

# Mobility and Sense of Place among Youth in the Russian Arctic

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**Abstract:** This article explores how the mobility of young people influences their sense of place in different parts of the Russian Arctic. In globalization studies increasing mobility has often been set in opposition to belonging to place, and interpreted as diminishing local connections and ties. Recent studies show that the role of mobility in shaping a sense of place is more complex. The Russian Arctic is often considered a remote, hard-to-access area, despite the fact that local residents have always been very mobile. We compare three case studies from across the Russian Arctic—namely, the Central Murmansk region, the Central Kolyma, and Eastern Taimyr—showing how mobility shapes differently young residents' sense of place. These regions have a different population structure (urban / rural, polyethnic / monoethnic) and different transportation infrastructure, thus providing a good ground for comparing the relationships between mobility and a sense of place in the Russian Arctic.

**Keywords:** Magadan region, mobility, motility, Murmansk region, Russian Arctic, sense of place, Taimyr, transport infrastructure

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“There are no roads in the North” is a common stereotype about the Russian Arctic.<sup>1</sup> Social scientists working there often become annoyed by this postulate, not only because it presumes an essential immobility of the local population that is far from reality, but also by the background idea that the Russian North is a uniform, homogeneous space that does not display significant differences across its several thousand kilometers. Anthropologists studying the Russian North face precisely the opposite problem: how best to compare the results of field research if social life varies so radically in different regions.

In this paper, we try to wear two hats: first, we aim to show how different the Arctic regions of one country can be; and second, we compare mobility practices and senses of place in these regions. We demonstrate



how similar social practices work differently in regions considered to be parts of one macroregion, the Russian Far North. At the same time, we call into question some assumptions that are common in mobility studies about the weakening of a sense of place because of the increased mobility of modern societies.

This article is based on the comparison of three regions of the Russian Far North: the Central Murmansk region, the Central Kolyma, and eastern Taimyr Peninsula. Each author conducted research in a different area: Valeria Vasilyeva in Taimyr, Anastasia Karaseva in the Central Kolyma, and Alla Bolotova in Murmansk region. Together we wrote the introduction, theoretical framework, and conclusions, while in the ethnographic part of the article each case study was analyzed by the author who conducted the field study in this region. This is the reason for using “I” instead of “we” while discussing the separate cases.

## Theoretical Framework

The recent “mobility turn” in social sciences brought various forms of spatial mobility into the center of attention: the mobility of people, goods, and information has significantly increased during the last decades (Urry 2000). Many authors believe that increasing mobility has weakened the links between territories and people, withering away a sense of embeddedness in place and the local rootedness of social relations, consequently causing a decrease in attachment to place (Bauman 2000; Castells 1996; Giddens 1990; Relph 1976). Numerous studies have been recently conducted on deterritorialization connected with an acceleration of mobility. However, some authors questioned the unambiguity of this argument. For example, in the essay “A Global Sense of Place,” Doreen Massey criticizes the opposition between mobility and place, and suggests to consider place as a dynamic constellation of social connections intersecting in a specific spatial point (Massey 1994).

The term *sense of place* is widely used to describe how local residents perceive the places in which they live, what meanings they attribute to them, and how personal attachment to a place develops. This concept is used in various disciplines, including psychology, geography, and sociology (Altman and Low 1992; Hay 1998; Hummon 1992; Relph 1997), while in social anthropology it is connected with the complex relations between locality, identity, and cultural practices (e.g., Feld and Basso 1996).

In a review article about the trends and achievements in “sense of place” studies, Maria Lewicka (2011) argues that, despite the increasing mobility and globalization, the majority of recent studies confirm that most people continue to maintain a strong place attachment. At the same time, the existing studies do not provide a definitive understanding of how mobility influences sense of place (Lewicka 2011).

One of the few studies directly approaching this connection is that conducted by Mia Fallov, Anja Jørgensen, and Lisbeth Knudsen (Fallov et al. 2013), based on field research conducted in Aalborg, Denmark. They have shown that belonging to place and everyday mobility are not incompatible. On the contrary, in modern societies mobility becomes important for the development of place attachment. The authors consider belonging to place as a process influenced by various factors, including the phase of life trajectory (belonging to a generation) and specificities of life courses (and biographies).

In our analysis, we use the concept of *motility*, introduced by Vincent Kaufmann (Flamm and Kaufmann 2006; Kaufmann 2002; Kaufmann et al. 2004). He defines motility as “the capacity of entities (e.g. goods, information or persons) to be mobile in social and geographic space, or as the way in which entities access and appropriate the capacity for socio-spatial mobility according to their circumstances” (Kaufmann et al. 2004: 750). While *mobility* describes the practices of movement, *motility* characterizes the potential for this movement.

Motility includes several interconnected components, such as an access to different forms and levels of mobility, the skills and competences needed to attain it, and the ways people use their skills and access to mobility. To understand the level of personal motility, one should analyze all these components (Flamm and Kaufmann 2006). Kaufmann considers motility as another form of capital, in addition to Bourdieu’s economic, cultural, and social types. It can be linked to other forms of capital and thus be exchanged for them.

Another concept important for this study is *remoteness*, as it is widely used by both social scientists and informants in relation to northern regions. Here we follow the approach of Caroline Humphrey (2014), who, in several case studies from Russia, has demonstrated that remoteness is not a characteristic of scale but rather a way of representing place imposed by centralized institutions. Remoteness also may describe the level of infrastructural development, primarily concerning transportation. In our cases, we show how the well-developed transportation infrastructure influences the perception of place and how

people compensate for its absence or shortage. Potential for mobility is especially important for the young generation because youth are the most mobile social group in modern societies. However, local mobility practices typical of certain places always feature significant differences. In this article, we focus on comparing mobility practices among youth in the regions of our study.

## Research Focus and Data

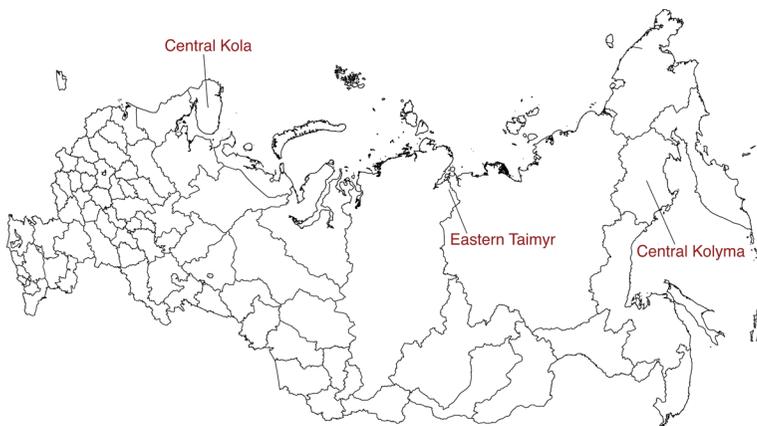
Through our case studies from three northern regions with significant differences in material infrastructure and community characteristics, we demonstrate how access to mobility and transformations in mobility practices shape young people's senses of place.

In this article we primarily consider short-term everyday mobility, though long-term mobility is discussed when relevant. The research primarily covers young people aged 17–35 at the time of the study, though these age limits are not strict. The chosen regions (fig. 1) differ significantly in the ethnic structure of the population and the proportion of migrants living there,<sup>2</sup> as well as in the degree of industrialization and infrastructure development, specifically in regard to transportation. The regions also vary in size. While the Murmansk region is a relatively small but densely populated region with a

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**Figure 1.** A map of Russia indicating the three studied regions.

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Map by Mitchell Brinton.

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well-developed and diversified transport network, Central Kolyma is a vast subregion with few settlements and a single vehicular transport corridor. Eastern Taimyr is a broad area that consists of several reindeer farms scattered across the tundra and a few small ethnic settlements accessible only by air or water.

Table 1 clarifies interregional differences, featuring a description of mobility opportunities in the regions studied. In the Far North, measuring distance in kilometers usually does not make much sense, as the time needed to cover the distance may vary significantly depending on the road surface quality, weather conditions, topography, means of transport, and other factors. For further clarity, the average travel time and costs are also shown in the table.

The argument in this paper follows the range of available transport options in the regions, from the area with the widest range to that with the narrowest one. The first region is Murmansk region with its railway, air transport, and extensive road network. The second one is Central

**Table 1.** Transport Opportunities in Murmansk Region, Central Kolyma, and Eastern Taimyr, prices for one-way trip.

Region	How to get to Moscow	Distance	Time spent	Price in rubles
Central Kola Peninsula, Murmansk region	Bus from Kirovsk to Khibiny Airport	34 km	50 min.	60
	Flight from Apatity to Moscow	1,335 km	2.5 hours	At least 6,000
	Train from Apatity to Moscow		32 hours	At least 2,800
Central Kolyma, Magadan region	Bus / minibus from Iagodnoe to Magadan	522 km	At least 10 / 6 hours	2,500 / 3,500
	Flight from Magadan to Moscow	5,900 km	At least 8 hours	At least 13,000
Eastern Taimyr, Krasnoïarskii Krai	Helicopter from Syndassko to Khatanga		1.5 hours	4,500
	Motor ship	285 km	At least 20 hours	4,000
	Snowmobile		At least 12 hours	6,000 (cost of gas)
	Flight from Khatanga to Noril'sk	800 km	3 hours	15,000
	Flight from Noril'sk to Moscow	2,900 km	4 hours	At least 13,000

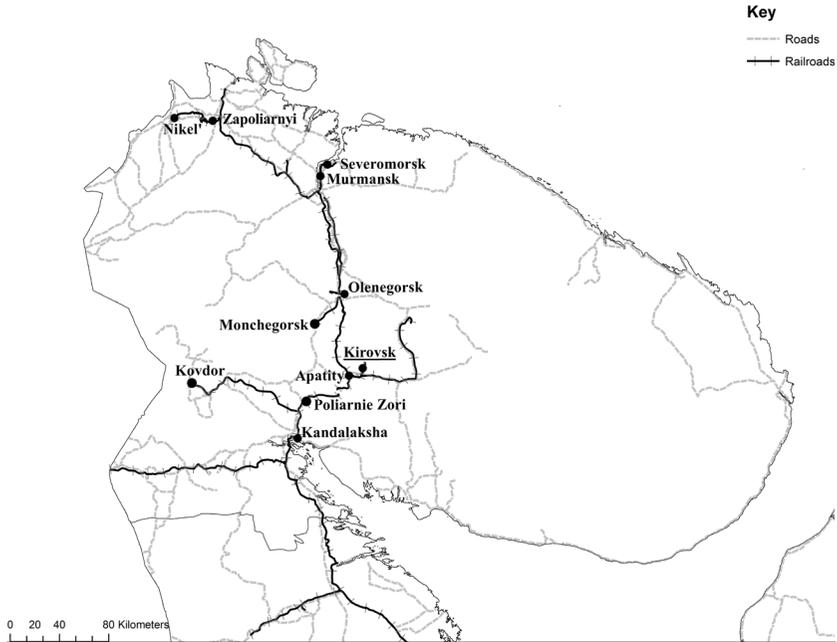
Kolyma in Magadan region, which is connected to the country's center only by air and has a single internal vehicular transport axis. In the third case, Eastern Taimyr is discussed, with its absence of roads and only occasional helicopter services. In each case, a number of common issues are considered, such as the transportation infrastructure, mobility practices, motility, sense of place, boundaries of place, and matters relevant locally.

## Central Kola Peninsula, Murmansk Region

Mobility practices and the sense of place among youth in the Murmansk region are analyzed here on the basis of fieldwork conducted in 2015. The research was carried out in several cities and towns of the region, but here I focus on the city of Kirovsk. This typical industrial city was founded in 1929 to allow for the development of the rich local deposits of apatite and nepheline ores. Kirovsk is situated in the center of the Kola Peninsula, and it is part of the Apatity–Kirovsk urban agglomeration: the distance to the nearest city, Apatity, is only 16 kilometers. The regional center, Murmansk, is situated 212 kilometers further north (see figure 2). The Murmansk region is highly urbanized: 93 percent of its residents live in cities and urban-type settlements.<sup>3</sup> The majority of cities in the region were founded during the Soviet period, and many of them, including Kirovsk, are mining towns built during the Soviet industrialization near deposits of mineral resources and “city-forming enterprises.”<sup>4</sup>

Kirovsk was populated by migrants from all over the USSR through the course of several waves of migration. The first influx of migrants arrived to the construction site soon after the city's founding in 1929. There were three main groups of these first settlers: educated specialists and professionals; so-called special settlers, who were forcefully relocated peasants;<sup>5</sup> and Gulag prisoners (Kiselev 2008; Shashkov 2004). The shift to a voluntary labor force happened after the death of Stalin in 1953. In the 1950s and 1960s, young people from different regions of the Soviet Union were attracted to the North by various economic benefits, like higher wages and better housing. As a result, the ethnic diversity in the new mining cities was very high. Initially, people came to these towns to work for a short period of time, but later many of them chose to settle permanently.<sup>6</sup> At the same time, they continued to maintain close social connections with their regions of origin. In general, the first generation of settlers in these new northern towns practiced intense

**Figure 2.** A map of the Murmansk region showing the cities and infrastructure.



Map by Mitchell Brinton.

short-term and long-term mobility,<sup>7</sup> which had a profound effect on the mobility of the younger generation, involved in their parents' mobility practices since early childhood.<sup>8</sup>

In the post-Soviet period, local enterprises in the industrial cities of the Murmansk region were privatized and entered the market economy, and many cities started to lose their attractiveness because of economic problems. In some of them, the development of local mineral resources became unprofitable in light of the new conditions of the global market. After the neoliberal reforms, most mining cities in the North diminished in size as many people went elsewhere to search for better opportunities. There emerged a steady problem of depopulation of the Russian North (Heleniak and Bogoyavlensky 2015). For example, the population of Kirovsk decreased from 43,500 in 1989 to 26,900 in 2016 (a decrease of 38.1 percent). Since 2009, the city of Kirovsk has been officially included in the list of mono-industrial towns with the most difficult social and economic situation (Perechen' [...] 2014). However, the mining industry remains somewhat stable there, and it continues to

be one of the main employment spheres for young people; in addition, youth also find employment in the public sector, in the service sector, and in trade. Furthermore, Kirovsk is located in the foothills of the Khibiny Mountains, which makes the city very attractive for tourists and provides opportunities for nonindustrial development.

## Transportation Infrastructure

Among all regions of the Russian North, the Murmansk region has the most developed transportation infrastructure, linking it to both the Russian urban centers and European countries. This fact influences mobility practices and the sense of place of people living in the region.

The transport network of the region has a clearly visible axial structure; the railroad crosses the Kola Peninsula from north to south, running parallel to the federal highway “Kola”, which links Murmansk with the city of St. Petersburg. The most developed areas of the region are situated along this axis. In the eastern part of the region, there are almost no roads, and remote localities can be reached only by air transport or by sea. In the western part of the Kola Peninsula, settlements are linked by numerous roads of varying quality. Side branches of the railroad also connect the central axis with distant cities and towns (see figure 2). In former times there were local train services at those branches; however, now they are used only for the transportation of industrial cargo, as nearly all local passenger trains are not in operation anymore.<sup>9</sup>

The well-developed road network in the central and western parts of the Murmansk region allows people to move within the region rather easily. In addition, the regional level of motorization is rather high.<sup>10</sup> There is also a well-developed system of public transportation: buses and minibuses connect most settlements on a regular basis (varying from semiweekly to daily). Most towns of the region can be reached from Kirovsk by public transport: Murmansk, Apatity, Monchegorsk, Olenegorsk, Kandalaksha, Kovdor, Umba, and so forth, with the fares varying from 200 to 700 rubles one way. One can travel outside the region by any means of transportation, including road, rail, and air. In recent years, the services from the Khibiny airport (located 34 km from Kirovsk) have intensified. Moscow or St. Petersburg can be reached by direct flights for 5,000–7,000 rubles, while train tickets to these destinations range from 2,000 to 5,000 rubles.

## Motility and Mobility

The well-developed transportation infrastructure in the Murmansk region defines the motility of youth, allowing them to move within the region quite intensively. Young people living in Kirovsk travel to other towns for a variety of reasons: shopping, spending leisure time, getting services not available in their city, and meeting friends and relatives. The most typical destinations are the nearby town of Apatity and the regional center, Murmansk, as well as the other places where friends and relatives live. During their leisure time, Kirovsk youth often go outside the city: dacha weekends, barbecuing, mushroom and berry picking, and fishing are among the most common activities. Choosing a place for these activities depends on individual preferences and opportunities: people who do not have their own transportation often go for picnics and hikes to the Khibiny Mountains, within walking distance from the city, while car owners prefer to go farther away from the city. Means of transportation range from bicycles to off-road cars in the summer and include snowmobiles in the winter.

When Kirovsk residents travel outside the Murmansk region, it is usually rather long-term; this is due to long vacation periods, which are significantly longer in all northern regions of Russia.<sup>11</sup> Usually, all northerners try to go for a summer vacation, leaving northern cities often looking rather empty during the summers: *“This is a northern summer—the city seems almost dead, everybody leaves. Apatity, Kirovsk, nearly all people go somewhere. Then you walk here like: ‘oh, look, there is a human being!’ when you see somebody walking far away”* (female, age 24, unemployed).

During their holidays outside the region, people not only enjoy vacation activities but also try to solve various problems, like getting medical services that are not available in the region; working part-time on temporary jobs; or searching for options for future resettlement if they have a plan to leave. Many young people living in Kirovsk talk about their love for travel and desire to visit different regions, yet they still often express strong place attachment to their northern town:

*I really love to travel, to go south, to live there for some time, to see how people live differently. In every region the mentality is so different, people behave in a different way, and this is very interesting to observe. Traveling is cool, but I want to live here, in my northern homeland.* (female, age 23, teacher)

Most young people who grew up in the North are used to traveling somewhere every summer: since Soviet times, northern urban residents usually brought their children for vacations to more southern regions, either to the seashore or to visit relatives. When the younger generation reaches the age of parenthood, they usually follow the imperative of “kids have to spend their summers in the South,” though the mobility practices adopted in childhood can vary depending on the current financial situation in the family:

*Inf.: I remember when I was a child we usually flew for vacations. Now to fly somewhere as a family with two kids . . . Well, I don't know! This year my employer doesn't cover my vacation expenses, so I'm thinking to go [to the South] by train.*

*Int.: But you are going in any case, right?*

*Inf.: Yes, we will go because children should be taken away [from the North], there is just the question of what transport to choose. (female, age 29, civil servant)<sup>12</sup>*

Many informants say that salaries in the North are not as high nowadays—they have become equal to salaries in the more temperate regions. Still, people working in mining industries can afford to regularly go on vacations to the South, and some people even go on vacation several times a year.

When young people search for a job, they sometimes take into account whether their potential future employment allows them to travel regularly and to see other places: one of my informants told me that he left his position at a mining enterprise for a position at a geophysical research laboratory despite the lower salary at the new place. He explained that the new job was more interesting for him and provided him with an opportunity to see new places: “*How could I have visited Kamchatka if I still worked in the mine?*” (male, age 29, engineer).

The Murmansk region is also special because of its position bordering Finland and Norway. Thanks to special agreements with those countries, Russian citizens permanently living in the Murmansk region can obtain a Schengen visa more easily than those living in other parts of the country. That is why many young people living in Kirovsk have the experience of traveling abroad; some people visit the neighboring Nordic countries quite regularly, for sightseeing, skiing, or shopping. There are also people who go abroad for longer stays, for either work or study: “*I went to Finland from time to time. I like traveling to Finland and to Norway. I studied for one year in Norway in one of the public high schools*” (male, age 32, entrepreneur and former miner). A young woman work-

ing as a downhill skiing instructor and as a teacher in a children's club used her vacation for part-time work abroad:

*I got an offer from a Norwegian resort to go there to work with Russian-speaking clients. Many Russians who come there do not speak any foreign languages, so if they need something, any consultations, I help them to hire instructors and to deal with everything. In English or in Russian, it depends. Of course, I accepted this offer. (female, age 22, downhill skiing instructor)*

Such experiences of coming into contact with other cultures is common for youth living in the Murmansk region, and it has a significant influence on the perception of place, as it broadens horizons.

The long-term mobility of youth in Kirovsk is usually connected with education or work. There are opportunities for higher education in Murmansk and Apatity in a limited number of professional fields. Vocational education and training at the secondary and postsecondary levels are available in many industrial cities in the region, but the choice of professions is also rather narrow and connected mostly with mining. The Khibiny Technical College in Kirovsk provides training for young people oriented toward work in the mining industry. Many Kirovsk residents choose Apatity as a place to get higher education: because of the proximity of these two cities and good transport connections between them, young people from Kirovsk often see Apatity as a continuation of their city, although such perceptions can change with age. For example, a young woman from Kirovsk (studied in Apatity at the university, now has two children), remarked that her perception of the road and of the distance between Kirovsk and Apatity had changed a lot since she was a student:

*Int.: Where did you go to study, to Apatity?*

*Inf.: Yes, to Apatity. In fact, we did not notice this distance, especially when we were young. Now I often feel 'oh no, I am too lazy to go to Apatity!' But at that time I could go back and forth several times during the day, in the morning and in the evening and this was OK. (female, age 30, museum employee)*

When young people want to get higher education in professions that are not available in the Murmansk region, they usually go to St. Petersburg, though some people might choose Petrozavodsk, Moscow, or other large cities in Central Russia if they have relatives there. After their studies are complete, many graduates try to stay in those big cities, but others cannot cope with the rhythm and complexity of living in a

large city and thus return to the North. For example, one informant from Kirovsk initially went to St. Petersburg to study, but after a couple of months, she decided to return home, because of the high stress she experienced living there. During these months she was robbed several times, got repeatedly lost in the city, and was continuously sick. She came back to Kirovsk and later started distance education at the Monchegorsk Sports College (83 km from Kirovsk).

*It was really convenient, I could go there just for a month: I would come, pass the exams, and leave. And this is really close, I could come home [to Kirovsk] for weekends, well, that was really cool. And it was also possible to ski, combining everything together. (female, age 22, downhill skiing instructor)*

Unlike her St. Petersburg experience, moving between Kirovsk and Monchegorsk was easy for this woman. The neighboring town was similar to her hometown, and she had an opportunity to study and to engage in her favorite sports at the same time. After the difficult experience of living in St. Petersburg, this informant decided to study in her home region, seeing it as the best option for her.

In general, the high motility of youth in Kirovsk is based on the well-developed transportation infrastructure in the region, including roads, public transport, and a high number of private cars. The region is also well connected with other regions of Russia, which also ensures the motility of youth. Practicing intense mobility, young people follow the experience of older generations that came to the North from other regions of Russia to construct new cities and to work in industries. Currently, young people employed in the mining industry have opportunities for outgoing temporary mobility during their long “northern” vacations, thanks to a relatively high and stable income in mining. The proximity of the borders with Nordic countries and the well-developed connections with them also contribute to the high level of mobility among the young people in the Murmansk region.

## **Sense of Place and Place Boundaries**

The experience of traveling that is so common for the majority of youth in Kirovsk broadens their mental maps. This map includes many regions of Russia, ranging from the Republic of Karelia, St. Petersburg, and Moscow to southern regions, predominantly within the European

part of Russia. While Siberia and the Far East are rarely mentioned, some European countries, especially those within Scandinavia, are often named. Inside the region, the boundaries of their “own place” are also broadening with the increasing mobility of youth. There are numerous stories in which young people recount how they explored their city’s surroundings in their early childhood:

*There were so many places where we went as kids. This is unlike the big cities where your space is limited to the backyard. Here, you leave the backyard and there is already a mountain and lakes where you can easily go. Parents limited our time, but at least in close proximity all surroundings were explored.*  
(male, age 29, engineer)

While growing up, young people expand their “own territory” and include neighboring cities and towns in their space. Because of high motility and the growing regional mobility of youth, their perception of the region significantly changes. For the older generation, their “own” area consists mostly of their hometown; for younger people, the entire region becomes their place. Cars and the dense road network have changed the perception of place among youth, especially in cities like Kirovsk, located near the main regional transport axis.<sup>13</sup>

In the Murmansk region, people living in neighboring cities often organize various joint events: sport competitions and trainings, music concerts and festivals, and meetings of clubs and interest groups where all residents of the region are invited. For Kirovsk, such neighboring cities are Apatity, Monchegorsk, Olenegorsk, Murmansk, Poliarnye Zori, Kandalaksha, and even Kovdor, which is a bit more remote. New technology contributes to the transformation of the perception of space: due to the high level of Internet accessibility in the Murmansk region, there are numerous groups on social networks that are popular on the regional level. For example, there are travel companion groups, regional virtual communities, and interest clubs that also organize regular off-line meetings, such as climbers, Hare Krishna followers, cyclists, role-playing gamers, anime fans, and many others.

As mentioned above, before the economic crisis of 2014, the youth of Kirovsk often visited Finland and Norway. Because of such frequent contacts with the neighboring countries, young residents of Kirovsk broadened their horizons. For example, the young man mentioned earlier who spent a year in Norway recently decided to open his own small business in Finland. He explains this decision by telling how his perception of the Nordic countries changed after living there:

*Well, the boundaries of my mind have somehow widened. So when I'm going to Finland or Norway it's not like going to a foreign country where everything is different. No, now I understand their life a bit, and I understand the people who live there, who they are, how they think, their way of life. During that year I got to know this a little. Somehow I feel relaxed and easy there; that is why I was not afraid to start up something there. I mean, I didn't even think something like: this is a different country, there is a language barrier, the laws are different, rules are different. (male, age 32, entrepreneur and former miner)*

After 2014, the number of young residents of Kirovsk traveling to Nordic countries decreased significantly, because of financial problems and the change in the ruble–euro currency exchange rate. However, many people have already had the experience of traveling, or they have friends and relatives who travel a lot, so they often discuss life in other countries, comparing the situation in their city to those in other places. Here is a typical story discussing a colleague's trip to an Austrian ski resort and the perspectives of tourism development in Kirovsk:

*When I was still working at the open pit mine, a colleague of mine, an excavator operator, lived in our apartment block. He also likes skiing, and he told me: I would rather go to Austria [to ski], what to do here? When I go there I live like a nobleman: I buy a ski pass for a week, get on a ski train right at the hotel entrance, and get out at the ski slope. With such a ski pass I can ski everywhere, I do not think if the lifts are working or not, if the slope closed or not, will two hours be enough or not. How to get to the slope, how to return. He says everything is organized there that one may need, and everything is designed for people's convenience. But I hope in the future we will also have that here. They are now promising to develop tourism here. (male, age 29, engineer)*

This example demonstrates that experiences of traveling abroad and discussions about life in other places are important for youth when they develop ideas of what life in Kirovsk should look like and what should be changed.

Many informants express a hope for the future development of tourism in Kirovsk, especially people involved in various sport activities. One of my informants, a ski instructor, talks about her vision of future:

*Actually, I hope that one day the mines here will be simply closed. Frankly speaking, we all hope for that, and then there will be a super-great ski resort here . . . The number of residents will probably decrease in cities, but this is life, what to do? But all people who do not like the North, who lived here only because of work, they will leave to work in more pleasant places, and here only the real fans and lovers of the North will stay (laughing). (female, age 22)*

On the discursive level, there is a widespread opinion among the population of Kirovsk that young people should leave. Many young people currently working at the city-forming enterprise JSC Apatit do express a desire to leave the place, especially now that the company is in the process of reorganization, and aiming to get rid of noncore assets and reduce the number of employees.

*The policy of the [city-forming] enterprise becomes quite inadequate. In my opinion the enterprise is falling apart. . . . Highly qualified people are leaving, I don't know where, they are just leaving. Some of them go to work at subcontracting companies, other just leave the city. . . . All my friends have a similar opinion: we should get out of here. Though the opportunity to leave is a different thing. The desire to leave is one thing, and the possibility to leave is another thing. Our salary is so low now that we hardly can afford a ticket to get out of here. (male, age 29, miner)*

Various “optimizations” carried out by the city-forming enterprise have a significant effect on young people’s perception of the hometown. There is a widespread concern that Kirovsk will become a fly-in, fly-out town sometime in the future. According to persistent rumors, the company prefers to employ people from other regions rather than local residents, because in this case they do not have the obligation to pay the higher northern wages and social benefits to which the locals are entitled. In these conditions of uncertainty and with the lack of a stable future, many young people have started thinking about changing their place of residence.

In addition to the changes in the city-forming enterprise, young people’s perception of place is heavily influenced by the decrease of state social services. For example, the ongoing “optimization of the health-care system” is a recent trend in the Murmansk region and in the Russian Federation in general. It results in the mergers and integrations of medical institutions situated in different cities and towns. Such mergers mean a lower number of local medical institutions, fewer types of medical care delivered on-site, and fewer medical personnel, combined with the agglomeration of services in several large medical centers in the region. Kirovsk was not influenced by this reorganization directly, as the city became a “base center,” meaning that many medical institutions and specialists from Apatity and other neighboring towns were transferred to Kirovsk. However, the number of people receiving medical care in Kirovsk has increased significantly, resulting in long queues.

Such radical reorganizations of the health-care system are possible because of the existence of the well-developed transport infrastructure

in the region. Local residents are mainly very critical about these changes, as they feel that they are being forced to adjust to the new system. Individual mobility becomes one of the main resources that people use for solving the problem of locally unavailable medical care: people are now going to the regional “base centers” such as Murmansk, Kirovsk, Monchegorsk, and Kandalaksha, where medical institutions and specialists are now concentrated. Those who can afford it try to visit medical specialists in big cities while on vacation.

Many young people currently living in Kirovsk already had the experience of leaving the city and then returning after studying or working in other places. Even those who plan to resettle often postpone their move to the distant future, to an abstract “someday.” One of the important reasons for staying in the North is the abundance of housing available in the region: because of the significant decrease in population and low apartment prices, even young people can easily afford to own a flat. In general, there is a certain ambivalence in the region: the wish to leave is very common among youth. However, many young people come back after spending some time elsewhere. Among other reasons, the unique environment of the Khibiny Mountains is also a powerful factor creating a sense of place for youth in Kirovsk:

*Int.: What was the most important thing for you when you decided to come back here [from St. Petersburg]?*

*Inf.: Sure, the mountains! Even when I was living in St. Petersburg, I often came here, and brought my friends here. Especially in summer when you can walk around and see the beauty . . . How can you leave this for St. Petersburg's marshes, slush, and the large dirty city?! It is better to go there for a vacation and to live in a nice clean place. (female, age 33, museum employee, lived in St. Petersburg for seven years)*

The Khibiny Mountains are located in very close proximity to the town, which increases its attractiveness for local youth, especially for those who are involved in various sporting activities. The natural environment is perceived primarily as a space for leisure activities.

This case study shows that the perception of the city by local youth is closely linked with their motility. The well-developed transportation infrastructure allows young people to travel extensively both within and beyond the region. The high mobility of youth in the Murmansk region is also caused by the significant migration experience of previous generations that settled in new industrial towns of the region during the Soviet period. The proximity of Nordic countries also stimulates the mobility of youth: because of intense contacts with Finland

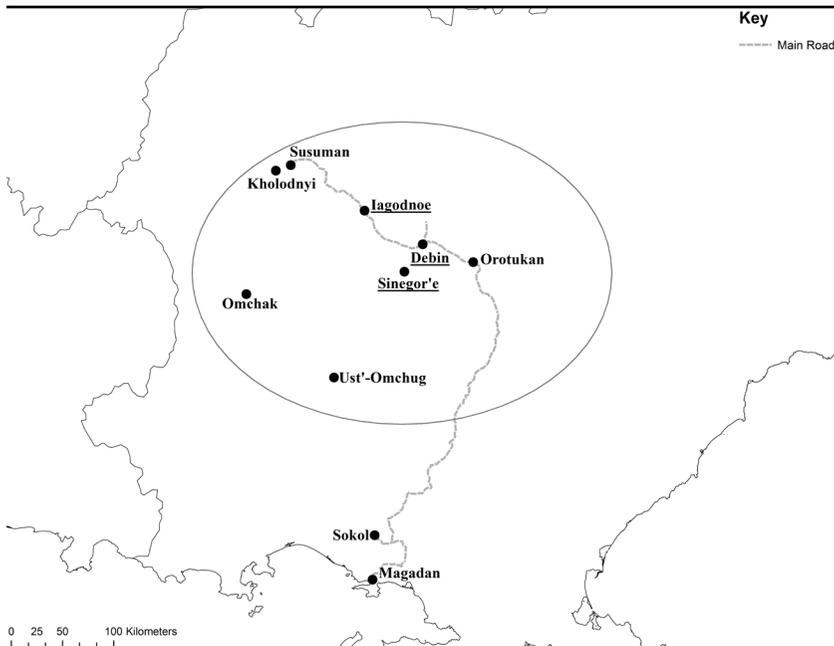
and Norway, young people are expanding the boundaries of the world in which they live. On the other hand, the well-developed transport infrastructure enables the government to cut local social and health services, and concentrate facilities at only a few centers. As a result of the current state policy, solutions for social problems are becoming individualized: the responsibility has shifted from the state to individuals. People develop a strategy of adaptation to the reorganization of the social and medical infrastructure, which is based primarily on individual mobility, while people with lower motility do not have access to services that they had previously.

## **Central Kolyma, Magadan Region**

The Central Kolyma subregion<sup>14</sup> is an area that comprises the Iagodninskii, Susumanskii, Tenkinskii, and partly Omsukchanskii and Khasynskii Districts of Magadan region (see figure 3). I deal here with three towns in the Iagodninskii District, the core of the subregion: the urban-type settlements of Iagodnoe, Sinigor'e, and Debin, where fieldwork was conducted during the fall of 2015. About 8,500 people reside permanently in Iagodninskii District. Iagodnoe has around 4,000 residents, Sinigor'e around 2,500, and Debin around 700 (Federal'naia sluzhba gosudarstvennoi statistiki 2015).

Like the Murmansk region, the Magadan region is historically an industrial region that came into being during the period of intensive development of nonferrous metallurgy. Active exploitation in the area began in the 1930s, owing to the need for gold for the accelerated industrialization of the country. Initially, it was the prisoners of the Gulag system who built the industrial facilities, roads, and housing, as in many other regions of the Far North where industrial development took place (Nordlander 2003; Shirokov 2000; Zeliak 2004). In the 1950s, after the Gulag's demise, the government maintained special financial incentives to recruit people to the areas with so-called hostile climate and underdeveloped social infrastructure. The newcomers, who arrived from all over the USSR, usually planned to make money and then leave for good. The strategy of temporary stay motivated them to keep close ties with their relatives and friends in other regions, while long holidays and cheap flights made regular contacts possible and affordable for almost everyone. This is how Kolyma people maintained connections in a number of regions of the Soviet Union, both their home areas (Ukraine, Kuban', Altai, and the Far East) and areas of future relocation

**Figure 3.** A map of the the Central Kolyma area in the Magadan region in Russia.



Map by Mitchell Brinton.

(Moscow and Leningrad, the Baltic countries, the south of Russia near the Ukrainian border, and the Far East). Today, the regions of relocation remain more or less the same, except that the Baltic states are replaced by the Kaliningrad region (Ivanova and Kuteinikov 2015).

The political and economic crisis of the 1990s heavily influenced life in Magadan region. The construction and food industries were almost shut down. The population outflow from the region amounted to more than 60 percent during the period between 1989 and 2010 (Nezavisimyi institut sotsial'noi politiki n.d.). Many settlements were closed, and the already sparse rural population almost disappeared. The modern population of the Central Kolyma consists mainly of descendants of migrants from different periods, primarily engaged in gold mining, public service, or the services and trade sector. Today, the opportunity to travel outside the region for state employees (who constitute the majority in the "living" towns of the Central Kolyma) is limited to the biennial state-covered vacation for employees and their children. People engaged in gold mining make enough money to keep the motivation for the annual seasonal work. According to the representative of Jagodninskii

District administration, about half of those engaged in this sector live outside the Magadan region, and come only for spring and summer.

Thus, the history of industrial development in the Central Kolyma determined the multiethnic structure of the local population and its settling in the urban areas. For historical reasons, high mobility has always been one of the important values for the local residents, although their motility now varies to a greater degree than it did during Soviet times.

## **Transportation Infrastructure**

In terms of transport, the Magadan region is connected to the rest of the country by air and sea lines, and also by road, as the R504 federal highway “Kolyma” links Magadan and Yakutsk. The sea is used only for cargo transportation. Passengers use year-round flights from Magadan to Moscow, Novosibirsk, or Vladivostok, scheduled several times a week. During spring, summer, and early autumn, flights to Krasnodar, Khabarovsk, and Petropavlovsk-Kamchatskii are scheduled to meet the seasonal inflow of gold miners and the outflow of local residents going on vacation. In 2015, the prices range from 10,000 rubles for the Far Eastern destinations to 20,000–70,000 rubles for destinations in Central Russia.

Steady year-round traffic on the Kolyma highway began only in 2008. Earlier, the sections of this highway located in Magadan region and in Yakutiia were not connected with each other, and local residents still perceive the Kolyma highway mostly as a local transport corridor and not as a way to travel beyond the regional borders. The transportation opportunities provided by this road are used first and foremost by Yakutian entrepreneurs who bring jewelry, fur coats, and other goods to the Magadan region. Kolyma residents mainly use the road through Yakutiia to smuggle illegally mined gold.

The Iagodninskii District is located in the central Magadan region, with the distance between Iagodnoe and Magadan being over 500 kilometers. In terms of transport, the urban-type settlements located along the road, including Iagodnoe, are oriented toward the regional center. There is a passing public bus service from Susuman, the westernmost settlement of the region, to Magadan every two days, as well as minibuses running every day. In addition, there are minibus services directly connecting Magadan to Iagodnoe. A direct minibus line between Magadan and Iagodnoe is also in operation. In 2015, the cost

of transportation from the town to Magadan ranged from 2,000 to 3,000 rubles one way, with the duration of the trip being 10 hours by bus and 6 hours by minibus. There are no regular connections from Iagodnoe to destinations in neighboring Yakutiia; only private minibuses and taxis that drive there from Magadan can pass through the town.

Inside the Magadan region, local flight services also operate, but not all towns of the Central Kolyma have air links to Magadan. Today, only Susuman, Seimchan, and Omsukchan are accessible via air transport. Thus, the choice of transportation for most Central Kolyma residents is limited to road transport—private or public, for travel within the region—and air transport, to go to other Russian regions and abroad. The developed public transportation system, both state and private, allows many residents to live without a private car, though cars are highly valued as proof of the high motility of the owner.

## The Quality of Roads as an Omen of the Future

The transport infrastructure defines the structural constraints for mobility, thus affecting residents' motility. Yet the users' perception of this infrastructure is also important, as the absence of roads does not necessarily mean immobility (see the Eastern Taimyr section of this article). However, the Central Kolyma is closer to the type of remote region described by Edwin Ardener. He determines remoteness not as a consequence of geographic conditions but as a specific effect of connection with the dominant area. A need to maintain stable contact with the center makes linking infrastructure a matter of concern and anxiety for inhabitants of remote areas (Ardener [1987] 2012: 528).

For highly mobile residents of Iagodnoe, roads mean an opportunity to leave the town and get supplies, and their quality is seen as reflecting the settlement's future. When I went to Iagodnoe in late August 2015, just before the local elections, the town was buzzing with discussions of the road. For instance, the librarian (a single mother, aged 30, who fled from her ex-husband's harassment in southern Russia), talked about buying a residence in the town: *"I'm not sure if it's worth it. There are rumors that the town will be closed down. Look, there was the money allocated for the road repairs—and the repairs never happened."* The interpretation of the rumors about the town's future linking it with the road condition reflected not just her personal opinion but also the opinion of the entire library staff; at least, all my interviewees among the staff members shared this interpretation.

The heat-only boiler station employees who spent most of their lives in the town were not so unanimous:

*Inf. 1: You see, the towns are being closed down . . . Soon Magadan will be the only settlement of the Magadan region, maybe also Palatka and some other suburbs . . .*

*Inf. 2: Well, they will not close this town: the federal highway passes by, it should be monitored. The federal highway won't be closed down. How else can it be? It won't be closed down. (male, age 44; and male, age around 50,<sup>15</sup> boiler facility workers)*

The road repairs started in late September, after the election had passed. The repair area, about 100 meters long, was located in front of the district administration building, causing many local jokes. Repairing the road in the prewinter period, when the snow was about to cover the ground, was considered to be an obvious waste of money by the locals. Although residents were indignant and criticized the administration routinely for ill timing, one could feel that people could now stop holding their breath, for investment in the road repairs meant that the settlement was not going to be closed.

This interpretation has historical reasons. A comparison of the maps of the Magadan region between the early 1990s and today shows that most of the surviving settlements are located along the federal highway. The only surviving settlements beyond the highway are the district capitals or the urban-type settlements based around strategic enterprises, like the Kolyma Hydropower Plant (Kolyma HPP) in Sinegor'e or the regional tuberculosis treatment center in Debin. Most side roads and the settlements located along them are now defunct.

Although the transport infrastructure of the region is well-developed, the residents are concerned about the stability of its functioning. They consider the highway's condition to be a litmus test defining the future of the towns located along it. This reflects the high value of mobility in both symbolic and practical terms.

## Mobility and Motility

The economic transformation of the early 1990s heavily affected life in Kolyma, leading to the marginalization of the place. The Soviet-era priority of supplying goods was replaced by shortages of most necessary products. The outflow of different specialists has led to reduction in the services offered. Although the situation with goods and services

improved during the 2000s, locals still do not have equal consumption opportunities compared to the inhabitants of the central parts of Russia. In this context, mobility serves as one of the means to compensate for the shortfall of a wide range of goods and services, from clothing to health care and education.

In each case, mobility depends on what is being compensated and the amount of time available for meeting a need; strategic decisions relating to matters of nonurgent health care and education require long and carefully planned trips. To take a medical example: the local hospital in Iagodnoe, in spite of its good equipment, is infamous for the lack of properly trained specialists and numerous cases of misdiagnosis; therefore, many residents prefer to look for medical care elsewhere—for example, in Magadan for urgent cases and in other places, during their vacation time, for less pressing medical concerns. For instance, the son of one of my informants scalded himself one weekend; instead of taking him to the local doctor, his father drove him to Magadan to get more professional health care. The husband of another informant was misdiagnosed in Iagodnoe, and his disease continued to develop; eventually, he had to fly to Moscow for surgery. To prevent the need of seeking medical assistance in town, the local residents attempt to receive medical examinations or nonurgent care where they spend their vacations, just as the Murmansk region's inhabitants also do. I was told, for instance, about cases of treating thyroid disorders and tumors in Korea, getting dental treatment in China, and doing MRI scans in Ukraine.

In the case of education, the solutions can often become even more radical, as mobility here amounts to migration. Many parents are not satisfied with the quality of local secondary education; hence, they plan to move when the time comes for their children to start preparing for their final exams. If they cannot move themselves, they send their children to live with relatives in the regions where the children are planning to study after school. In these (though infrequent) cases, having relatives in the region becomes a decisive factor for the choice of place, rather than the quality of education in their chosen field. Still, town inhabitants predominantly prefer not to send their children very far from themselves, and consequently Magadan becomes the most popular and affordable destination for getting higher education, and many residents of the Central Kolyma industrial settlements eventually move there.

However, relocations are not necessarily final. First, a number of people who have moved to the city still keep their “highway” houses,

which are used as summer residences (*dacha*) because the climate of the Central Kolyma is considered better than in the Magadan area on the coast of the Sea of Okhotsk. The summer temperatures in the Central Kolyma can be as high as 30°C. Second, the seasonal nature of gold mining allows people to live in Magadan or even in the western parts of Russia and commute for seasonal work. Third, some people who are unable to pay the rent in Magadan return to the towns. Almost all my interlocutors in Igodnoe, who were in their early 30s, had the experience of life elsewhere at some point. Most of them lived in Magadan; some people came back from Khabarovsk and Irkutsk or the neighboring Susuman, with its technical school. The motives of returning are similar to those found in the Eastern Taimyr (see below): young men return mainly because of poor progress in studies, caused by too many friends and parties; young women return mainly owing to early pregnancies and the discomfort of living in a large city far away from their families and, sometimes, their boyfriends.

Thus, the ties with Magadan are the closest: first, many of my young interviewees have friends and classmates living in the city; second, there are diverse and attractive leisure opportunities available there. Compared to older generations, young Central Kolyma residents travel to the city much more often, mostly taking minibuses or their own or their friends' cars to get there, but not regular buses. A woman, 30 years old, who provided accommodation for me in Igodnoe, was surprised at my decision to take a bus and told me that she had never taken one in the 10 years she has spent in the town. In her opinion, buses were uncomfortable and slow, and they also sometimes break down right on the highway. She uses minibuses despite the fact that her sister-in-law got into a serious highway accident a few years ago, and my landlady and her husband spent several unpleasant hours waiting for news (fortunately, the woman was not injured). For highly mobile young people, the most important factor in traveling to Magadan is speed.

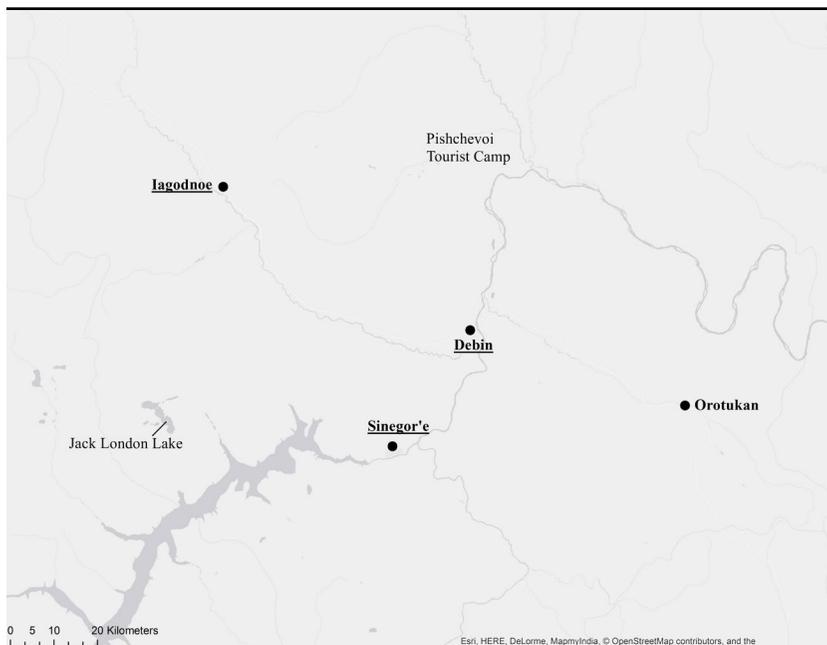
Holiday trips to Magadan usually take at least a week. Going there and back again in two or three days will almost always be done for business reasons. Given this context, the case of a Kolyma HPP executive officer looks extreme: in his opinion, the scarcity of entertainment opportunities in the urban-type settlement of Sinegor'e was not a serious issue because one could always go to Magadan, getting in by car on Friday night, relaxing in the city through the weekend, and returning Sunday night. Typically, weekend trips to Magadan are distinctly rare and clearly indicate the high motility of the speaker.

Some young men also often travel to Susuman, about 100 kilometers west from Iagodnoe. These men are usually deeply engaged in the local social networks. In Susuman, they relax and hang out with their friends, thus keeping important contacts alive. Rides there are more frequent and shorter in time, as a round trip usually takes a couple of days. This practice is similar to trips for leisure to neighboring towns taken by young people in Murmansk region, though in the Central Kolyma the distances between towns are larger, and covering them takes more time.

Besides traveling to neighboring towns and the city, the locals also go “to the countryside” (i.e., the riverbank), a neighboring hill, the taiga forest, campsites, or gold-mining sites (*stany*). Although recreational places can be easily reached on foot, people travel to these more distant locations using bicycles, motorcycles, quads, cars, and boats, and also skis and snowmobiles in wintertime. Young people’s favorite summer recreational places are often the hard-to-access campsites in the middle reaches of the Kolyma River, in the vicinities of the now defunct town

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**Figure 4.** A closer look at the infrastructure and surrounding area of Debin, Sinegor’e, and Iagodnoe, and Jack London Lake.



Map by Mitchell Brinton.

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of Pishchevoi, and especially on Jack London Lake (see figure 4). These two campsites can be reached only by car, and the base on Jack London Lake requires using an off-road vehicle. The ability to get to these places for recreation purposes indicates one's high level of motility and corresponds to one's status in the local community.

To sum up, for Central Kolyma residents, mobility serves to compensate lacking or unsatisfactory goods and services. Long-term mobility allows them to get high-quality health care and educational services, while everyday short-term mobility usually meets younger residents' demand for leisure and recreation; young people are more mobile than the middle-aged and older generation. Often trips to the "countryside" make the boundary between the town and its natural environment fuzzy (cf. the case of Eastern Taimyr below). People "utilize" the spaces that can be reached during one night—that is, places where one can go for a barbecue after work in the summer and return the same night. The size of the "utilized" space and its boundaries are connected with the individual's motility, determined by the possession of a vehicle or social relations that can make up for the lack of such a vehicle.

## **Sense of Place and Place Boundaries**

The post-Soviet marginalization of the region has also affected the perception of place by its inhabitants. For many Central Kolyma residents, the main feature of their place is its *remoteness*. People mention it directly as well as indirectly, pejoratively referring to their town as a "village" or asking why I, a visiting researcher, was exiled here. Drawing on the ideas of Edwin Ardener, Caroline Humphrey (2014) demonstrated that the concept of remoteness refers not so much to distance as to the availability of modern infrastructures, and my field data support this claim. The meaning of "remoteness" is changing, and the highway to Magadan appeared in the discourse or disappeared from it depending on who spoke about what.

For instance, younger people mostly talked about the remoteness of the Magadan region from the central parts of Russia, referring to the lack of land transportation linking them with those regions. "Here" predominantly meant "in the Magadan region" rather than "in our town." Compare the words of a heat-only boiler station employee studying at the university in Magadan when he speaks about the possibility of moving there: Magadan and Igodnoe are treated as parts of the same space, while "there" for him is clearly outside the region:

*Well, I live quietly. I have no moving plans so far. The only opportunity is Magadan. . . . One doesn't know where one is going . . . **Here** you have at least some job, some income, some housing. And if you go **there**—well, who knows what you are up to? It's also frightening.* (male, age 22, heat-only boiler station worker)

*If one gets a higher degree **here**, it will be mostly legal education and accounting.* (male, age 23, heat-only boiler station worker)

The distance from Magadan to the town was mentioned only when people talked about infrastructure that is of crucial importance to the young: modernity-related ones, such as Internet access and certain methods of delivery for goods. The Internet connection in Magadan region works via satellites, so it is slow and expensive. However, there are persistent rumors of an upcoming fiber-optic connection, and in September 2015, my Magadan informants were waiting for this connection to be introduced by the end of the year. People in Iagodnoe were less optimistic:

*Inf.: Well, yes, the connection is very bad, well, it's very slow.*

*Int.: Any prospects for improvement?*

*Inf.: Well, they say they are now extending a line of . . . fiber optic from Sakhalin to Magadan region, along the seabed, so here we are . . .*

*Int.: When would they do that?*

*Inf.: I don't know. They will probably use a train to bring it **to us here**.*

*Int.: (laughing) You mean, they should first build a railway?*

*Inf.: Yeah, like that . . . Well, you can imagine: another 500 km from Magadan up to **here**.* (male, age 30, civil servant)

Matching the high-speed Internet connection with a railway is rather telling. The railway from Yakutsk to Magadan is a failed project of the Soviet time, though there are still rumors it will possibly be revived. It expresses the local dream of being integrated into the larger transportation network and provokes bitter sarcasm among the locals. In this case, using such an emotional comparative simile highlights the significance of the information infrastructure for the young people, since having Internet access is a marker of belonging to the modern world. Being engaged in modernity is historically an essential part of the identity of young Russian Northerners (Anderson 2004).

Another example can be found in the (mostly female) stories about purchasing clothing. In addition to more traditional methods of shopping, such as buying clothes in the regional capital, on the “mainland”

during vacation, or via mail-order catalogs, women also mention the newest urban developments (i.e., shopping malls and home-fitting delivery services):

*Inf. 1: So, the deliveryman brought you stuff in St. Petersburg, huh? Click-click on the website (imitates typing), then the delivery guy arrives, you try it on and return it if you don't like it.*

*Int.: Like that, yes.*

*Inf. 1: Here! There is no such thing here. What a shame!*

*Inf. 2: They tried to do that here. . . . One girl ordered this service. . . . The delivery guy came all the way from Magadan, she tried everything on, buying some things and declining others; so the guy came here a couple of times more, someone else told me that . . . And then he stopped coming, I think it isn't paying.*

*Int.: Yeah, yeah.*

*Inf. 2: It's like this: you try it on and then "I think I won't buy that," while he . . . drove such a long way. (male, age 22, entrepreneur; and female, age 25, teacher)*

This couple often mentions their trips to Magadan, as the man is studying outside the town at Northeastern State University and has business with partners in Magadan, and the woman is taking driving lessons and preparing to apply for Russian citizenship (she is originally from Ukraine). Both are members of the regional Youth Chamber, regularly taking part in the city's political activities. They travel quite often; however, they mentioned the duration of the trip (implying the distance between the town and the city) only twice, in the passage cited and when speaking about the highway closures owing to weather conditions.

Young informants tend to downplay the distance to the regional capital. There are no complaints about remoteness, nor detailed stories about traveling there. An extreme example of such disregard is the following passage from an interview with a young cinema employee:

*So we're like . . . once we were sitting with [a friend] outside, chilling and relaxing and drinking beer and the like. Then the boys came, well, we helped them with loading, and then I asked: "You're going to Magadan, right?" . . . Then I'm like: "Well, let's go there now as well?" So they said OK. [The friend] said, "Damn, wait, let me at least . . . fetch my bag." And I said: "My passport is on me—I'm ready to go right now." . . . So we went to Magadan, without much money, we only had 3,000 rubles, but we still had a crazy time there, for a week. So we came back, and everything was fine. (male, age 33, cinema employee)*

Locals of the older generation primarily linked remoteness with the distance to Magadan. Speaking of remoteness, they mostly referred to other issues, such as food supplies and the work of education and health-care institutions, and they used “here” and “we” meaning “on the highway” and “in the town.”

This age group describes the road to Magadan as full of hardships. They talk in detail about the way to the city, specifying how much time it takes and how dangerous and inconvenient it is. In the case of middle-aged and older women, it can even become a reason for moving to Magadan. For instance, one of my interviewees decided to move from the town of Debin to Magadan, where her daughter lived. She explained her decision by saying that Debin is too far from Magadan and that there are “constant fatal accidents” happening on the road. For her, the hardships of the trip, owing to both distance and the road quality, is a legitimate explanation for moving to the regional capital. However, for young people this argument would not hold; in this case, they would mention not the distance but the lack of opportunities and leisure activities in the town.

Thus, some Central Kolyma residents describe their hometowns using the concept of remoteness, which has clearly negative connotations. In their view, remoteness is expressed through the degree of development of the infrastructure, which is of crucial importance for them. Depending on their age, speakers can refer to the distance to regions of Central Russia if they are young, or to the city of Magadan if they are middle-aged or older.

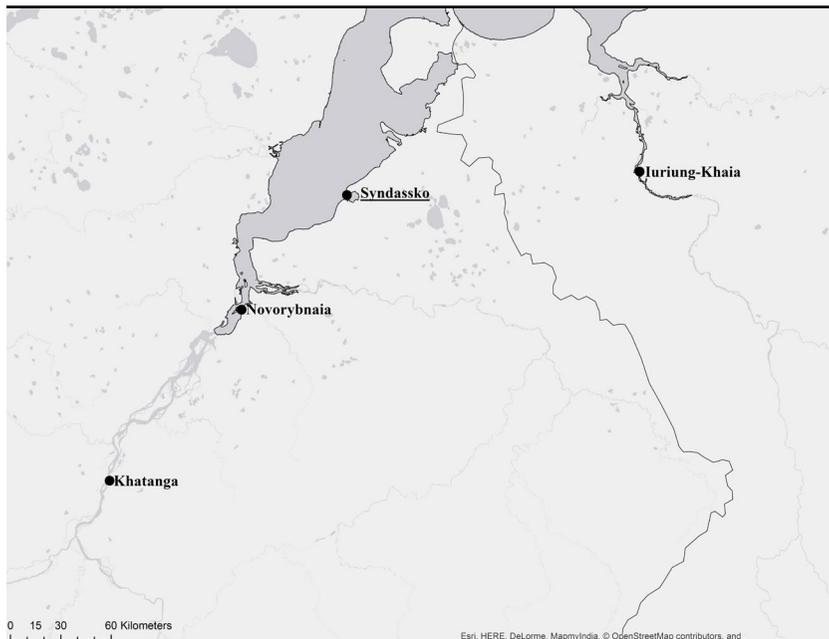
Boundaries of “one’s own” space can be analyzed in two directions: discursive construction and the practicalities of visiting particular sites. At the discursive level, boundaries are flexible and are constructed ad hoc, depending on the topic and the purpose of the narrator. In one case “here” may refer to the Magadan region, in another case it may stand for Iagodninskii District, and in a third context it may signify the town itself. The limits of actually utilized space are not the same as the discursively constructed ones. At the discursive level, “one’s own” place for young Central Kolyma inhabitants may demarcate the Magadan region, while at the level of practice, people actually visit the places almost entirely located within Iagodninskii District, except for Magadan. The boundaries of “one’s own” place are flexible and determined by everyday mobility opportunities, which also affect the degree of motility of particular town residents. More motile residents have a larger space of their own than less motile ones, including not only those places in the vicinity of town but also Magadan.

Thus, in the case of highly mobile residents of an industrial region like Magadan, and Central Kolyma in particular, the single option of the transportation infrastructure—which determines individual motility—plays an important role in building a sense of place. First, the road quality as part of this infrastructure is interpreted as a direct indicator of the town's future. Second, in an era of post-Soviet marginalization, mobility gains both symbolic and practical value, as it serves to compensate for the shortage of goods and services, including entertainment. Third, remoteness becomes the main feature of the place for its residents, and people interpret it differently at various stages of their lives; the crucial factor here is the level of development of the infrastructure important to the residents of particular age groups.

## Eastern Taimyr

Eastern Taimyr is used here as a conventional name for the vast area officially called the “Khatanga rural settlement,” located in the eastern Taimyr Peninsula and covering about 336,000 square kilometers (fig. 5) (Vizitnaia kartochka n.d.). Its administrative capital is the village of

**Figure 5.** A map detailing Khatanga rural settlement.



Khatanga. Informally, the district is divided into “upper” and “lower” villages—that is, located downstream or upstream of the village of Khatanga, along the Khatanga River. Ethnically, almost all the inhabitants of the area are Dolgans. During Soviet times, the village of Khatanga was an important base point of the Northern Sea Route, so its population consisted almost exclusively of nonlocal workers, while the local indigenous population rarely settled there. After perestroika, the situation changed: the majority of Russian-speaking residents moved away, and people coming from adjacent towns took over their deserted apartments.

Fieldwork was conducted in April and May 2015 in one of the “lower” settlements—Syndassko, the easternmost village of the district. The village is located close to the regional border with Iakutiia; the distance to the village of Iuriung-Khaia (in the Anabarskii Ulus, or district, of Iakutiia) is only 160 kilometers, while the village of Khatanga is 285 kilometers away; this has a profound effect on the life of the village. Syndassko is a typical northern village. It was built in the 1930s, when the Soviet state was working to sedentarize the nomadic groups. When the village emerged, a collective farm (*kolkhoz*) was also established; it was engaged in state-regulated reindeer husbandry, hunting, and fishing. The collapse of the Soviet Union led to a gradual decline of this system, so most village residents and the tundra reindeer-herding teams eventually lost their jobs. Thus, the village residents had to find alternative ways of marketing their production. Reindeer husbandry became economically unprofitable, but for the older generation, keeping reindeer herding alive is less of an economic decision and more about valuing a way of life. However, herding is gradually disappearing: the best herders have grown old, and there is virtually no continuity between generations. Most residents are sedentary now, although several herding brigades still keep up a nomadic way of life in the neighboring tundra.

Now, the village is home to around 500 people, most of them Dolgans. According to the data provided by the local administration, 494 residents were Dolgan, eight were Russians, five were Nganasan, two were Even, and another two were Yakut. Nearly all of the residents were born and raised there or in the adjacent tundra areas, except for several women from neighboring villages who married Syndassko residents and those who came to work there because they were unable to find a job in their own villages after graduation.

The employment opportunities in the village are rather limited. There is a primary school, a kindergarten, a medical center, a post office,

a town administration that easily fits into one office, a local House of Culture (*dom kul'tury*), a library, and a diesel power plant. Those institutions provide around 80 positions, though only posts at the school, kindergarten, and administration offer proper salaries, while the salaries in other places are quite low.

Residents who could not find wage labor are mostly engaged in hunting and fishing. Their catches go to the family, for informal exchange with other families, as well as for exchange for fuel and food during certain seasons.<sup>16</sup> The bulk buyers come to the village from the neighboring Iakutian village Iuriung-Khaia and from Khatanga. There are also other income opportunities in Syndassko, such as sewing fur boots (*untaiki*) and the production of "ethnic" souvenirs, although they are less common. In addition to that, some people engage in the occasional reselling of various goods brought from neighboring villages; this can sometimes even become a steady informal business.

In addition to that, state benefits are an important part of the local economy. People get benefits for maintaining the traditional lifestyle (*kochevye*) amounting to around 4,000 rubles per month; most of 138 unemployed residents of the village (according to 2014 data from the local administration, personal communication) get those benefits regardless of how much they are engaged in reindeer herding or fishing. There are also unemployment benefits, which are, for a short period after dismissal, larger than the *kochevye* ones, as well as pensions, compensation for the loss of a breadwinner, and maternity and other benefits.

In general, the yearly trade cycle and barter cycle are quite diverse: different types of exchange are linked to different periods. For instance, in autumn people prefer to buy gasoline brought from Khatanga by a fuel tank truck, while in winter and spring they prefer to exchange their catches for condensate. The liquid gas condensate is imported to Anabarskii Ulus in the Sakha Republic to be used in the heat-only boiler station; it is used by those in Taimyr mostly for fueling the snowmobiles. The Taimyr village residents buy it or get it through kinship networks in exchange for reindeer meat. Although gasoline is believed to be of better quality than condensate, its deposits in Khatanga become quickly depleted, and gasoline procurement trips are quite costly. In winter, it is common to send fish and meat to relatives who live in the neighboring Novorybnaia, so that smelt, which cannot be caught in Syndassko, can arrive in exchange in the spring. In addition to that, securing the basic food supplies for one's family requires occasional parcels of meat and fish to be sent to relatives living in Iuriung-Khaia

or Khatanga, and they will then send back supplies from their grocery stores. During early summer, just before the start of the goose and duck hunting season, rifle cartridges become the best means of payment in the village. Here is an example of how a young teacher, a single mother who was born in the neighboring village of Novorybnaia and now lives in Syndassko, is actively involved in these exchange networks:

*Inf.: My uncle, or rather a great-uncle, visits me here—he lives in Syndassko. He visits me sometimes, helping with the housework. We use the local coal here . . . So he helps me with cutting it; sometimes, when I have no time to stoke the stove, he helps me with stoking it. He can also help with cleaning the chimney, throwing snow down from the roof, that's how it works . . . I have other relatives and friends who can bring ice or local coal here—a bag or two at a time. . . . They can also sift it . . . in exchange for something (laughing, mimicking a bottle).*

*Int.: Well, it's not so easy to get a bottle of vodka here for such exchanges!*

*Inf.: Well, yes, that's why I order vodka every time (laughing) from Khatanga. Well, when I need vodka to pay someone with it, I usually call people in Khatanga and they send me some.*

*Int.: Who are those people in Khatanga?*

*Inf.: My sister. (female, age 29, primary school teacher)*

Thus, the basic economic unit in the village is the extended family. The distribution of catches involves the entire family, and the money earned by each member is spent for the benefit of the whole family. This applies not only to common nutrition but also, for example, to booking transportation tickets. The household duties are shared by all family members. An official employment can also become a family business: there are numerous cases in which the family helps one of its members with official duties. For example, a woman working as a laundress in the boarding school is usually assisted by her unemployed daughter; another young man who is working as a diesel engineer often lets his father work instead of him while he goes fishing or hunting.

## Transportation Infrastructure and Motility

It is possible to get to Khatanga only by weekly air services from Noril'sk or Krasnoyarsk; there is no direct connection to Moscow or other cities. These flights quickly become fully booked. Regular passenger services connect Syndassko and Khatanga, but the departures are very infrequent: all three eastern villages are served by just one heli-

copter (during the cold season) or motor ship (in the summer) service per week. The helicopter takes 20 passengers, and the motor ship takes 20–60 (depending on how many people can squeeze on board). There are no roads in the region, not even seasonal ones.

The only vehicle suitable for traveling in such conditions is the snowmobile. Though all-terrain vehicles (ATVs) used by private individuals are widespread in some other regions of the Russian North—for example, in the Kola Peninsula (see Konstantinov 2009)—this is not the case on the Taimyr Peninsula. These days, most households have one or more snowmobiles. They are used both for compensating for the lack of public transportation (i.e., for trips to Khatanga or neighboring villages) and for trips to the nearby tundra.

Snowmobile trips to the tundra are a usual practice for most Syndassko residents. Such trips are required for basic household needs, such as getting coal and water, as well as hunting, fishing, and gathering. Almost every adult male in the village hunts wild reindeer, ptarmigan, ducks, geese, and other game; in addition to that, they usually fish in tundra lakes and in the gulf. Such trips can last one day or a longer time when people go “to the spot” (*na tochku*)—that is, to their own hunting huts in the tundra, where they can spend up to several weeks. Similarly, reindeer herders do not spend their entire time in the tundra but travel constantly between the camp and the village, while the village residents often visit these camps or just stop by on their way.

Furthermore, many people, especially youth, often go to the tundra for entertainment. They call it “going hiking” or “having a picnic,” meaning a one-day barbecue trip, sometimes including drinks. If a person is in possession of alcohol, leaving the town becomes particularly important: this means they are not obligated to share alcohol with hangers-on. People often just ride their snowmobiles through the village and in the nearby vicinity for fun. Walking outside the village on foot when the weather is mild is also a common practice, usually with no economic reason at all. For instance, picking mushrooms and berries is often not a household need but rather a motivation to get “outside.”

Snowmobile drivers are usually men, but women and younger boys often join the adult males for hunting, fishing, or shopping trips to an adjacent village. The trip has its own value: it is perceived as entertainment. The winter periods when the long trips are impossible owing to low temperatures are described as boring. The cold period is perceived as the most difficult one, not only because of economic issues but also because there is “nothing to do”: both commercial and recreational trips become impossible.

As for long-distance travel (going on vacation, educational migration, medical and shopping trips, trips for paperwork that require going to Khatanga, if not Dudinka—the district administrative center), such trips become a real burden for the local residents, as the ticket cost may be higher than their monthly wages. Those trips are usually planned in such a way that they allow combining multiple objectives. Family members working in state-financed organizations, and therefore having their vacation trips covered every two years, plan their holidays so as to allow for dealing with several financial and medical issues of other family members. Here is an example of a young teacher speaking about her vacations paid for by the state:

*I'm going to Krasnoyarsk as if it were Khatanga. Well, I usually go there with my mom, but this year I'll go with my little brother . . . He should be taken to the allergist for treatment: he's allergic to everything, he has Quincke's edema. I don't know for certain, we have to find out . . . what treatment, what medication to take. So we go there . . . I'll visit the dentist, and I will buy various things for myself. Well, I don't know why we go there (laughing). But I . . . I go there every year. I wanted to buy some furniture—other people do it, why can't I? (female, age 29, primary school teacher)*

Similar situations would cause dissatisfaction among Murmansk region residents; but here, it is not perceived as something unusual. There was never any medical care or document-issuing institution in the village, so people are just following a long-established pattern.

For those family members whose travels are not covered by the state, the money is raised by the entire family; for that, people often spend state benefits accumulated over several months:

*Last year, I wanted to go with my daughter to Krasnoyarsk when she was entering university. We went in August. But I only had money for a one-way trip. So I asked myself, "How will I get back?" and so I stayed behind. They usually pay us enough for the return trip, but this was not the case last year. Regina is now planning to go; we all try to raise the money. She gets a pension for the loss of a breadwinner, so I'm saving all year. We will just withdraw it right before departure. (female, age 36, cleaner at the library)*

It should also be mentioned that an extremely important tool for compensating for the low motility is the mobility of things—that is, the exchange of parcels between relatives. Those living in Khatanga provide the village residents with the “fresh stuff” (*svezhesti*; i.e., perishable foods); the local residents send fish and meat to Khatanga in exchange. Here is a typical example:

*Inf.: We order pills from Khatanga, various cough syrups for children and other things that are unavailable here. My sister purchases those and sends them along with somebody who is traveling. Some people refuse to take parcels, but most are OK with that.*

*Int.: Do you send something in exchange?*

*Inf.: Yes, we do send meat and fish. Well, she calls me and tells me what she needs. But it's mostly our brother who sends stuff to her from Kataryk [upper village]. They like our stuff. They think it's better than what they have. . . . We also make minced meat for them, send them. In summer, we send them salted fish, because you can't send fresh fish on the motor boat, it would go rotten. In exchange, she sends us sausages, there are none here in the [local Syndassko] store, so she sends that before the holidays. Sausages, cucumbers, tomatoes, fresh stuff for the children.*

*Int.: Do you go to the local store?*

*Inf.: The local one? Yes, I do. Sometimes I have to buy on credit, before the nomads' benefits (kochevye) are paid . . . When the money arrives, I pay back, then again you have no money, so you are on credit again. (female, age 28, chairperson of the youth committee, unemployed)*

Ordering goods via the Internet, a widespread pattern for the Murmansk region and the Central Kolyma cases, is hardly possible here. There is an Internet connection in the village, but an expensive and very slow one, so it hardly contributes to the increase in the residents' motility.

To summarize this section, the motility of Syndassko residents is defined by several factors: whether a person possesses a snowmobile and whether the family has enough money or contacts for traveling or receiving parcels—one type of capital can be converted into another. The relatively unhindered snowmobile trips can be undertaken only within the region.

## Long-Term Mobility

Usually, the first long absence from the village comes for its young residents when they start fifth grade. From that moment on, they have to attend the boarding school in Khatanga. After graduating from it, nearly all young village residents prefer to continue their education at a college or university. However, they rarely have a clear picture of their future but rather prefer to choose the most comfortable living conditions. Typically, the plans for the future include going to study with

one's classmates and friends, get away from older relatives' control, and live in a place where you can "take showers, not steam baths (*bania*)."

Choosing a career often does not mean much, and decisions are made under their own momentum:

*Int.: Where did you go after the 11th grade [the last year of high school]?*

*Inf.: After school? I went to Tura.*

*Int.: Why have you made such a decision?*

*Inf.: I'm not sure . . . Some girls came here after studying there. I thought I would finish the course. But then I had a row with this teacher, then she became deputy director, and I decided to come back. (female, age 20, unemployed)*

Although almost all high school graduates choose to continue their education, most of them drop out and return to their home village. The reasons are the unfamiliar environment and problems with integration—or vice versa: too many parties lead to low marks. For girls, a common reason is early pregnancies: they take a sabbatical and return to the village with their newborn babies for some time. Many of them go back to study after a break, or at least plan to do so while staying unemployed or partly employed.

Unemployed young men and women in the village usually help their families. Women help with household duties, which are numerous, since no heating or water supply is available. Food is cooked from basic materials, such as flour, and meat and fish require butchering. As for men, they go with their older kinsmen to fish and hunt, and also do the harder housework, such as cutting reindeer carcasses, carrying ice and coal, or sifting the coal.

Nevertheless, the structure of the young residents' employment is flexible, so losing one worker is not a hard blow to the family economy. That is why young people are often actively moving between different places (although their number is limited) to pursue job opportunities, both deliberately and while visiting. There are numerous examples when a person comes to visit relatives for a couple of days and finds a job there, staying for several years. Most of the issues are solved "on their own," by luck or with the help of relatives who find a position for the young person. The cases of creating articulated or definitive life strategies are rare. Here is a typical example:

*Inf.: I flew to Khatanga to attend the boarding school. I graduated after 11 years, in 2008, when I moved to Dudinka to go to technical college.*

*Int.: What program?*

*Inf.: Gas and electric welding. I studied there for two and a half years. Then dropped out, just when I had two months of practical training left. I got drafted to the army, served in Omsk for a year. Then they sent me to Stavropol' . . . I came back on 27 December, 2011 . . . I came here, met my friends and parents, then I was relaxing for a year. After that, I moved to Dudinka, got a job, worked there for a year and three or four months . . . Then I gave up that job, got tired of it (laughing). I came back and stayed here.*

*Int.: What year was that?*

*Inf.: 2014.*

*Int.: Why have you returned? Is it because of the job, or you didn't like Dudinka?*

*Inf.: It's because of the job: I just got tired. I came here to help my relatives, drilling those fucking ice wells (grinning). Then I went to Khatanga for a week, relaxed a little bit, and came back. I also flew to Dudinka recently.*

*Int.: For how long?*

*Inf.: Like two weeks.*

*Int.: Why did you go there?*

*Inf.: Just resting . . . I came to Khatanga, stayed there for a week and came back . . .*

*Int.: What are your next plans?*

*Inf.: Not sure. It would be great to find a tusk (laughing).<sup>17</sup> (male, age 25, unemployed)*

It turned out that this young man did not go to Dudinka “just to relax.” Influenced by his relatives, he investigated the opportunities for a sling operator training in the port of Dudinka. Six months later, we suddenly met again in Dudinka. He was taking that training, and a year later I learned he had found a job in the port.

Thus, young people's planning horizon is short, and the decisions about relocation and life change can be spontaneous. Therefore, young people's life strategies and related movements are often not caused by purposeful action but happen on a whim. At the same time, one's biography usually includes a lot of mobility, which can last for many years.

## Place Boundaries and Sense of Place

Interestingly, the set of options for young people's relocation is limited to a small list. Prospective relocation destinations are the neighboring

villages and towns, Khatanga, Tura, Dudinka, Noril'sk, Krasnoyarsk, and St. Petersburg. The set of possible destinations varies depending on the relocation type. For instance, educational migration naturally omits destinations without higher and secondary education opportunities, such as Khatanga and the neighboring villages; visiting relatives is not relevant for Tura, as there are no kinship networks there, and so forth.

Surprisingly, even the range of holiday destinations for the town residents is the same in almost all cases, despite the fact that municipal employees can undertake vacation trips paid by the state every second year to any destination inside Russia. The only exception I found was a holiday spent in Buriatiia, but that trip was made upon invitation from a university friend.

We can assume that such a short list of travel destinations is explained by the fact that these settlements provide a solid "safety net": there are relatives there or, as in Tura and Dudinka, one can get a bed in a college dormitory during the enrollment period. Here is a typical example: *"She [daughter] could spend the first year in Dudinka, I have friends there . . . I'm not sure about St. Petersburg if she is able to live there. But still, Alla lives there; while in Krasnoyarsk she will at least live close to her big sister"* (female, age 35, library cleaner).

Other places are just not taken into account at all, although TV and the Internet provide some ideas of those places. Yet almost none of the young Syndassko residents would imagine enrolling in Irkutsk, Ivanovo, or Moscow universities.

This situation is fundamentally different from what was described above for the Murmansk and Magadan regions, which is also typical for many northern industrial cities. Most of those cities appeared during Soviet industrialization, and their residents are migrants of different generations, who keep close ties to other regions. Residents of those cities support such ties and maintain multiple identities. In the case of Syndassko, a village with a predominantly Dolgan population, the "imagined Russia" is just the opposite—a short list of familiar points where a Dolgan "diaspora" already exists.

Applying the concept of remoteness to Syndassko and following Caroline Humphrey's criteria of the level of transportation and other infrastructure development, Syndassko seems to be almost a prototypical example of a very remote village. It is very hard to get to Syndassko and to get out of it; in addition to a two-day-long trip, it sometimes also requires several weeks of waiting.

Of course, Syndassko residents realize how long the distance is between their village and the central parts of Russia. Many of my inter-

viewees mocked me, asking, “Do you feel you’ve come to the world’s end?” However, they never say anything like that among themselves. The well-developed informal economy that exists, mostly owing to the highly developed short-distance motility of village residents, mitigates the image of the village forgotten by state.

It is important to note that, unlike the Murmansk region, where many settlements became marginalized due to the decrease of infrastructure opportunities in the post-Soviet period, in Syndassko many infrastructures such as special health-care services never existed, so the contrast between the Soviet times and the modern period is not that sharp.

The attachment to the place is mentioned by nearly every resident of the village. There is a sharp contrast between what Maria Lewicka called *social* and *physical* aspects of the sense of place—that is, value-based attachment as opposed to the attachment to a comfortable life (2011: 214). As mentioned above, the living conditions in the village are still very poor, so it is clear that the local residents do not possess many “comforts of life” (though in the past decade, many gadgets have made their life easier). However, one can find many examples of the contrast between emotional attachment and a rational desire to move to a more comfortable place. Here is a typical quote:

*It’s hard to live here, especially during the wintertime. [You must keep bringing in] the coal all the time. They will bring coal in autumn, one has to sift it. You have to carry water in the summer and ice in the winter. It’s always cold inside, so you have to heat the stove several times a day. And then you’re suddenly . . . old. Uh, it’s hard to live in this village. I would prefer to live in Khatanga or somewhere else out there . . . where life is more civilized . . . On the other hand, when I go somewhere, for example to Yakutiia [to stay in Luriung-Khaia at her sister’s place], I’m still missing my relatives and friends. I don’t have a lot of friends there. (female, age 28, chairman of the youth committee, unemployed)*

The mother tongue often becomes an important factor of attachment as well:

*Int.: Why are you attached to the village, what do you miss when away?*

*Inf.: Not sure . . . it’s my homeland. I was born and raised here, and my parents’ home is also here. My roots are here [laughing]. My friends and acquaintances—everything is here, everything is familiar. Even the language . . . You see, I’m speaking Russian outside, and here I can speak my mother tongue, it’s fun. (female, age 28, chairman of the youth committee, unemployed)*

Interestingly, when describing the attachment to the village, its young residents do not separate intra-village activities from extra-village ones, such as hunting, fishing, hikes, and picnics.

*Int.: What do you usually do [in the village]?*

*Inf.: Playing volleyball, lapta, football, going fishing in the summer. Right now, in May and June, we usually go fishing. And hunting as well. (female, age 21, unemployed)*

The activities in the village include a wide range of trips beyond its boundaries:

*When there is a warm day, we go hunting ptarmigan. My daughter, my husband, and myself . . . Does not matter if there is little gasoline left. We often see hares on our way. And we go fishing as well; the first time my family went when they returned from Novorybnaia . . . They picked the seagull eggs and roasted these—great fun! I like going out there . . . just riding the Buran snowmobile here and there. (female, age 36, library cleaner)*

A strong sense of attachment not just to the place of residence but to the nature around it as well is far from unique. An important part of the attachment to place in the industrial cities of the Murmansk region is the affection for the natural environment (Bolotova 2014). However, in this case of a Taimyr village, nature gets included in the concept of one's own place, so "one's space" consists of a larger set of territories. The familiarization of the tundra is achieved not through visiting the same places repeatedly, but rather through being able to navigate in the entire space of the tundra, when the choice of a place for leisure depends on the situation.

Therefore, the case of Eastern Taimyr proves that high everyday and long-term mobility of young people still allows them to remain attached to place. Moreover, despite the very poor living conditions in the village, the social aspect of attachment to place remains very important for its young residents. Long-distance trips are not that diverse: the number of destinations is limited, and there are "safety nets" of relatives and fellow countrymen (*zemliaki*) in these destinations. Life-changing trips are often made after a spontaneous decision.

The low level of long-distance motility is compensated by a high level of intraregional motility and extensive exchange networks. The boundaries of place are not congruent with the village's boundaries. They also include the adjacent tundra, where not just some points but the entire area is considered to be "one's own."

## Conclusion

The three northern regions we have discussed are strikingly different from each other in terms of both the level of transport infrastructure development and the mobility practices used by their residents. However, the young residents of all three regions have a common feature. They are highly mobile, and this deeply affects their sense of place.

In all three cases, *mobility is used as one of the means to compensate for the lack of goods and services* at the locale. Schemes of such compensation vary. One can fly several thousand kilometers or take a minibus to a neighboring city or ride a snowmobile to a town close by. In the northern context, the level of motility determines one's access to essentials.

For young people, *mobility is an important part of leisure activities*. In search of entertainment, young people move through their regions to the neighboring locations, ride snowmobiles across the tundra, and have "picnics" in the countryside. Young people from the Central Kolyma can easily cover the over 500-kilometer distance to Magadan to find new or locally unavailable types of entertainment. In the central part of the Murmansk region, well-developed transport infrastructure and widespread Internet access enable the emergence of numerous new, regionally based collectivities, such as clubs, associations, subcultures, and various interest groups. Their participants meet in various locations of the region, moving actively around and meeting people with similar hobbies. For the young people of Eastern Taimyr, mobility itself serves as a kind of entertainment, as they can just go ride a snowmobile in the tundra.

In all three regions, *high local mobility promotes the expansion of the boundaries of the place people call "their" own*. This can cover not only the town but also the area around it and the neighboring towns and villages. Moreover, people's narratives reflect the specifics of local mobility. While northern urbanites usually mark a given location and, in some cases, the countryside nearby as "their" place, inhabitants of Eastern Taimyr perceive the entire tundra as being "their" place owing to regular trips serving a range of their needs.

The post-Soviet shrinking of state support and economic transformations at the town-forming enterprises have caused *changes in the perception of place, increasing a sense of marginalization* among the residents of the industrial cities and towns. The memories of recent events, such as a shutdown of the major employer companies and relocation of citizens from the nearby settlements, play an important role here,

since people form their expectations for the future by comparing the present situation and the past one. Young people rarely return to the settlements with decaying transport infrastructure and decreasing opportunities for mobility after graduation. In this setting, the quality of the road can be interpreted by locals as an immediate indicator of their town's future, as in the Central Kolyma case, in which citizens were concerned about a lack of road maintenance in their settlement. However, in the places where the road-based transport infrastructure has never been developed, as in the Taimyr case, traveling hundreds of kilometers to meet essential needs such as health care does not cause any anger or anxiety and is considered a usual practice by the residents.

A well-developed transportation infrastructure can also have its side effects. For example, the relatively more advanced road network in the Murmansk region enables the "optimization" of the social infrastructure and the closing up of social programs in times of financial crisis. The federal government merges social facilities and restructures the social support provided locally by the state, especially in places where people have the possibility to reach neighboring locations by transport. In this respect, the less-developed infrastructure and dispersed settlement in Central Kolyma and Taimyr prevent such mergers and restructuring of social services. The case of optimization programs in the Murmansk region provides an example of a paradoxical situation when high motility not only cannot be converted into other types of capital itself, but even becomes its opposite, impeding access to essential social services.

Though the levels of infrastructure development in our three cases are strikingly different, *there is no direct relation between these infrastructures and the residents' life trajectories and attitudes toward the place*. Our cases show that infrastructure can affect the perceptions of place and the mobility patterns in different ways. For instance, in spite of extremely poor living conditions in villages of the Taimyr region, people are still attached to the place, and there is no sharp population outflow; in the Murmansk and Magadan regions, where even the "underdeveloped" infrastructure is much more developed than in the Taimyr Peninsula, many people still are considering relocation.

These cases prove that mobility and sense of place mutually determine each other, while the particular interplay of these connections is produced by many factors and depends on the local context.

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## Notes

1. In this article, we use the concepts of Arctic, North, and Far North as synonyms, because the areas under these labels are similarly administered in the Russian Federation, and distinguishing them has no analytical sense.

2. The population in Murmansk and Magadan regions consists predominantly of migrants who arrived in the Soviet era, during different waves of migration from various regions of the USSR. Therefore, it is ethnically diverse, including Russians, Ukrainians, Belarusians, Azerbaijanis, and many other ethnic groups.

3. There are 16 cities and 12 urban-type settlements in the Murmansk region (the Russian term *gorod* we translate as “city” or “town,” while *poselok gorodskogo tipa* is translated as “urban-type settlement”).

4. There are also other types of urban settlements in the region, such as military settlements or administrative centers, including the regional capital Murmansk. Still, the majority of settlements in the region were created for the industrial development of mineral resources. Like company towns in other countries, they are very dependent on so-called city-forming enterprises. Officially, only some of these towns are classified as monofunctional (single-industry) towns: around 20 percent of the region’s residents live in 8 single-industry towns, though there are more settlements and people dependent on extractive industries.

5. Special settlers were victims of collectivization in the USSR, as households in their homeplaces were confiscated prior to forced resettlement (Shashkov 2004: 12). In their exile, special settlers were relatively free compared to prisoners: they were not guarded, they lived as families, and they had the right to work and receive a salary. Still, their rights were significantly limited in comparison to free workers: they regularly had to re-register with the local administration, their salary was reduced, and they did not have the right to leave the town (on special settlers in the USSR, see Viola 2007).

6. More details on how Kirovsk and other new towns in the Murmansk region were populated can be found in Bolotova 2014; Bolotova and Stammer 2010.

7. According to the 2010 Russian census, the Murmansk region is characterized by a high level of migration. Only 38 percent of the population (270,200 people) live in their birthplace, while the remaining 62 percent (436,900 people) have changed their place of residence at least once during their lifetime (of these, 69 percent are of working age). People of working age, especially the young, are the most mobile, and they comprise a significant part of the migration outflow (*Kuditskaia* 2014).

8. In the case of Central Kolyma, considered below, we observe very similar patterns.

9. There are still two local trains running between Apatity and Murmansk, and Apatity and Kandalaksha, but they use the central railroad called Oktiabrskaya Railway line.

10. The ratio of cars owned by local residents was 307 cars per 1,000 people, which is higher than the Russian average (Transport Murmanskoi Oblasti 2014).

11. Compared with more temperate regions of Russia. The minimal duration of a vacation in the north is 52 days.

12. In northern regions of Russia, employers are obliged to pay for travel expenses for their employees once every two years.

13. The perception of place by youth in the towns and cities in the Murmansk region to a large extent depends on how far they are situated from the central transport axis. For example, young people in the towns located farther away from the central roads, such as Kovdor and Umba, more often speak disparagingly about their places of residence, despite their level of mobility.

14. This name of this subregion located in the upper reaches of the Kolyma River within the borders of Magadan region was suggested by the local historian Ivan Panikarov and seems quite useful, as it allows defining the area with a common history and transportation infrastructure.

15. The interviews with people from age groups marginal for this project are cited when they reflect phenomena that affect all residents regardless of age and describe the discussed processes clearly and concisely, or when they show the contrast between older and young people.

16. The situation in the central Taimyr Peninsula is similar (see, e.g., Ziker 1998, 2007; Ziker and Schnegg 2005).

17. Selling mammoth tusks found in the tundra is a highly profitable business: a pair of tusks can earn you up to one million rubles. However, these tusks become harder and harder to find.

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