

**FLEA MARKETS OF VOLGOGRAD: CULTURAL AND SOCIO-  
PSYCHOLOGICAL SPECIFICITY<sup>1</sup>**

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From the point of micro-urbanism studying the city cultural environment staging on everyday practices, the authors consider relations of flea markets as a phenomenon of modern culture to such universals of human being as labour, game, exchange, childhood, generation, daily routine. It is researched in the article, Volgograd flea market ('Pet market'), its social structure, its place in city environment, communication peculiarities, and its socially psychological 'atmosphere'. Within the framework of studying the anthropology of a thing in the region culture, the way of attitude to things and socio-cultural patterns generated by flea markets as the phenomenon of the city culture of Volgograd are shown. It is stated, that the expansion of flea markets into the culture of various countries may be considered as a part of estatization and gamification of life, from one side, and puerilization of culture, from the other side. And also, it might be the essential potential for the development of modern cities as cities of culture, the significant element of creative urban economy and the resource to the cultural tourism.

Key words: flea market, thing anthropology, economical behavior, general exchange, micro-urbanism, culture of Volgograd.

**Introduction (background)**

Volgograd is one of the leading centres of Volgograd region and in the South of Russia. It is a city with over one million inhabitants, stretching out along the river Volga more than 100 km long. Its eight districts might have been quite big separate towns grouped around the plants, having their own temples, cemeteries, and markets. To find out the people living in a city much better, travellers used to visit these cultural places at first. A unique cultural image of modern Volgograd would be not quite complete without studying specific logic of such a cultural object as a flea market. In modern urbanistics flea markets are seen as, some kind of, «mirrors» of the urban societies, reflecting unique «appearance» of the city, its fortune, its special language (Shipulina N.B., Marchenko A.Ju., Kudryavich E.L., 2015).

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All world's flea markets are similar to each other, but each has unique details and 'inner logic', specified by culturally anthropological specific of its participants. Flea markets are the places where by the deliberate and penetrating thinking one may see the correlation of person's economical behavior with his other intrinsic properties and social qualities (Damsar, 1998). The results of theoretical analysis about the influence of up-today global economy on peoples' mentality and behavior can be substantiated by means of close and deliberate observation of this specific human experience. Here one may see a hidden, and even mystical nature of general exchange, while leading of that, the exchange of properties between people and things is being held: when things possess the status and importance of their owners, as well as owners possess the status of things (Moss M., 1996).

### **Material and methods of researching**

In Krasnooktyabrskiy district of Volgograd the flea market possesses the large space between the wall of the official city market, existing here long ago and used for selling household goods and domestic animals (that's why it is named «Pet market»), and nearby streets. Its working days are Saturdays and Sundays. On these days it occupies the place that is used for packing visitors' and vendors' cars on weekdays. The sales outlets are mostly occupied by vendors, but this state of things is changeable, because of the weather and season. As a counter one may use not only carton boxes, but own small tables or the bonnets of own cars. Vendors come from every part of Volgograd as well as from closely situated towns – «towns-satellites». Market administration levies quite a symbolic tax from the vendors that is referred for territory cleaning (as everybody thinks).

The Krasnooktyabrskaya «Ptichka» has existed as the place for selling once used things since the end of 1980s. But nowadays the market has been going through its bloom as the phenomenon of urban public culture. That is connected with the situation of spreading this phenomenon in other Russian cities and changing the inhabitants' attitude to flea markets, especially the representatives of the middle class, who have had a chance to visit flea markets in other counties. Up-today «Ptichka» fully represents 'the interests' club' – «concentration of social and cultural life, the place of citizens cooperation» (Pachenkov O., Voronkova L., 2014, p. 133).

At «Ptichka» from 500 to 800 sales outlets are represented there. But there are more vendors because family and friendly pairs deal in. In comparison with Saint-Petersburg flea market «Udelnay» (Pachenko O., 2004), the specific of «Ptichka» is, that males at the age of fifty chiefly sell. Females selling things and own clothes unnecessary in the household are usually over fifty, and they are about 10-15% in quantity. From time to time, the elderly vendors bring their

grandchildren, that may be the reason of envy for some 8-9 year old children having come with customers.

A girl of about 9 years old is addressing her mother, who has a look of anxiety and slight disgust on her face, and says enthusiastically «Mum, when will we sell here?» - «But what should we sell here?» asks her mother quite scared. «Well, my toys, by chance». Unlike the children from other countries, who are busy getting the first experience of economical relations, Russian children coming with sellers at the Volgograd flea market are mostly an indicator of the game displayed here.

Vendors are differentiated into «metalists», «numismatists», «specialists of battle scenes», «watchmakers». There are quite few actual «second-hand booksellers», as well as actual «music lovers». There is a particular category as vendors of medals and pins. The peculiarity of «Ptichka» is plenty of «metalists» that caused the second title of the market as «Ferrum-piece» («Zhelezka»). Moreover, it is situated opposite the metallurgical plant «Krasniy Oktyabr», that is over 100 years old. There are ‘masters’ specializing on the details necessary at different fields, and ‘old sellers’ offering the wide range of details for different equipment of Soviet period, that was illegally taken from Volgograd plants at those years.

The other peculiarity of «Ptichka» is that there is practically no handicraft, as when as in 1980-90s art handmade things were represented more often. It is because handicrafts are sold at other places: at the official markets, by Internet, craft fairs, and festivals-exhibitions. Besides, «Ptichka» is inclining mostly to antiquerization, to transformation of pure meanings contexts (Shpakovskaya L.). «At flea markets the items and feelings inspiring their creation should die for long times so that to be restored to life and be demanded at the other context, unlike the period they were created ... Great objects of such markets at first should live for years at the purgatory of silence and oblivion» (Jean Cathelin et Gabrielle Gray, 1967).

It might have been supposed, that Volgograd flea market should widely present articles «coming back» from the World War II such as helmets, flasks, gas masks, parts of the weapons, soldiers’ and officers’ belts, shoulders straps, having been bought from self-working archaeologists, and «black diggers». But it is not quit so, because the market sector is occupied by «professionals», who may be accompanied by antique vendors, usually reselling the articles bought at flea markets in other cities (in Krasnodar, Rostov-on-Don, Voronezh, Penza). Apart from that, «professionals» have the others outlets for showing their goods in Volgograd. It is connected with the fact that «Ptichka» is visited by plenty of people with low buying possibility (as it is the proletarian district). The collectors and the experts visit «Ptichka» as well, because it is the biggest flea market in Volgograd. But sometimes they want to communicate within the subculture with

its specific rules (for example, setting prices). Not more than 10-15 vendors constantly presenting military items at «Ptichka» do this mostly to draw attention. Something unusual still can be bought from the inhabitants. «Professionals» trade with collectors through the Internet where the price is being approved. These kind of things are bought by customers included into Russian and global nets of flea markets. The representatives of this category may come to «Ptichka» from Moscow, Saint-Petersburg, and at recent times from Caucasus as well.

But even the vendors-‘professionals’ don’t study just economical interests, as at the moment «Ptichka» is more likely to be the club, where it is of great importance to have «the space of close relations, special social interconnections, interactions «face-to-face» (Pachenko O., Voronkova K., 2014, p. 134). The atmosphere at «Ptichka» is soft and pleasing, nearly festive, but without music. Records are really tuned with gramophones, not representing the work of musical instruments. At least two groups of vendors play chess and backgammon with each other. At «Ptichka» it is safe, though there are no patrol policemen unlike the flea markets in the USA (Zukin Sharon, 2015). The other noticeable difference is that, there are no migrants. Though in Volgograd there are some huge diasporas traditionally occupying own niches in the structure of population employment. At flea markets they meet rarely, and only as customers.

Among the «Ptichka» vendors the category of people who try to sell absolutely absurd things may be differentiated. The age range of this group of people is from 55 to 70 years old. Their rare customers are a lot younger as a rule. At «Ptichka» in comparison with Berlin Mauerpark artists and designers rarely come. It is also not visited by various odd fellows, who are interested in absurd things. Meanwhile the special attitude created by the flea market field to material world leads to transformation material objects into the source of spiritual energy. The pieces of past life, lying on the ground, taking out from the context, are appealing not only to the memory but also to the imagery, being able to create a new reality to them. Neither artists nor odd fellows are the main clientele of such vendors, but those «who penetrate» – people «having fallen into the creative bloom» and slightly feeling shy because of this state. They come at «Ptichka» not often and experience vivid pleasure being here. Just watching these people one may understand why more and more people all over the world play this «carnival of absurd things» with such a great passion. Sometimes the things represented as touching «treasure» at a flea market, being brought home and appearing in the other object context become just lumber.

In this case the nostalgia about the soviet period becomes apparent (Pachenkov O., Voronkova L., 2008), and the paradox is that the times of «no-image in life» and romantically idealist struggle with «things possession» are

represented with the things. Emotional implication of things is evident through the attitude to the things, for example, a person who sells at a flea market at a loss, because things that they bought before here or at any other similar place for resale are so loved by them that they do not want to part with them. These touching treasures may have no value. «*How much are the brilliants?*», asks a customer bending forward to a broken pin, pretending to be done from amber. Symbolic nature of exchange being done here is vivid for everybody. Here one can experience the joy because of having met the thing that he saw 40 years ago and the desire to give it birth in future («*You will sell it in 20 years once again*»), to oppose to the culture of once-used things the unexpected feeling of realizing that each phenomenon has long-lasting and breathtaking echo.

In M.Y. Epshtein's works we find the confirmation to reasonless street philosophy represented by «Ptichka»: «They worship absolutely altruistically «the humble» – the ultimate quota of universe, forgotten and wordless identities, through which the wisdom of Inimitable and Inimitated comes out much more accurate; - to what the poet called «Almighty God of details» (Epshtein M.N.). Here, unnecessary things are changing, «saved from their pettiness by love *choosing* them», exposed «to shame» out of the upper shelves, attics, garages. But still, a flea market is not only and not all that much «an urban scene» as it has been represented in the research by O. Pachenkov and L. Voronkova. Only the consequence of culture «*showization*» makes us see in the essence of flea market a performance, a sphere of voyeurism. It appears more likely as a special space of metaphysical freedom.

All observers of flea markets catch in the affection to trivial things something touching and unselfish, referred to the childish look at the world. So, a flea market appeals to the child in the soul of a grown-up, to the memory about childish games when changing clothes, about the affection to the small and miserable, flawed and damaged but nevertheless, unique and inimitable. Studying the world of things at the flea markets, the researchers point out that they are characterized with «unusual combination of things, representing thousands private lives of some generations and social spheres at a single space» (Pachenko O., Voronkova L., 2014, p. 168). It is true. But the powerful protovirtuality of flea-markets objects, their desire to survive and find their place in the new context should be also marked. The symbolic value to such objects is added not only because of their history and voyeurism, where time vector is directed to the past. It is the place where another possibilistic form of communication between a man and an object is being shaped, where the vector is directed to the future, in which the object has an ability not only to inform, but also to transform the subjects of interaction.

Humanist background and anthropo-cultural essence of flea markets differ and depends on real economical situation. So, practically the absolute



absence of public commodity, starvation and closely relating to it absolute deterioration of morals influenced the atmosphere of «New Market» in Odessa in 1920s. «How is it possible to recall the plenty of swears, howlings, cryings, complaints, hysterics, imprecations, and abuse, messed in a single buzz unexpectedly interrupted with ashrrill whistle of a militiaman?» C. Puystovskiy once wrote, «and how to describe the hard running of black marketeer with all those things hanging all over their bodies, who do straight down the block pavement? How to describe the yellowed bras, lost while the running; soldiers' pants made of coarse calico, and cracked and overdried rubber hot-water bottles having a specific color of liver?» (Paustovskiy C.G., 2013. P. 113).

People's accumulation at one locus, who have appeared on the edge of survival, naturally reveal the worst human qualities in them and turn visiting of the flea market to a real test. In the context of our investigation, one evidence is interesting, that the «New market», located at the bottom of Sadovay Street, and being used as a refuge for swindlers, old generals' wives, pickpockets and odd fellows «with spoiled unreasonable life» was the special space of urban environment.

At the beginning of the XX<sup>th</sup> century flea markets were considered to be suspicious and shameful phenomenon in many countries (Gregson N., Crew L., 2003) and were connected with the chaos, poverty, and marginal groups. To this contradiction, the modern fleamarkets are becoming the space of holiday and may be interchanged with scared places. In this way, «at every 21<sup>st</sup> of every month in Kiot a huge flea market of Cobo-ity - the «Cobo's market», called so after the name of Cobo-dicy (patriarch of the esoteric Buddhism community of Syngon. The flea market is being held at the oldest Kiot temple Todzy» (ZhzhURL: alex-chekaev, Livejournal/com/74733/html). Such amazing flea trading attaches quite rich people.

In cases when a vendor searches only financial interests and brings books from his private library, takes recently used shoes from the upper shelves, not having money for a deal, there may not be any sense of a holiday. Such kind of vendors in Volgograd locate at things' and products' markets, and unlike the frequent customers of «Ptichka» buy nothing from each other. The vendors at «Ptichka» don't hide whirl of things: *«I bought here this bracelet and wore it with pleasure! You are sure to wear it with pleasure either»*.

But books change more hands than any other things. A vendor, who has 3-4 books among other things, says *«Lady, buy «bovary»*. Not at once a customer understands that it has been said about the novel «Madam Bovary» written by Flober. *«It is a book quite to life, I am retelling you now»* she continues. And then, she reports that she buys books here, reads them, and then resells them. But also she retells the plot to the ones who wish, as the most important thing here is the process of emotional communication.

Among the books that go round at «Ptichka» there are 5 kinds of literature: 1) adventure, detective, fantastic and love stories; 2) medical and technical reference books; 3) textbooks and fictions of Soviet times; 4) rare books printed in the years before the revolution of 1917. They are very expensive: if the other types of books cost from 20 to 100 rubbles, then these books are asked to be paid more than 1000 roubles. 5) Booklets on gardening, and healing at home. Collected works are met quite seldom, very rarely in a full and good state. The one can buy here the literature of special kind, something that was printed «in hard 90s» on poor paper and published by printing houses that had not existed before and didn't exist long after that period. This literature is interested with esoteric, gothic, and adventurous non-classics of foreign and native authors. Some texts of this kind were written that times, and have never been reprinted since there. They make astunning impression with their «sense of freedom» and demand close researching.

One of the vendors, who brings a great number of books, answers the question of where he takes the books, or, maybe, he sells the books of his friends and acquaintances, this way. He says that at previous times he worked at the «society of book lovers», that allowed him to buy rare printings for his own library and for his children. And regarding on the represented publications, he has been keen on reselling since 1990s, and his outlet is being replenished not only with books from his private library. But he absolutely refuses the last supposition.

Vendors at «Ptichka», who deal only with books, are in a very few amount. A real book lover but not a second-hand book seller was seen only once. Books have appeared to be «those ones», that he doesn't want to be near by. These books had been an example of status and a support of family relations («*I was taught to read a lot by my parents*» once was mentioned). Then the bookswere moved to the garage. The person explains that children do not need books nowadays, grandchildren don't read either, and that he is at the marker to help his son. An element of emotional unclearanceis felt here. A «book lover's» wife denies the husband's statement that he is trying to save money for buying a flat for a son, realizing that by means of selling books it is impossible. Vendors' appealing to the up-today financial instability in comparison with 1990s in most cases shouldn't be taken seriously.

By such behavior, one may find a way out of the feeling of overstrain, the desire to get rid of emotional load of objects, that have been accumulating for years.

The methological background of the research of Volgograd flea market is the field ethnographical method. The research has been carrying out since June, 2015 till July, 2016 («ethnographical year»). Just this method in correlation with self-reflection has allowed to find out something in Volgograd

«Ptichka» that may be hardly analysed while sociological researching with the help of any other known methods, because of the people «inhabiting» our native fleamarket world are quite reserved, shy, and even fearful. They consider the keen interest to be an aggression and react accordingly.

So, researching of the specific of Volgograd flea market had been based on using such methods as included observation, focused unstructured interview, and all types of comparative analysis (comparatively contrastive, typological and historically genetic).

### **The results**

So, we conclude, that due to several points *modus vivendi* of Volgograd «little flea» amazingly coincide with that, how French historians describe their native flea markets in the Middle ages, that are located at the place of previous big selling fairs, are organized around «metal and iron» and depend on them. They respect military spoils, form the guilds, lay down etic rules, laws of reselling and taking out to the nearby regions (Bedel J., 1985; Sciardet H., 2003).

The specific of Volgograd «Pet market» as a form of global opposition of private and public, social and intimate, is that it is mainly a tame and humanized medieval institute (and it is not without reason that its researchers often appeal to Bachtin's works about public culture of Medieval Ages and the Renaissance. (Henderson Phil, 2014; Sherry John F., 1990). And this is why in up-today situation flea market is fragile as a leisure form and social interaction. Any kind of improvement and changing the place of location is ruinous for it, as the place is an «energy matrix» that «generates representation and changes the people's awareness» (Sherry John F., 1990). Usually in Russia the government disputes coming back to archaic with its civilizational mission. In Russia it is very easy to destroy a flea market under the pretext of restricting it (Borisov A., 2014). However, the consciousness of aroma disappearing of medieval market increases, than a specific attractiveness of this kind of exchange considerably disappears.

Modern flea market is like a mirror, reflects the puerilization of culture having spread all over the country and influencing its development. For Volgograd this is the borrowed form of people's relations who still remember the profiteers' persecution in the 1960s, «pirate» counters in the 1990s, the ideology of anti-trading and disgust to material and private life during socialist times.

The most important thing, that a flea market gives to a man, is an opportunity to free one's own childiness and at the same time to show the protest with the fashion to disposable objects, disposable relations and linear definiteness of status and situation determined communication. Since the



development of youth movements a flea market has been visited by reconstructors and frequenters of festivals costume plays (Shipulina N.B., Marchenko A.J., Kudryavich E.L., 2015).

At our flea market there is much irony, self-irony and even protoirony, restoring the seriousness of life by revealing absurd ties: «that a man longs for that he doesn't need» (Epshtein M.N., 2000). Hence, there is a combination of curiosity and shyness on people's faces involved in our flea markets.

Trading as a special kind of labour directed to getting income is not here an end in itself. Though economical interest of people trading there shouldn't be ruled out. 5-7% of vendors are retirees with low income for whom any sum of money is of much importance in a monthly budget. But even they are influenced with the carnivalization of surroundings that turns «Ptichka» in their eyes into a new psycho-riality. It is noticeable, that they don't consider their employment at the 'little flea' to be a hard work, though they say that they work there when heat and cold. Here we get some food for thinking about how the correlation of a game and life is being changing before our very eyes: many types of human practice interchange with gaming communication in the conditioned situation.

Ever since the 1970s the researchers of flea market culture noted its resemblance to the theatre (Maisel R., 1974). «Here at any time a performance may start, that turns you into an actor being on the stage and seen to everyone» (Panchenkov O., Voronkova L., 2014, p. 162). It is not difficult to note that our people are not ready for such kind of communication. That's why it is seen that a gaming character of relationship at 'Ptichka' is connected not just with theatricality in the vein of A. Blum (Blum A., 2003), but with a willing gamification of labour, that is substituting labour for a game.

The aim at manipulation of vision firstly, and imagining any events of life as if a performance, we call showization of modern culture. Just this one makes an observer see the continuing performance in the communicative energy of a flea market.

Serving a satisfaction of hypertrophied necessity in performances, it makes the other various phenomenon be treated as a theatre. Expansion of the visual culture penetrates vividly in the researching work as well, when just a research work itself in social sphere may be taken as a kind of voyeurism.

### **Conclusion**

From the point of microurbanism and cultural anthropology of thing, there a typology of vendors and customers in the regional culture is given; and there the objects and processes of thing exchange in urban space are classified. There cultural reasons and motives of interaction of subjects of Volgograd urban culture in representative and trading practices, being hold out at the space of «Pet market», are revealed and set as a problem. The problem of necessity to

study from the position of philosophy of culture the relationship of man's economical behavior to the other personal characteristics and socially cultural qualities is brought to life and researched.

It is criticized in the article the approach presenting the phenomenon of flea market as «an urban stage». The authors have concluded that this approach may be seen as a consequence of showization process in modern culture. And, even though a flea market includes the elements of theatrelization of mundanity and esthetisation of life, it is not yet brought to the performance of «urban stage». The authors have revealed and proved the unique ability of a flea market to give a man an opportunity of freeing one's own childiness and at the same time to show the protest with the fashion to disposable objects, disposable relations and linier definiteness of status and situation determined communication.

It is shown in the article, that the specifics of Volgograd flea market as a form of global opposition of private and public, social and intimate is following: the city is not yet ready to take easily the existence of flea markets as a new form of leisure time activity and interaction, and, moreover, as a resource of urban culture development and potential of getting the status of a cultural city by Volgograd.

### **Appreciation**

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**БЛОШИНЫЕ РЫНКИ ВОЛГОГРАДА: КУЛЬТУРНАЯ И СОЦИАЛЬНО-ПСИХОЛОГИЧЕСКАЯ СПЕЦИФИКА**

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С позиций микроурбанизма, изучая городскую культурную среду на микроуровне повседневных практик, авторы статьи рассматривают связи блошиных рынков как феномена современной культуры с такими универсалиями человеческого бытия, как труд, игра, обмен, детство, поколение, повседневность. В статье исследован Волгоградский блошиный рынок («Птичий рынок»), его социальная структура, место в городском пространстве, характер коммуникаций и присущая ему социально-психологическая «атмосфера». В рамках проекта по изучению антропологии вещи в региональной культуре рассмотрен характер отношения к вещам и социокультурные паттерны, порождаемые блошиным рынком как феноменом городской культуры в Волгограде. В статье показано, что распространение блошиных рынков в культуре развитых стран может рассматриваться как часть процессов эстетизации и геймификации жизни, с одной стороны, и пуэрилизации культуры, с другой, а также быть существенным потенциалом для развития современных городов как городов культуры, значимым элементом креативной урбанистической экономики и ресурсом культурного туризма.

Ключевые слова: блошиный рынок, антропология вещи, экономическое поведение, всеобщий обмен, микроурбанизм, культура Волгограда.

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