Assessing senses of place, mobility and viability in INdustrial NOthern COMmunities

BOREAS MOVE-INNOCOM

The majority of Russia’s northern population are southern incomers from various waves of relocation who built new industrial cities in the last 70 years. In the wake of massive outmigration from the Russian North, our research analyses the relocation experience and senses of place of these people with qualitative social sciences methods. Their reasons for leaving or staying in the north affects the viability of northern settlement patterns. In addition to understanding the formation of communities and place attachment among industrial relocatees and commuters, our analyses explain why recent demographic regulation policies have not brought the intended results. Reasons include alongside poor implementation, financing and communication among institutions also the underestimation of senses of belonging to place among non-indigenous northerners.

See [http://www.arcticcentre.org/innocom](http://www.arcticcentre.org/innocom) or contact Florian Stammel

**Long-distance Commuting (LDC) in the N-W-Siberian hydrocarbon industries** (affiliated project, U of Vienna, Dep. of Geography and Regional Research)

LDC is an increasingly used form of labour force provision for remote oil and gas fields e.g. 30 days at work/30 days at home. The rotational workers’ life is characterised by HOME – JOURNEY - ON DUTY. These spatiotemporal social localities shape integration, negotiation and organisation of mobile livelihoods. Qualitative assessment reveals how persistent movement as well as territorial and temporal distance turns into a socially perceived ‘normality’.

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**Murmansk Oblast**

Research focuses on ‘older’ settlers who contributed to building cities in Russia’s first northern industrial region: Kirovsk, Apatity, Kovdor.

Life histories reveal how early comers have developed intimate relations to the northern nature which becomes significant as a social space in the lives of industrial city-dwellers.

Landscape surrounding industrial cities has been transformed into personally and socially significant space for people through their memories, for example their past as inmates of labour camps during the forced period industrialisation.

**Novyi Urengoi, 1978**

**Northwest Siberia**

Research focuses on first generation incomers who contributed to building Russia’s major gas cities in the 1970s in the tundra: Novyi Urengoi, Nadym, Pergolyd. Relocation histories of early comers and participant observation of their life in the North reveals how their attachment to the North has formed simultaneously to the monoindustrial cities there.

The practice of physical place-construction for senses of belonging to the North is emphasized: people feel they belong to the work of their own hands, e.g. particular gas fields, houses in cities etc.

Yet their identification with their places of origin in the south remains, leading to what has been called ‘place polygamy’ (Beck 2000).

**State induced resettlement programmes in the Russian North**

This study reveals that a purely economistic approach used by the Russian federal government towards depopulating the Northern periphery has failed. People do not easily leave the North after their work in the extractive industry. Over time they developed sense of place, social networks that along with economical motivations influence their decisions to move or to stay.

Community cohesion and social capital at their northern places of residence have to be considered when assessing the real outmigration potential from the North.

**Preliminary Results**

- Presence or absence of viable social networks in the community importantly determines movement, settlement and relocation decisions among the non-indigenous population of the Russian North
- Joint experience of constructing new cities and overcoming hardships among same-generation early-comers form the ‘social glue’ of young settlements whose population develops into a viable core as industrial cities grow over time
- Former migrants develop identification with the initially hostile northern place through ‘the work of one’s own hands’. New northerners’ form intimate relations to their built and un-built environment. In, constructing the city or building up industry lets people develop senses of belonging to such places
- Many northerners express ‘place-polygamy’ (Beck 2000), perceiving themselves as people with multiple homelands
- Relocation and settling biographies, city-council policy decisions, city plan analyses demonstrate that mono-industrial settlements are gradually transforming from workers’ temporary camps to permanent cities with viable communities