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## Topography of Risky Consumption in the Commercial Space of a Frontline City

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This article continues the exploration of transformations in consumer practices as a component of lifestyle stylization dynamics within military societies. It presents findings from a research phase focused on analyzing risky consumption practices in a frontline city, interpreted through a sociological lens of urban space. The study centers on the social environment of a large shopping mall in Kharkiv, a city located near the front line. To conduct an initial test of a previously formulated hypothesis – namely, that risky consumption in wartime largely serves a compensatory function – the authors employed a combined methodology: Michel de Certeau's «city walk» approach, adapted to the shopping center context, alongside a series of rapid interviews with mall visitors. While full verification of the compensatory and adaptive nature of risky consumption under wartime conditions was beyond the scope of this phase, the results provide partial empirical support. The data revealed a set of consumer practices aimed at reconstructing a sense of pre-war «normality». Analysis allowed the authors to identify three key vectors of risky consumption: habitualness (symbolic representation), comfort (reconnection with pre-war routines), and anxiety (manifestations of risk experienced by vulnerable groups). The third vector points to the need to refine the original hypothesis, potentially by introducing the individualism – collectivism dichotomy. The authors also suggest that conceptualizing military risk through the lens of social entropy holds promise. Future research will aim to expand both the empirical base and methodological scope of the study, with plans to scale the adapted methodology to the broader urban context. We assume that the foundation obtained at the end of all stages of the study will allow us to move on to a new research cycle using quantitative methodology.

**Key words:** Risky consumption, urban sociology, lifestyle stylization, compensatory behavior, everyday resistance, habitus.

**Литовченко Артем, Нехаєнко Оксана. Топографія ризикового споживання в торговельному просторі прифронтового міста.** У статті представлено результати одного з етапів дослідження ризикових практик споживання в прифронтовому місті, що інтерпретуються крізь соціологічну призму урбаністичного простору.

Для початкової перевірки раніше сформульованої гіпотези – ризикове споживання у воєнних умовах переважно виконує компенсаторну функцію – автори застосували комбіновану методологію до кейсу торговельного центру як сегменту міського простору. Вона поєднує адаптований до контексту торговельного центру підхід «прогулянки містом» Мішеля де Серто із серією експрес-інтерв'ю з відвідувачами цього простору. Отримані результати частково підтверджують гіпотезу, проте потрібна подальша емпірична перевірка. Зафіксовано споживчі практики, спрямовані на реконструкцію довоєнної «нормальності». Також виокремлено три основні вектори ризикового споживання: звичність (символічне відтворення ідентичності), комфорт (відтворення довоєнної повсякденності) та тривожність (акцент на ризиках для вразливих груп). Третій вектор указує на необхідність перегляду або деталізації початкової гіпотези, зокрема через введення ціннісної дихотомії «індивідуалізм–колективізм».

Вважаємо доречним на майбутніх етапах концептуалізувати воєнні ризики через категорію соціальної ентропії, що відкриває нові можливості для осмислення динаміки життєвих практик у кризовому середовищі.

Також видається перспективним розширення емпіричної бази, залучення нових методів збору даних і масштабування адаптованої методології «міської прогулянки» до ширшого міського контексту.

**Ключові слова:** ризикове споживання, урбаністична соціологія, стилізація способу життя, компенсаторна поведінка, повсякденний опір, габітус.

## INTRODUCTION

This article serves as a logical continuation of the paper “*Practices of Risky Consumer Behavior in the Dynamics of Lifestyle Stylization During Wartime*”, which examined the transformation of consumer practices in the context of protracted military conflict, using the frontline city of Kharkiv as a case study. In that earlier article, we introduced the key concept of risky consumption – a form of consumer behavior that emerges as an adaptive response to conditions of heightened danger and uncertainty.

Unlike “risk production” or “voluntary risk consumption,” risky consumption is shaped by external pressures and fulfills new functions: reducing anxiety, symbolically restoring a shattered reality, and maintaining identity and social order. Our study draws on the sociology of risk and consumption, incorporating the theoretical contributions of Pierre Bourdieu, Anthony Giddens, Zygmunt Bauman, Ulrich Beck, Elisabeth Shove, and others (Lytovchenko, & Nekhaienko, 2025, pp. 222–226). Within the framework of risk theory, it is argued that protracted warfare normalizes the perception of risk – it ceases to be perceived as exceptional and instead becomes embedded in the everyday, compelling individuals to adapt on a micro-level. In this context, consumption functions not merely as a means of satisfying needs, but as a compensatory mechanism for restoring a lost sense of normality through the reproduction of pre-crisis routines.

Within the sociology of consumption, drawing on Giddens’ concept of reflexivity and Bourdieu’s theory of habitus, we argue that consumer practices operate simultaneously as individual strategies and as reflections of broader structural transformations. Based on exploratory expert interviews conducted in our previous study, we identified four types of risky consumption: 1) Symbolic representation (e.g., purchasing merchandise with military symbols, supporting the Armed Forces of Ukraine through consumer goods, or buying non – essential items); 2) Social adaptation (e.g., stockpiling, purchasing generators and autonomous systems); 3) Innovation (e.g., supporting local producers and civic initiatives such as the “de – occupation store”); 4) Resilience (e.g., collective purchasing, home gardening, and mutual cooperation to mitigate risks).

These practices reflect a desire to restore a familiar way of life through the stylization of everyday experience, where consumption becomes a tool for repairing the disruption caused by war.

In the first phase of our broader study, we formulated the **hypothesis** that compensatory consumption dominates in wartime or so-called “military society” contexts (Lytovchenko, & Nekhaienko, 2025, p. 228). We posited that consumption practices serve as a symbolic means of resisting the collapse of social reality. Drawing on the results of a pilot study – five in-depth interviews with experts from Kharkiv—we developed the above typology and suggested that risky consumption is an indicator of broader social transformations. This article seeks to further explore these practices and to conceptualize how urban communities adapt under conditions of instability.

Our current focus is on empirically deepening the hypothesis regarding the compensatory and adaptive nature of risky consumption during wartime, wherein consumer practices act as instruments for reconstructing everyday life warped by war. We approach everyday life through the lens of urban spatial analysis, focusing on the shopping mall as a symbolic “island” of routine life that continues to operate despite wartime conditions. In frontline Ukrainian cities such as Kharkiv, everyday life is shaped not only by destruction, but also by subtle, embodied practices of resistance. Some of these practices are closely tied to consumption, as discussed in our earlier work.

In this article, **we aim to explore risky consumption at the spatial level**. The primary methodological tool is Michel de Certeau’s “city walk”, which allows for the capture and interpretation of everyday consumer experience through spatial movement. We treat the city – and its commercial zones in particular – as a text that consumers “read” through their trajectories. Using walk-based observation, we examine how shopping routes, points of entry, and bodily interactions with the physical environment reflect efforts to retain control, express identity, and navigate a shifting social order – an order increasingly shaped by martial

law (e.g., store closures during air raid alerts, the relocation of commerce to underground parking areas, etc.). This article thus marks the next stage in our ongoing research on risky consumption as a factor in the stylization of everyday life. At this stage, we focus specifically on its spatial dimensions, conceptualized as forms of everyday resistance within the context of military society. We proceed from the assumption that – even under conditions of acute threat and infrastructural damage – consumers do not lose their subjectivity. On the contrary, through tactical actions in space, they renegotiate their position within the city, activating latent mechanisms of cultural resilience and social solidarity. Among the most prevalent sites of such negotiation are shopping centers and supermarkets, which remain operational despite partial destruction and the constraints of martial law.

The **purpose** of this phase of the study is to empirically reconstruct the everyday consumer experience of frontline city residents as a spatial-symbolic practice. Our research question is: How do people use commercial space, make consumer choices, and enact symbolic gestures through those choices? We assume that observing consumer behavior in Kharkiv will allow us to understand consumption not merely as symbolic representation or risk adaptation, but as a process — a form of territorial enactment embedded in the fabric of everyday life. At this stage, we do not aim to measure the frequency or typicality of practices; rather, we seek to identify and document them. This evolving set of observed practices should inform and refine subsequent phases of the study. It should also test the applicability of the adapted “city walk” methodology for analyzing risky consumption and further demonstrate the relevance of the typology of risky practices established during the first phase of our research.

## 1. THEORY AND METHODOLOGY

The theoretical and methodological foundation of this study builds upon the concept of the “*sociology of risky consumption*”, established during the previous phase of the research and briefly outlined in the introduction. This framework integrates two complementary perspectives – *the sociology of everyday life and critical urbanism* – with Michel de Certeau’s *theory of everyday tactics*, articulated in *L’invention du quotidien* (1980), serving as its conceptual core.

De Certeau argues that everyday actions – such as walking through the city, choosing routes, or buying groceries are not merely mechanical routines but creative acts of resistance against structural power and disciplinary systems. In this context, urban space and its constituent elements operate as systems of prescriptions (infrastructural, symbolic, economic), while individuals employ “tactics” to adapt to, circumvent, and reinterpret these constraints. In contrast to Foucault, who focuses on the architecture of power, de Certeau invites us to center the agency of ordinary people, contending that every act of movement, route selection, or consumption can be interpreted as a tacit political gesture. What is at stake is not just physical movement through space, but the appropriation and “rewriting” of that space in one’s own interest.

In times of military conflict, such practices acquire heightened significance. They become not only adaptive responses but also *soft forms of resistance* to externally imposed destructive orders. De Certeau’s conceptual distinction between *strategies* and *tactics* is central here: strategies are the practices of dominant institutions (such as the state, corporations, or military) that shape space, impose order, and prescribe behavior. Tactics, by contrast, are the everyday actions of those without the authority to define space but who are capable of *reinterpreting, manipulating, or “hacking”* it in their favor.

For de Certeau, the consumer, the pedestrian, the urban resident is not a passive subject of structural control, but an active agent who, through tactical behavior, *appropriates space and reclaims subjectivity*. In the act of consumption, such appropriation becomes a form of *hidden production*, and the tactics involved in this process are often intuitive, embodied, and situational (Boyko, 2019, p. 75). These consumer tactics constitute the focal point of our research. A walk through a supermarket, a visit to a local store, or a trip to the market are not simply shopping acts; they are modes of everyday navigation in a reality where threat and disruption have become routine. As de Certeau himself noted, one “speaks” through the body in space – and these bodily itineraries allow us to trace the everyday logics that sustain order in the midst of disorder.

Employing de Certeau’s approach in the study of risky consumption practices allows us to move beyond symbolic representation and instead analyze practice as action – dynamic, adaptive, and spatially embedded.

**Methodological Design.** Methodologically, the study relies on observations of bodily and spatial behavior of consumers within a supermarket, understood as a form of micro-agency. We adapt the "city walk" method as a universal tool for collecting sociological data (Boyko, 2019, p. 147), repurposing it within a combined methodology tailored for risky consumption analysis in confined retail environments. While this method is equally suitable for broader urban applications, we reserve that extension for future stages of the research.

At this stage, our focus lies specifically on consumer zones such as shopping malls and supermarkets, which serve as crucial spaces of civil routine under martial law. Following de Certeau's logic, a walk through such a space is conceptualized as a tactical breach of institutionalized logistics. Accordingly, we pay close attention to consumer routes, pauses, gestures, and emotional reactions – all of which offer insight into the symbolic geography of consumer experience.

Empirically, the method involves both observational tracking ("shadowing") of consumers along their routes through the retail space, and unstructured interviews accompanied by mapping of individual trajectories. This exploratory approach is designed to reveal how the spatial logic of the supermarket is reimagined under wartime risk and how consumption transforms into a bodily and symbolic act of resistance to disorganized wartime everyday life.

Adapting de Certeau's "walk through the city" to the analysis of the supermarket or shopping mall as a micro-urban environment enables us to examine how consumer paths, decisions, and interactions with goods and displays reflect the everyday logic of survival, control, and meaning – making. Rather than simply navigating a designed space, the consumer tactically appropriates imposed logistics, choosing alternative paths, responding to perceived threats (e.g., crowding, scarcity, air raid sirens), selecting emotionally resonant products, or avoiding undesirable zones. These acts can be read as forms of embodied and symbolic navigation within a space of risk.

Our adaptation of the method is intentionally weakly formalized, prioritizing the researcher's inductive assessment of the significance and necessity of recording particular phenomena in real time. The non-standardized participant observation was conducted using the "observer-as-participant" model, with four predefined focal areas:

1. Patterns of consumer movement and communication across different zones of the shopping space;
2. Behavioral specifics in checkout areas;
3. Reactions to air raid alarms;
4. Reactions to the presence of individuals in military uniform.

At this stage of the study, our goal was to evaluate the applicability of the method itself. Thus, we focused on a single case — a large shopping center in central Kharkiv — and did not yet pursue comparative or generalizing analysis. This initial step, while modest, yields a set of intermediate but critical results, both in hypothesis testing and in validating the adapted method.

To complement the spatial observation, we conducted a series of informal express (blitz) interviews with visitors at the exit of the shopping center. We approached all those willing to participate, with an effort to maintain age and gender balance. Each respondent was asked to briefly describe their route through the commercial space. A detailed rationale and earlier use of this technique is presented in our prior article (Lytovchenko, & Nekhaienko, 2022, pp. 181–184).

At this exploratory phase, quantitative representativeness was not required. The purpose of these interviews was not to determine prevalence or frequency, but to record variations in consumer trajectories and identify indicators relevant to testing our hypothesis about the compensatory function of risky consumption. These analytical and interpretative tasks form the core of this phase.

We employed a "one case – one day" strategy: the fieldwork was conducted in one of the largest shopping centers in Kharkiv, located in the city's central district. Observations and interviews ( $n = 67$ ) were carried out during a single weekday, between 12:00 and 18:00.

## 2. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 2.1. A Walk Through the Shopping Center

We did not set the task of comparing the occupancy levels across different zones of the shopping center. However, it is noteworthy that a relatively high number of visitors were observed in several branded

stores offering premium goods (lingerie, electronics, gadgets, jewelry, decor, children's toys), as well as in the elite alcohol department of the supermarket. At the same time, the absence of visitors in the jewelry "islands" (racks with jewelry located in the open space of the floor outside of designated stores, creating a perimeter around the seller), and in the store selling patriotic and military-themed items, also drew attention.

**1.** The following features of consumer movement and communication were recorded:

- two dynamic models dominated the retail space overall: less frequently – a purposeful, fast movement with a clearly identifiable single goal; more frequently – a strolling, sporadic, at times chaotic pattern, involving multiple goals that could emerge (and presumably dissolve) in the course of movement;
- in high-occupancy zones, consumers moved chaotically, often waiting for the crowd to thin before beginning to select goods. Communication in these zones was either deliberately loud (especially if the consumer was accompanied; typical for the "island" cafeteria and premium electronics or lingerie stores) or, conversely, minimized, including limited interaction with other customers and store personnel;
- in zones of non-essential goods (souvenir shops, jewelry, bookstores, toy stores, premium electronics and gadgets, elite alcohol, imported cheeses and delicacies), consumers consistently followed an "inspection" pattern of movement: slowly and sequentially reviewing all displays, shelves, and racks, regardless of whether or not they intended to make a purchase;
- this "inspection" model had two modifications: 1) when accompanied, consumers discussed items quite audibly; 2) when alone, elderly visitors inspected items silently, moved hesitantly, maintained distance from others, and waited for the crowd to thin;
- outside of optional goods zones, only the second modification of the "inspection" model was recorded – in mid-occupancy apparel and footwear stores, and in several supermarket departments (fish, dairy, cheese, tea, and coffee);
- in the optional goods zones, it was noted that consumers who were not alone often openly stated that they did not need the products on display; nonetheless, they typically made at least three or four purchases in one zone. Such behavior was observed outside these zones only in large stores offering affordable clothing;
- within individual consumer trajectories, the optional goods zones consumed the most time; the overall trajectory often combined with a mono-target dynamic model in other parts of the shopping space.

**2.** Observation in the checkout areas revealed that supermarket visitors who purchased premium goods more often chose staffed checkout counters, even when lines were long; meanwhile, consumers following a mono-target dynamic model preferred self-service counters or sought out lines with fewer customers.

**3.** Responses to air-raid alarms varied by store location:

- if a store closed during the alarm, consumers' behavior became forced and constrained; emotional and communicative reactions in such instances were characterized by openly expressed dissatisfaction directed both at the alarm and at store policy. It was apparent that many consumers did not support the store's decision to close during alarms (notably, a significant number of people remained near the store to wait until the alarm ended);
- if the store remained open, most consumers ignored the alarm, with only rare expressions of dissatisfaction regarding its cause. Consumers in high-occupancy or optional goods zones were less likely to leave after an alarm was announced, while those in medium-occupancy zones were more likely to retreat in response.

**4.** Reactions to people in military uniform were relatively rare; most consumers displayed no distinct response. However, two repeated patterns were identified:

- the first was observed among visitors with young children: upon seeing a soldier, children would loudly comment (*"Mom, look, a soldier"*, *"Mom, is that a soldier?"*, *"Does a soldier live here?"*, *"Dad, is that a general who came to buy soldiers?"*). Parents either hushed the child or agreed, but typically attempted to move away from the point of contact as quickly as possible. One exception was a child who remarked: *"Daddy, look, that soldier has the wrong uniform"*, to which the father replied, *"They're all like that"*;
- the second pattern, observed across various visitors, involved visible attempts to distance themselves from people in uniform – by slowing down, speeding up, changing direction, etc.

Observations conducted within the shopping center help clarify and empirically elaborate the concept of consumption as a tactic of everyday resistance to uncertainty and elevated risk. Zones that could be conventionally referred to as spaces of comfortable return to “routine normality” and symbolic pleasure were the most heavily visited. Stores selling affordable and branded clothing, lingerie, shoes, books, souvenirs, premium electronics, children's toys, along with the cafeteria and the supermarket, all demonstrated stable attractiveness. Despite their price segmentation, these spaces served a common function: they created the illusion of a normal, peaceful world through contact with “civilian” goods (e.g., lingerie, cheese, chocolate, perfume, children's toys, coffee, gadgets), through ritualized visual consumption (browsing, circling, comparing), and through stabilized consumer scenarios.

Particularly notable is the contemplative or “inspection” mode of behavior in optional, excessive consumption zones (premium, elite goods) – a slowed-down, ritualized movement in which bodily presence itself becomes more important than actual purchase. This supports Miller's (1998) thesis that consumption is less about functional utility and more about ritualized self-care and emotional regulation. Goods without an explicit utilitarian function become mediums for re-establishing subjectivity and embodied presence via visual, tactile, and auditory engagement. These spaces operate as “window utopias” – environments where one may spectate and participate without completing a transaction.

The “inspection” behavior reflects the daily ritualization of time and space, where one does not so much choose as reappropriate visibility, reaffirming access to “normal” temporality, bodies, and materiality. Elderly visitors' behavior is especially revealing: their silent, deliberate pace, tendency to wait for the crowd to dissipate, and distancing from others indicates heightened vulnerability, yet simultaneously a strong commitment to maintaining consumption as an identifying ritual. That this ritual persists despite vulnerability underscores its importance.

In our view, the consumption of non-essential, excessive, and premium goods plays a crucial role in the compensatory restoration of pre-war “normality.” A resident of a frontline city who purchases only bread, basic clothing, medication, or protective items follows the logic of military consumption – not adapting to war, nor resisting it, but submitting to it. In contrast, the individual who allows themselves optional or excessive consumption – even symbolic – resists war by reviving fragments of peacetime daily life, which may otherwise seem absurd amid constant danger. This perceived absurdity ritualizes what should be impossible: dining at cafés, purchasing luxury alcohol, acquiring decorative objects. Buying redundant, non-functional, even luxurious items is a way of affirming to oneself that war does not dominate the personal world – where “everything” (i.e., consumption) remains unchanged. We will return to this point when analyzing the results of the express interviews.

The two recorded bodily dynamics – purposeful and strolling – indicate a dual strategy of action in the shopping space. On the one hand, the consumer seeks to minimize time spent in potentially unsafe environments (purposeful model); on the other, they engage in restorative navigation and the reappropriation of social life (strolling model), in the spirit of de Certeau. The chaotic character of routes and multiplicity of spontaneous goals also highlight a tactical response to spatial stimuli: routes are assembled from fragments of sensory and spatial experiences. In this indeterminacy lies the lived sociology of the everyday (Giddens, 1991): through micro-adaptations, pauses, returns, and detours, consumers reconstitute the shopping center as a personal experiential environment.

Consumer behavior during air-raid alarms illustrates that consumption acts as resistance – both literally and symbolically. If the store closed, open irritation was directed not at the war itself, but at the disruption of routine consumption. This is crucial: protest targeted the breakdown of ritual, not the source of threat. Conversely, if the store remained open, most consumers ignored the alarm. Zones of high affective and bodily engagement (e.g., cafés, branded clothing, electronics, high-end goods) proved the most resistant, reinforcing the idea that consumption serves as a grounding tactic. In contrast, more frequent withdrawal was observed in medium-occupancy zones, likely due to weaker emotional attachment.

Reactions to uniformed personnel (by both children and adults) revealed a dual perception of the military: present yet not integrated into consumer normality. Avoidance behaviors – slowing down, diverting routes – are, in de Certeau's terms, “polite circumvention” of symbolic intrusions into everyday life.

Even in the presence of figures who theoretically merit support, consumers often chose distanced, silent dissent, preserving a bubble of normality. Here, consumption functions as a means of neutralizing political

intrusion into corporeal space – especially evident in parents' attempts to shield their children from direct exposure to war symbols. While deeper analysis of the child's reference to "*a general buying soldiers*" or the father's pacifist comment ("*they're all like that*") lies beyond this article, these insights offer fertile ground for a separate study on the symbolic consumption of war.

## 2.2. Express-Interview

The results of the express-interviews allow us to identify three typological vectors of consumer practices in the shopping center, which, from our point of view, are designed to compensate (that is, in various variants – to disguise, obscure, refute – to ignore military everyday life and restore pre-war normality) or reflect "resistance through acceptance" to the risky nature of military everyday life: habitualness, comfort, and anxiety.

The first typological vector aims at restoring a routine that fundamentally opposes the riskiness of war as a paradoxically prolonged excess and denies the impact of war on basic everyday life (informants are labeled by the first letter of their gender and the number of full years):

**W, 29:** "*I come here often, even during alarms – I know where everything is. Today I came for bread and yogurt, but bought cakes too – just for the mood. Coffee here is like a ritual when everything feels unstable*".

We can see that the informant contrasts visiting her familiar shopping center with anxiety ("*even during alarms*"), and her consumer practices are not limited to simple necessities – bread and yogurt – but extend to a *box of cakes* and *coffee in front of the cash register*. The purchase of cakes is not connected with any specific rational reason, but is done simply *for the mood*, that is, it embodies an everyday (though not every day in the sense of daily) tradition; and the informant herself defines regular coffee consumption in the "island" cafeteria as a *ritual*.

**W, 62:** "*I don't like unfamiliar supermarkets – you get confused there and it just annoys me*".

What is more important in this statement is not the fact of irritation from unfamiliar supermarkets, but the explanation of this irritation: "*you get confused there*". Confused by what is not part of the familiar, mastered everyday space. The war becomes the same undeveloped, unfamiliar, alien, hostile, i.e., **entropic** space for the inhabitants of the frontline city. Consumer practices in the familiar supermarket are a way to resist the confusion and social entropy of war.

**W, 22:** "*I sometimes come here just to walk around. Not so much for shopping, but to remind myself how life is boiling. When you go inside, it's beautiful, music is playing, kids are jumping on the first floor. There are teenagers gathering on the bench, which may annoy some people, but it makes me happy that so many people are here*".

We feel a certain commonality between us and the informant: for her, as for us, *walking* is just a method. In her case, it is a method of reminding herself "*how life boils*". The fact that the walk, which reminds us *how life boils*, is taken in a *shopping mall* – even if *not so much for shopping*, but still for *shopping* too – unambiguously identifies consumer practices with *life*. Of course, there is no reason to believe that life is reduced to consumption, but the informant clearly considers it an effective means of *reminding about life*. At the same time, as we can see, it is not about consumption within the framework of basic physiological needs: the informant focuses on aesthetics – "*it's beautiful, music is playing*" – as well as on the people present in the shopping space, particularly children and teenagers. This cannot be attributed to age sentimentality – the informant is 22 years old; but it is not difficult to explain it through the prism of Kharkiv specifics. Children and teenagers in the shopping center are an unmistakable sign of peaceful life; military reality is maximally hostile to young people of conscription age, but no less hostile to children and teenagers. The war deals a sensitive blow to their everyday life, destroying the main field of social interaction for them – schools: in Kharkiv, education is predominantly distance learning, and face-to-face education is partially available only for pupils of lower grades. Thus, shopping malls are one of the few sites of collective interaction available to children and adolescents, and for the informant, this component of a walk through the mall embodies a peaceful everyday life that symbolically overcomes risks and breaks through the objective fabric of war.

**M, 39:** "*I went to a costume store not long ago – by chance. I stood there, looked around. I wasn't going anywhere. I realized that I missed my normal job, when I had to go every day, when I had a reason to tie a tie. I came out of there like I came out of an exhibition – I didn't buy anything, but I remembered who I was*".

The randomness of the informant's consumer practice does not contradict its relevance as a means of reproducing peaceful "normality". In this case, the informant carries it out in the field of memory, and the practice looks not only retrospective but also insufficiently "practical"; however, let us not forget that the mechanism of memory was triggered only as a result of a specific spatial action; outside this space, outside the consumer's return to this space, the mechanism did not work. We have before us a clear example of how symbolic consumer practice – partly close to the practices of "window utopias" – itself re-constructs everyday signs of normality and the complex normality of everyday life (daily work = reason to tie a tie). The longing that the informant feels for the normality reconstructed in memory is partly satisfied by the visibility of the shopping space.

In general, the practices of the first typological vector fit neatly into the first type of risky consumer practices that we identified in our previous article based on the results of an expert survey: symbolic representation through the consumption of non-essential goods (Lytovchenko & Nekhaienko, 2025? 226).

The second typological vector is associated not with the instrumental characteristics of comfort, but with the fundamental incompatibility of comfort and war. War cannot be comfortable, and the presence of comfort, accordingly, indicates the absence of war. Being well aware of the fragility of this imitation of syllogism, we are at the same time well aware, even if not logical, but vital – practical – justice of this commonplace dichotomy, which plays an important role in the consciousness of modern man.

**W, 47:** *"It is not very convenient for me to go to the center usually, but here Silpo is not closed for the alarm, and there is a semi-basement here, so you cannot rush anywhere, I like to walk around to look and think; and if the alarm is announced, you have to go straight to the cash register, and they kick you out immediately. Here you can take your time, and if you forget something, you can pop out for small things near the house".*

Note: the informant clearly focuses on the fact that convenience is more important than the basic function of the shopping space (which, however, is not denied) – the purchase of products, as well as on the opposition between convenience and war, embodied in the alarm: *"...does not close for the alarm..."* For Kharkov, this opposition is especially relevant: there were entire military seasons when alarms sounded around the clock or began literally two or three minutes after the previous one had gone off. When absolutely all establishments (including shopping malls) were closed, their visitors found themselves in a completely irrational situation: they were in danger because they were far from home and quite often from shelter, and at the same time they could not realize the practices for which they had come to the establishment. In this context, the convenience embodied in overcoming the risky nature of military everyday life is more important than the logistical inconvenience: the informant literally *arrives* in a peaceful everyday life, albeit in an inconvenient way.

**W, 24:** *"I went out with a friend today. Just sat down with coffee, croissants ate upstairs, I did not buy anything, we came for a snack and a chat. And here came to buy water just, convenient that all in one place and in the center, met, and then each on his own business".*

This quote does not directly oppose comfort and war, but all the details of the description – meeting with a friend, coffee, croissants, the lack of necessary purchases, the *"snack and chat"* model – all embody the relaxed and optional nature of peaceful everyday life; the combination of *simplicity, convenience, and localization* sounds like an illustration of the impossibility of *comfortably* optimizing everyday life during war.

**W, 39:** *"I come here on weekends or in the evening sometimes, with my child. We don't take anything special, we just walk around, I can buy him an ice cream, he likes the rope park here and socializes with other children here, it's convenient that you can bring him and leave him either in the children's room or go there. While he is busy with animators there, I can quickly go about my business here. But in general, this is our way to distract ourselves a little and say to ourselves, "we are not only surviving, we are living". Although yes, if there is an alarm – it's scary, but what can you do, there are always alarms..."*

The shopping center as a space for children's leisure is a perfect banality; but there is nothing more incompatible with war, from the common man's point of view, than banality. For banality is equal to and even identical with everyday life, even if it is the banality of leisure or entertainment. Banal is the very possibility of such a *convenient, comfortable* leisure for the mother of a child; and this possibility belongs exclusively to a peaceful everyday life in which there is no place for war. We see that this is not an



imaginary but a real consumer practice: the child is busy with the animators, and the mother *can quickly go about her business*. At the same time, however, the informant demonstrates a very clear awareness of the symbolic function of this consumer practice: *“a way to distract ourselves a little and say to ourselves: we are not only surviving, we are living”*. “Surviving” is the strategy (in de Certeau's understanding) of risky military everyday life; “living” is the tactic of peaceful everyday life; and the informant and her child are distracted from war by realizing the practice of unconditional risky consumption as a way of denying the source of these risks.

**M, 34:** *“I went in today on purpose to wait out the alarm. It's like a bunker inside, but beautiful - they've opened stores in the parking lot, which is nice. There used to be benches down here, but they took them away, probably so that people wouldn't sit around bored, but would go shopping, making a profit for them. But I didn't buy anything”*.

The commercial space as a space of security is rather an element of military everyday life; however, note the informant's words *“like a bunker, only beautiful – they have opened stores in the parking lot now, it's nice”*. What could be more dissonant with military everyday life than a *“beautiful bunker”*? Yes, *“to wait out the alarm”* is not a peaceful routine, but *beauty* is not characteristic of a routine military bunker; and the fact that the informant *finds the stores* open in the parking lot *pleasant* says a lot about the importance of consumption – even this fleeting, in passing - to compensate for the risks of military everyday life. What this informant has in common with the other actors of practices in this vector is the associative opposition of convenience and pleasantness, i.e., comfort, to military danger and the strategies generated by it.

Finally, the third typological vector, anxiety, contradictorily reflects informants' struggle with the risky nature of military everyday life. In this struggle, consumer practices either allow informants to remind themselves that war is not endless and not alternative, and this reduces the risk of anxiety and the risk of despondency; or, on the contrary, emphasize the risky nature of military everyday life. The contradiction is resolved by the fact that both the first and second options oppose *the normalization of war*, albeit in essentially opposite ways.

**W, 66:** *“I try not to come here often, not to upset myself unnecessarily. Everything has become expensive, difficult, my pension is not enough for anything. Today I took only the most necessary things, and that – I looked at the price tag of oil and put it back. I choose more markets, there and cheaper and the same vegetables fresh more, there all natural, and in supermarkets it is unclear where they come from. I buy greens from women who stand near the subway, there it is immediately clear – homemade and cheaper at them. And it's also nice that a person can help out, they also work, they bring. I don't like supermarkets”*.

There are much more signs of war in this quote than the opposite. And if the previous two vectors gave grounds to associate certain subjective-symbolic components of lifestyle with consumer practices, here we see the unconditional importance of objective-material components that significantly hinder access to this lifestyle. High prices and low pensions do not require interpretation: they directly denote the absence of material conditions, which are necessary to give compensatory character to consumer practices. Nevertheless, the informant does not limit herself to them. Despite the significantly limited possibilities of stylizing life through consumption, she denies the compensatory potential of consumption in shopping malls not only compulsively, but also consciously: the products in the supermarket are *“incomprehensible from where”*, while in the markets they are *“natural”*; and it is *“pleasant”* to buy herbs from women standing near the subway, because *“you can help people out”*. And in this last phrase we can see an alternative core of the (anti)military lifestyle, based not on personal reconstruction of peaceful consumer “normality”, but on conscious overcoming of the risks of war through practical empathy, voluntary subordination of their consumer practices to common (with sellers) needs and interests. At this stage of the research, we are far from differentiating these two approaches to life stylization as “individualist” and “collectivist”, but we see here a certain side research perspective.

**M, 56:** *“I don't go here often – it's expensive. But sometimes I come in just to look at the shop windows. They say we are at war, but here it's as if there is peace. It's even a shame who it's all aimed at, I don't buy here. But on the other hand, I'm glad. There is hope that it can be like this everywhere afterwards”*.

We see similar signs in this quote: costliness dominates among the factors that determine consumer practices. However, here we encounter the consumption practices of only partly retrospective “window utopia” (*“they say we have war, but here it's like peace”*), which, unlike the practices of the first typological

vector, has a very contradictory effect: on the one hand, it emphasizes the division, the split in the military society of the front-line city (*"it's a shame who all this is designed for, I don't buy here"*), and on the other hand, it symbolizes a possible future peace (*"joyful...there is **hope** that it can be like this everywhere **later**"*). In the previous vectors, as well as in the cases recorded by the observation during the "walk through the shopping center", the practices of *"window utopia"* compensated for the risky character of military everyday life by re-reconstructing the past, whereas here we observe the overcoming of this character by the perspective of the future.

**M, 38:** *"Buying from a list. Quick. Go in, get it, get it, get it out. No cart. The less time inside, the better. The most unpleasant thing is the queue, I usually get through at the self-service checkouts so that I don't have to talk to anyone on the way"*.

Here we see a different picture: a purely utilitarian consumer practice is described, which is opposite to both the practices of the first two vectors and the practices of the previous two informants (the price barrier is not relevant for the informant, since he comes shopping with a list), and does not give any grounds for arguments about its compensatory nature. However, the main thing, in our opinion, is the avoidance of risky communication generated by the desocializing impact of the war, embodied in the remark: *"The most unpleasant thing is the queue"* and in the tactics of cashier behavior aimed at *"not talking to anyone on the way"*. The war in Kharkiv, a city politically contradictory and ideologically far from the mainstream national ideology of the post-2014 model, has had a particularly devastating effect on public communication, bringing to the fore ideological and linguistic splits and deeply atomizing the citizens. The outburst of defensive patriotism has a flip side – *"spy mania"*, hysterical hunting for traitors – and gives public communication a fundamentally risky character, which can often be overcome only by refusing to communicate with strangers. In this case, it is not the price barrier, but the desocialization barrier that indirectly, but noticeably changes the nature of consumer practices, however, not in the direction of compensation, but in the direction of subordination to the social entropy of military everyday life.

**M, 39:** *"I'm more into online ordering in general, but sometimes I come here because I need to go out a little bit, to get some air, you know? But you can't go out like that often, to be honest, I try not to go out too much, especially in the daytime because of the "bussification" we have here, so I'm either early in the morning or late at night. But I go out locally to get some movement. Here, in the mornings, by the way, it smells like in civilian life: buns. I sometimes walk by the bread store in the morning and catch that smell and buy some, even if I wasn't going to. But mostly, I order the basics once a week, so I don't have to show my face"*.

And here we encounter another specific barrier to the realization of consumer practice. The informant would willingly practice consumption in a shopping mall for a reason quite similar to those that were relevant for the first typological vector of practices – because of the possibility to re-construct peaceful "normality": *"Here... it smells like in peaceful life – buns. I... catch the smell, buy it, even if I didn't intend to"*. However, it is not the danger of bombing that stands in the way of this consumer compensation, but the internal threat created by the war, in the form of the TCC and SP employees with their specific approach to the performance of their official duties: *"I try not to go into the street once more... we have busification here"*. "Busification" (from the word "bus", a minibus, which is usually used by the military) is the process of actually forced (often with the use of physical violence) mobilization of men aged 25 to 60 years old by the TCC and SP (Territorial recruitment and social support centers – modern version of Military registration and enlistment office). This process, which is particularly large-scale in Kharkiv, forces many men who have no deferment from mobilization (and even those who have a reservation) to become reclusive, homebodies, going out very rarely and preferably in the dark. This explains the transition to online ordering reflected in the quote. It should be noted that the behavior of TCC and SP employees, far from legal and civilized norms, has in no small measure influenced Kharkiv citizens' wary perception of people in military uniform. The child's question, recorded during the "walking" observation, about the general who came to buy soldiers, also refers us to the specifics of mobilization processes: commanders of army units, who come to training centers to choose new recruits, are sarcastically called "buyers" by the recently mobilized residents of the centers; most likely the child reproduced the corresponding story heard from adults.

**W, 32:** *"Sometimes I go to the store of home decor and home things, there on -1. I just like to walk around, look at, touch towels, tablecloths. I buy rarely, what is the point, I try now such things do not save*

*up, suddenly break down and go somewhere will have to, who I will leave it. But I like to look, in another time, maybe I would buy more often”.*

In this quote we again see obvious similarities with the consumption of “window utopia” in the practices of the first typological vector: “*I just like to walk around, look around*”, “*I like to look at things*”. However, the reason why instead of making a purchase only the practice of “window shopping” is realized is not in the impossibility of purchasing, but in the fact that purchases are meaningless due to anxiety for the uncertain future: “*what is the point, what if I suddenly break down and have to go somewhere...*” From the informant's point of view, wartime makes the purchase of optional goods (“*home decor, home things*”) meaningless because of the unreliability of the future, the unstable outlook; and while the actors of practices from the first typological vector see optional consumption as a compensatory mechanism, for this informant, as well as for the majority of actors in this typological vector, optional goods only emphasize and highlight the risky nature of military everyday life.

## CONCLUSIONS AND RESEARCH PROSPECTS

This article presents the results of a single stage of a broader study, during which we primarily pursued exploratory and methodological verification tasks. While these findings are not sufficient for a comprehensive validation of the hypothesis regarding the compensatory and adaptive nature of risky consumption in wartime conditions, the current stage has nonetheless produced results that support and partially confirm it.

Observation conducted in a shopping mall through an adapted version of Michel de Certeau's “city walk” methodology, combined with express interviews – allowed us to document a range of consumer practices, tactics, and spatial trajectories. These practices function as mechanisms for reconstructing pre-war everyday life and restoring a sense of peacetime “normality”. We observed how certain zones within the shopping center simulate a “normal” world by enabling contact with peaceful goods, encouraging ritualized visual consumption, and facilitating “visual utopias” through the “inspection” model characteristic of non-essential consumption.

Consumer behavior was shown to prioritize ritual and symbolic meaning over safety: irritation about air raid alarms was not directed at the threat itself, but at the disruption of established consumer rituals due to temporary store closures. Likewise, we recorded two distinct bodily dynamics within the space: one aimed at minimizing time spent in a risky environment, and the other – a meandering, adaptive model – reappropriating space through pauses, loops, and spontaneous detours. We also noted a rejection of militarized everyday life in consumer responses to the visible yet disconnected presence of military personnel within the commercial space. The consumption of non-essential, surplus goods emerged as a means of asserting the irrelevance of war within the sphere of private everyday life – corresponding to the previously identified type of risky consumption we labeled “symbolic representation”.

We identified three typological vectors of consumer behavior within the shopping mall: (1) the vector of habitualness, reinforcing ritual and repetition as a symbolic counterpoint to disruption; (2) the vector of comfort, wherein convenience is associated with peacetime stability; and (3) the vector of anxiety, which does not reflect compensatory practices, but rather signals their inaccessibility or irrelevance for certain groups. This third vector aligns more closely with the fourth type of risky consumption outlined in our earlier work – practices oriented toward ensuring resilience, rather than symbolic compensation.

These findings suggest the necessity of refining our initial hypothesis. In particular, the observed divergence between compensatory and anxiety-reflecting practices may correspond to broader cultural orientations along an “individualism–collectivism” axis. This insight opens a new theoretical and methodological avenue for further inquiry. We also see potential in reconceptualizing military risks through the framework of social entropy – a direction that warrants separate investigation.

Nonetheless, the primary research objective remains the continued empirical development of the core hypothesis. This involves a shift in focus toward the remaining three types of risky consumer practices: social adaptation, innovation, and resilience. Achieving this will require new data collection strategies and an expanded application of the “city walk” methodology, moving from the micro-level of a single shopping center to a city-wide scope. These constitute the key directions for the next stages of our research.

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