.

**Table 1.**

**Typological characteristic of life strategies\***

<b>Elements of individual life strategies</b>	<b>Basic types of life strategies</b>		
	<i>welfare strategies</i>	<i>life success strategies</i>	<i>self-realization strategies</i>
1. Perceptive orientations	Well-to-do, full of necessary benefits and comfort, secured and stable life	Active, full of events, socially significant and successful life	Beautiful, harmonic, creative life which is in its content near to art
2. Orientations of life sense	Acquiring and consuming different life benefits, seeking financial or moral and psychological comfort	Rising to the level of life which is desired, socially recognized and ensuring a stable financial position	Free creative activities and developing one's own moral and physical strength; self-perfection achieved through changing one's life world
3. Value orientations	Aspiration for acquiring and mastering a set of life benefits (desired or prestigious) which is significant for a personality	Reaching high level of skill, high professionalism and efficiency in the chosen sphere of activity; the value criteria of success are self-organization and self-discipline, businesslike approach and spirit of enterprise	Aspiration for personal independence and creative position; tendency to constant search for alternatives and deepened self-analysis; selective attitude towards the surrounding; pluralism of life position
4. Normative orientations	Accepting principles and rules setting the priority of certain life benefits	Accepting principles and rules resulting in success or contributing to personal and professional growth, moving up the social stairs	Absence of strict and clearly established rules in following generally accepted norms and restrictions; respectful treating the freedom and way of life of other people
5. Aim orientations	Aspiration for maximum possible or acceptable satisfaction of one's needs for certain life benefits	Defining and reaching large-scale aims which have transformation direction and lead to life success	Restricted using of aim-setting as an instrument of concretization and practice implementing of life senses

\*Source: [7]

The typology of life strategies by S. Babenko is based on such criteria as types, kinds and direction of social activeness; dominating aims; motives, values and preferences; methods, techniques, means and sphere of realization of these aims and preferences. The author singles out:

- achievements – self-realization, using new opportunities, broadened status reproduction;
- adaptation – type 1 – simple status reproduction, preserving it due to adaptation, forced balancing, using new opportunities including; type 2 – simple reproduction, an attempt to preserve a minimum accepted status, self-restriction;
- survivals – restricted reproduction on the level of physical survival, reducing social status, self-restriction, reducing life chances;

exclusions (isolations) – «escape» from reality, refusal to get adjusted to changes [15, p. 264].

Studying life strategies of social actors is important in the situation of social changes as it demonstrates the reproduction and alteration of social institutions, types of group activity, value and normative structures of a society. Life strategy is a dynamic formation and its dynamics is a result of an individual's reaction to changes, first of all, the changes in social and cultural surrounding and the events in the sphere of subculture microgroup.

The state of uncertainty and a large amount of social groups with restricted life resources and a low status as characteristics of Ukrainian society emphasizes adaptation approach to the analysis of life strategies and to the search for an answer to a question: which system of value orientations helps successful inside and outside adaptation to the existing conditions and social changes of the opportunity for long-term planning is restricted. The further analysis will be directed at viewing life strategies in the framework of existing life chances and opportunities, as well as everyday practices in different life spheres depending on different factors of regional social and cultural surrounding of the Borderlands. This will allow us to view the variants of perspective development of a society on the whole and of a definite region in particular.

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