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Participants in Workout Street Fitness See Moscow as Their Playground

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Anton Kuchumov, the coordinator of the Workout project in Moscow.

Every weekend, groups of young people take over Moscow courtyards, testing their fitness abilities by climbing monkey bars, performing straight-bar dips, pull-ups and push-ups on ordinary playground equipment.

They are devotees of a brand of street fitness called simply "Workout," which was popular in the Soviet era and is currently experiencing a revival.

Workout participants say the practice aims to build muscle and burn calories without the use of any nutritional supplements or the guidance of a personal trainer.

It's also a way to socialize. Training groups give participants the opportunity to encourage and compete against each other.

Anton Kuchumov, 27, the coordinator of the Workout project in Moscow, told The Moscow Times that around 200,000 people take part in Workout around Russia with 3,000 in Moscow alone.

Kuchumov and his team have developed an interactive map showing 4,500 playgrounds with sport equipment suitable for Workout around the world. According to the map, there are 402 such playgrounds in Moscow. Some date from the Soviet era, while some have new equipment. One way the playgrounds of the new generation differ from the Soviet ones is in the construction of the bars. There are different swing fittings and chains that allow users to adjust the bar according to their personal preferences.

Perhaps not surprisingly, the most popular and best-equipped playgrounds in Moscow are at Luzhniki stadium and in Neskuchny Sad near Gorky Park. A Workout team gathers at Neskuchny Sad every Sunday year-round and improvises different exercises for up to six hours.

Kuchumov sees his mission as promoting a healthy way of life and changing people's lives for the better. In addition to making it easy to find Workout facilities, Kuchumov's team has developed a program called "100 Days" that includes physical exercise plans as well as diet tips and advice to boost self-esteem.

"Our book starts with the Henry Ford quote: "Whether you think you can, or you think you can't — you're right," Kuchumov told the Moscow Times. "Our idea is to make people believe in their abilities and set ambitious goals."

All the information in the book is available for free online and looks like a compilation of scientifically approved standard methods of body training and basic explanations about how the human body functions.

Kuchumov does not have a degree in medicine, however. He is an IT specialist and, according to him, "spends hours in front of the computer."

But Workout is not just a hobby. It has grown into a business with an online shop that is on track to more than double its income this year.

"The shop's turnover in 2014 was 18 million rubles ($275,442)," Kuchumov said. "In 2015, it has become 30 million rubles ($459, 070)."

The shop offers tools and clothes for Workout such as a hand expander for 1,200 rubles ($18), t-shirts for 700 rubles ($10) or giant rubber bands for 300 rubles ($4).

Moscow is in the middle of remodeling all of the city's parks, and all of them will include new playgrounds. When Moscow Mayor Sergei Sobyanin attended the grand opening of the renovated Ostankino park in northern Moscow last year, he announced the inclusion of 15 sport playgrounds in the park's 1 hectare territory.

Not just public funds

Private companies are also sponsoring fitness programs. The Coca-Cola Company has already built 14 playgrounds across Russia.

"For the period from 2012 to 2014, we have invested 2 billion rubles ($30, 604 671) in sport development in Russia," said a spokesperson for Coca-Cola Russia and Belarus.

Coca-Cola has also launched an online project, v-dvizhenii.com that includes a set of over more than 100 inspirational and educational video training lessons. The videos, which are free to view, include sessions in 12 different types of sports, from jogging to yoga and Workout.

Kuchumov and his team have been invited to give advice about the construction of new playgrounds, but he says that for a true Workout lover, the whole city is a playground.

"I first tried Workout in 2009, when me and two friends came down to metro Park Pobedy, and were doing push ups and running on the escalator," Kuchumov said. "If you want to stay fit, you don't need a fitness club or any bars, just go out in the city and join us!"

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