

# Temporal Dimension of Attitudes toward Infrastructure and Opportunities for Relocation from the Northern Town The Case of Kamchatskii Krai

KSENIA GAVRILOVA

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**Abstract:** In this article I will explore the correlation between the discourse of youths' out-migration and their attitudes toward the infrastructure of Tilichiki, a small town in Kamchatka. I attempt to contest the perspective that out-migration (resulting in town depopulation) is caused by the perception of social infrastructure as insufficient. The analysis of local discourse shows that negative or positive descriptions of infrastructure, social services and life conditions in the town in general depend on whether the person has plans of leaving the town. This correlation is supported by temporal dimension of one's life project: the duration of speakers' residence in the town or the amount of time that they are planning to spend there.

**Keywords:** discourse analysis, infrastructures, remoteness, temporality, youth migration

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The southbound and westbound population outflow from the Russian Far Northern (Arctic) areas and the similar flow from the rural areas to the urban ones is perceived by demography researchers as the basic migration trend, while the northern communities themselves perceive this trend as a challenge. Statistically, the Russian Far East is reckoned to be the "absolute donor" of the population, having lost approximately one million of its population between 1991 and 2010 as a result of the "westbound drift" (Mkrtchian and Karachurina 2014: 320, 324); Kamchatskii Krai (Kamchatka) is no exception here.<sup>1</sup>



The local discourse of the communities where the study presented here was conducted features a certain common knowledge: the region in question is perceived as constantly losing population. During my fieldwork in Kamchatka in 2015, I noticed from the very first interviews that mentioning the “population outflow from the North” was sufficient to create the grounds of legitimacy for my research interests, as well as prevent further questions about the interview objectives. The notion of the region’s depopulation is part of the everyday knowledge of local residents, being pivotal for the (self-)presentation rhetoric of Kamchatka as a region.

This article explores how the relocation plans of young people and judgments about the infrastructure of Tilichiki (Kamchatka, Oliutorskii District) are related to each other. The study reconsiders the concept of unidirectional population flow and analyzes the pragmatics of the infrastructure-related arguments during the interviews.

The town of Tilichiki (*selo, sel'skoe poseleniie*), the administrative capital of the Oliutorskii District, is located on the shores of Korff Bay in the northeastern part of Kamchatka. As of 1 January 2015, the total population of Tilichiki was 1,595,<sup>2</sup> whereas the town infrastructure comprised a high (eleven-grade) school, an infirmary and a hospital, a kindergarten, two libraries, an art school, a culture and leisure center, approximately 20 shops (selling mostly food), as well as several companies responsible for the maintenance of the town’s housing and communal infrastructure or management of the adjacent Koryak Nature Reserve (including offshore areas) (Author’s Field Data [AFD]: AP; *Ekonomika i sotsial'naia sfera* 2014: 326–330). Passenger flight services from Tilichiki to the regional capital Petropavlovsk-Kamchatskii and back were available three or four times a week during the summer schedule, while the northern settlements of the district were linked to Tilichiki by helicopter flights and winter roads.<sup>3</sup>

## The Idea of Young People’s Out-Migration in Tilichiki Local Discourse

The basic assumption of the youths’ inevitable and overall out-migration penetrates the local discourse. This can be found both in expert interviews and everyday conversations. Here is an example of such inadvertent talk to a local resident of Tilichiki, V., that took place on the first day of my arrival:

[The first thing mentioned after making acquaintance was the] *assertion that the young people—to the last one—move out of the town and that those who do not just cannot find a place to move to; still, everyone definitely wants to leave. I objected, mentioning that while working in Bystrinskii District of Kamchatskii Krai, I have met young people consciously staying in their towns because it was more convenient there. Doubting that, V. said that it may be more convenient for middle-aged people like himself: he can hunt and fish here, and he can have a vegetable garden. But is it important for young people? he asked. After that, to prove his point, he provided a detailed description of a step-by-step migration pattern: from northern villages of the Koryak Okrug—to Tilichiki—then to Petropavlovsk-Kamchatskii—and, finally, Central Russia. (AFD: VSh [field notes])*

In this case, the rhetorical formula “everybody leaves” (or its variation “everybody tries to leave”) makes an exception for the speaker’s personal experience: her/his loyalty to the town and the acknowledged advantages of living in it. Thus, the life strategies of a particular representative of the working, middle-aged generation are seemingly opposed to the choice of the generalized category of “young people” allegedly trying to leave the town.

The same model is represented by the local experts, not only during the interviews that I conducted but also in the official discourse. For example, a local administration member commented on the public celebrations of Russia Day (12 June 2015) in the following way:

*“There are no active young people older than the school graduation age. . . . Look at who has come to the celebrations. Either people in their forties like myself or children. There is a profound gap in between” (AFD: AP).*

During the same celebration, one of the entertainers encouraged the high school girls on stage, calling them “the pride of the town” and stating that they “*will be able to find a good place in any city across the state!*” (AFD: OI).

Indeed, the majority of people born between 1985 and 1995 have left Tilichiki;<sup>4</sup> however, other life scenarios can also be traced in interviews and observation data. For example, high school graduates leave the town to continue their education but then return home because they either could not finish their studies or, successfully accomplishing them, could not find a proper job afterward. Some young people do not leave at all, considering life in the town to be more comfortable and economically advantageous (“*easy*”), very much like their parents’ generation. Such biographies can actually be found, and it is obvious in

these cases that the annual calculation of the local population loss only obscures the situation. The administration does not count the return flow, so the statistically unambiguous out-migration rate oversimplifies the situation in the minds of both authorities and community members.

The idea of the “flight of the young” is certainly promoted by, so to say, the “grinding” force of discourse. For instance, one of my hosts in Central Kamchatka, born in 1983, holding a university degree and having relatives in the city of Elizovo, had deliberately chosen to live in a remote town named Esso. At the time of my fieldwork, she was not seeking an official job, choosing instead to engage herself in fishing and gardening activities, claiming this life project to be the most feasible. However, when asked about her cousin who has left the town, she reproduced the typical local discursive strategy: “*My sister was born in Kamchatka, then obtained a university degree in customs service in Moscow and chose to stay there, because there is absolutely nothing here for anyone to do*” (AFD: LK).<sup>5</sup>

The most widespread motivation for young people to leave the town is “educational migration”: there are no professional or higher education institutions in the town, so most high school graduates move to the regional capital or to larger cities outside Kamchatka. This situation reflects a major *rural–urban migration* pattern of the Russian regions: a chance to complete one’s education in a larger city is still perceived as a prerequisite for future employment and economic security (Babaian and Liubimova 2015; Glendinning et al. 2004: 37–41; Habeck 2009: 199–200). Therefore, the determination to send children away from the town after graduation becomes a universal family strategy and a normative behavior pattern in the community, while deviations from this strategy need to be justified.<sup>6</sup> Another trigger for major population outflow in the late 2000s was specific to Tilichiki and involved state-sponsored housing certificates that granted support for obtaining real estate outside the Oliutorskii District. This constrained relocation was caused by the 2006 earthquake that destroyed several apartment blocks in Tilichiki itself and in the neighboring town of Korff.<sup>7</sup> To conclude, the constant population outflow is a significant part of local experience and makes the migration discussions a popular topic of everyday talk. The choice of a young family to stay in the town requires interpretation and justification, just as the decision to leave the town does.

## Infrastructure and Migration Behavior: Does the Lack of the Former Determine the Latter?

The large-scale migration of the 1990s, caused by the economic transition of the country, resulted in population redistribution within the former borders of the USSR, as well as depopulation of the Arctic and Far Eastern regions of the new Russia. During the Soviet period, both eastern and northern remote regions enjoyed mass in-migration, supported by substantial state subsidies that pushed economic development and provided high salaries and nice living conditions for skilled labor. Withdrawal of state support, accompanied by the rules of the market economy introduced in the first post-Soviet decade, led to the emergence of two northern “economies”: the profitable Western Siberian economy based on oil and gas extraction (e.g., Jamalo-Nenetskii or Khanty-Mansiiskii autonomous regions) and the “underdeveloped” one in the Far East (e.g., Chukotskii or Magadan regions) (Heleniak 2010). The Soviet Arctic is basically regarded as a “land of large cities,” and post-Soviet Arctic regions even more so,<sup>8</sup> because of the major tendency of *rural–urban migration*. In social terms, the ongoing urbanization process makes the Russian Arctic comparable to other Arctic countries, characterized by concentration of the population in larger urban settlements: “The predominant trend across the Russian Arctic is absolute population decline in the oblast centers or largest settlements combined with increases in their shares of the regions’ overall population. This obviously indicates significant depopulation of the areas outside of the largest settlements, including in many cases, complete closure of many smaller settlements” (Heleniak and Bogoyavlensky 2014: 95–97).

The invariable demographic and sociological explanation of mass out-migration to urban settlements relies on the notion of economic rationality. As Timothy Heleniak puts it, “Like anywhere people in the North are following jobs, as net migration in these regions following net employment change” (2010: 33). While “net migration” is considered to be the prevailing mechanism of choosing a destination, the main reasons for leaving the Arctic range from the overall economic decline of the region and scarce employment opportunities to “harsh living conditions in the villages,” including increased transportation costs or lack of infrastructure (ibid., 20–34). Consequently, rural residents, especially the young, seek to overcome the latter by migrating to urban centers that function as “economic, administrative and transport hubs” with far more amenities, such as “education, consumer goods, entertainment

and leisure opportunities” (Heleniak and Bogoyavlensky 2014: 95). Young people—the most flexible and mobile age group—constitute a very noticeable migration flow. A two-directional pattern of youth migration (both in and out of the Arctic) characterizes their search for employment. Centripetal rural–urban migration is usually explained by the desire to overcome insufficient infrastructure of the villages (educational or “lifestyle reasons”) (Hamilton and Seyfrit 1994).

One of the crucial trends of rural–urban youth migration in different Arctic countries is known as *female flight*. Using data from Alaska (with brief comparison to situations in Greenland, Iceland, and Russia), Lawrence Hamilton and Carole Seyfrit (1994) argue that female high school students, more often than male students, expect to migrate permanently and actually migrate away from their communities (“bush villages”) to urban centers. In comparison with young men, young women express greater ambitions regarding higher education and “business skills.” They are more focused on white-collar jobs, urban careers, marrying, and settling down in a big city, while male high school students are more interested in practical skills such as boat building or engine repair and prefer to stay in their respective native settlement (Hamilton and Seyfrit 1994). The situation described inevitably leads to a shift in the young-adult gender balance, because of the decrease in female dwellers. In the Russian context, this trend of out-migration may be regarded as a variation of such a *gender-shift* process. In most cases, gender shift in the Russian Arctic stands for an increasing absence of women in the taiga and tundra that resulted from the Soviet modernization policy toward indigenous peoples of the North. Despite the ethnic specifics of the process as it is described, fundamental features of gender shift characterize Arctic communities in general. The most important features are configuration of gender-specific occupations (e.g., while men are engaged in “traditional” economic activities, women work in state education or cultural institutions), gender-marked residential patterns (emergence of “gendered spaces”: sedentary life in a village is ascribed to women, while nomadic life is associated with men), gender stereotypes,<sup>9</sup> migration, and demographic processes (Povoroznyuk et al. 2010: 3, 14, 18; for a contradicting case, see Liarskaya 2010). In Oliutorskii District of Kamchatskii Krai, young female and male residents, roughly equal in number,<sup>10</sup> are perceived to follow different migration patterns: while men in most cases describe themselves as “stayers,” women show more interest in moving to a larger city (regional center).

If we return to the topic of youth migration from remote areas, I suggest reconsidering one of the most powerful interpretations of

migration choice. Searching for migration motivations in the area of insufficient infrastructure opportunities of a “giving” region and better opportunities of a “receiving” one goes in line with the classic “push and pull theory.” Based on the positivist assumption that individual choice is rational, this theory suggests economic reasons and vertical mobility opportunities to be the driving force behind “first world”-bound migration. Explaining migration strategies by calculating the push-and-pull mechanism’s impact (relocation costs and benefits) on the community and its individual members is typical of the economic paradigm of studying migration phenomena (see Brettell and Hollifield 2000: 3–6, 9–10, with references to Douglas Massey and Thomas Faist). The demographic approach to migration processes is quite similar: hypothetically, negative evaluation of subjective well-being and dissatisfaction with infrastructural conditions can be considered the reasons for out-migration, even if, according to survey data, the migration behavior shows no significant dependence on the perception of lacking facilities (e.g., housing) (Florinskaia 2009).<sup>11</sup> The “push and pull theory” may be considered outdated, but it is nevertheless very powerful. That is why references to the “lack of infrastructure” argument appear regularly within the framework of migration research.

Anthropological approaches to migration from smaller northern towns to larger cities regard the absence of opportunities for further education as a definite relocation-inducing factor (though not an exclusive one) that determines the school graduates’ practices and rhetorical strategies that legitimize their choice. Regular discussion of other infrastructural gaps (such as poor medical services or underdeveloped leisure opportunities) has no direct connection to the decision to leave the town; rather, it indicates the perspectives articulated by local residents for themselves, as well as intricate strategies of compensating for the lack of infrastructure. Otto Habeck argues that the “economic, political and discursive hegemony of the city over the countryside,” typical of Siberian regions, continues to define young people’s perceptions of “normal life” (2009: 200). Elaborating this argument, I assume that the strategies of evaluating the town’s infrastructure—which vary from one young person to another, even in the same neighborhood—may be influenced by social competences like the person’s education level or experience of living outside Tilichiki, while the larger city (and the experience of living there) becomes an ideal background for criticizing the town, its infrastructure, or available employment opportunities.

Nevertheless, criticism is not equivalent to the decision to leave. Stephanie Martin provides an impressive account on two research

projects in Greenland and Alaska that focused on “measuring living conditions” and investigating the reasons why village dwellers refused to leave their settlements. The initial concern of the Greenland project was provoked by practical problems: “Prior to the survey, Greenlandic policy was to encourage people to move from remote villages into settlements in order to access better housing and government services. But most people did not move. . . . Researchers using the data could not figure out why people continued to live in communities with substandard housing, where everyone was poor and nobody had an education, and why people in these places seemed particularly happy” (Martin 2011: 153). Analyzing data from Alaskan aboriginal communities, Martin argues that among typical “stayers” there is a large share of aged men with a low level of education (they outnumber middle-aged or young men who do not want to leave) that generally have tight connections to each other and strong attachment to their place; they also possess local control and even serve on local boards and committees. Among reasons for staying, they mention such “non-economic” motivations as overall life satisfaction (“comfortable” living) and engagement in specific subsistence practices like whaling or walrus hunting (“crews”) (ibid., 155–156). It is important to note that all these connections to nature, subsistence, or community are reinforced by temporal aspects: “stayers” are those who were born in a village or have spent a significant amount of time there. This pattern correlates with migration decisions of Russian Arctic residents who frequently become tied to the region through a growing number of social connections (friends, relatives, or business partners).<sup>12</sup>

Temporal constraints that influence migration decisions reveal themselves not only in generation-specific patterns (young people migrate more often than aged ones) but also in correlation between the duration of dwellers’ residence and their eagerness to leave. In this article, I regard temporality as an important social factor that determines rhetorical strategies of legitimizing one’s migration decision. I also argue that correlation between the perception of infrastructure (its positive evaluations or complaints about its deficiency) and the decision to relocate *is of a discursive (rhetorical) nature*, determined by the social experience of a speaker, such as the duration (temporal aspect) of her/his residence.



## Temporality as a Factor of Infrastructure Evaluation

The *temporal dimension* of life scenarios—namely, both the planned and actual duration of living in the town—also defines the attitude toward infrastructural opportunities. As mentioned previously, a strategy of “postponed migration” is typical of young-families-with-children’s perception of their future: typically, this includes plans to either move to the larger city together or send their children there to get professional education. The young parents’ opinion on the quality of school education often depends on whether they have plans for immediate relocation or not.

*I am happy with the school. The children study here, then get accepted by the universities, most of the classmates leaving the town, as we have mentioned. They study and graduate, and their knowledge base gained in school is adequate—I would even say that the requirements here are higher than where we lived before. (AFD: MF)*

*My little brother, six years younger than me, studied here until his ninth grade; it is now one year since he moved out of the town, to continue his education in professional school under Kamchatka State Technical University. He was enrolled in the “ship power plants” program, something like that. He just did not know where he was going, since there are no professional programs here and you cannot find out [what they look like]; that’s why he found himself at that program. After going there and studying for a year, he is now dropping out because he just did not like the profession. So the education opportunities here are [after a pause] second-rate, yes. (AFD: MA)*

In the first case, a resident of Tilichiki who has recently returned from Primorskii Krai and plans to settle in the town for a long period of time consistently evaluates the town infrastructure as sufficient. She does not critique the school education and considers it to be satisfactory, while the level of the school is characterized as generally high (the major evidence being the opportunity for the graduates to continue education: “the children study here, then get accepted by the universities”). Another resident supports the opposite point of view: her experience includes a failed attempt to move to Petropavlovsk-Kamchatskii, and she is planning to make another attempt in the near future. Her opinion about school education is negative,<sup>13</sup> despite the fact that graduating from the Tilichiki school made it possible for her brother to get admitted to a professional school, and for herself, to the Modern Academy of Humanities in Petropavlovsk. She cannot make any particular critical remarks about education quality: her brother’s dropping out from the professional

school is linked to the fact that he “did not like the profession.” The rhetorically unreasoned conclusion about the “second-rate” quality of Tilichiki school is marked by a hesitant pause and an emphatic “yes.” The image of the town in the quoted interview is built on the whole range of negative characteristics of local infrastructure (including medical services and leisure opportunities for children and adults). In this context, school education becomes an important element of the rhetoric of “lacking” that legitimizes the speaker’s desire to move out.

The temporal aspect of living in the town—both past and imagined future perspectives—affects the attitudes toward microeconomic interaction as well. There are opportunities for employment in the public sector (district and town administrations, as well as cultural, educational, and medical organizations operating at the district level) and trade sphere (with approx. 20 stores). There are other employment niches in Tilichiki—namely, at the energy-providing enterprise Koriakenergo JSC, at the Koryak Nature Reserve, shift work at the gold-production sites (e.g., at the Ametistovoe mine, a subsidiary of Zoloto Kamchatki JSC), or seasonal fishing work in one of the private fishing businesses operating in the area.<sup>14</sup> Nevertheless, the recent newcomers to Tilichiki who do not perceive the town as their final location usually claim that the official employment options are scarce and do not notice any alternative income opportunities at all. In this case, the short period of residence (in the past as well as in the future) determines the low level of newcomers’ embeddedness in the informal economic networks that exist in the town:

MD: *Still, there is isolation, to some extent. I thought that it would be easier to live in small towns, but people actually live separately here. . . .* ND: *There is some restraint here. We still treat Tilichiki with caution, we don’t know where to go—it’s, well, [after pause] hard just to leave the home, you understand, and go wherever you want. It’s because you don’t know where you can go and whom you can communicate with there, for example. . . .* MD: [Describing an unsuccessful purchase of a Niva jeep in Tilichiki] *There were problems with spare parts, problems with car repair, I should say. It’s all because of people being so isolated, because of the fact that even though my husband is local, nevertheless his schoolmates have already left or lost connection with him, so we are on our own here.* (AFD: MD, ND)

These two GP physicians, who came to Tilichiki under the “Zemskii Doktor” (“Countryside doctor”) federal program<sup>15</sup> and got employed by the local infirmary, have very critical attitudes not so much toward the obvious lack of leisure infrastructure or shopping centers as toward the “underdevelopment of production” in the town (e.g., the fishing

industry) and the local people's "isolatedness" (meaning lack of mutual assistance).

ND: *We have to maintain close contact with the local population, and [after a pause] to put it mildly, it is unsocialized . . . So our position in the society isn't favorable as well, since we have to live among these people: we still have to encounter them at the bus stops or when we take part in some amateur art performances.* (AFD: MD, ND)

A critique of this kind indicates that the speaker is entirely excluded from the exchange mechanisms of symbolic and material benefits that are working quite well among local dwellers, both relatives and neighbors (not necessarily born in Tilichiki but all those who have lived there for a long enough period). For instance, most households in the town possess various vehicles (snowmobiles, cars, four-wheelers), and they not only obtain service for the vehicles on the spot but also immediately place orders for missing replacement parts and get them delivered from Petropavlovsk-Kamchatskii on the nearest flight: getting a jeep fixed should not be a problem in this case. Similarly, the pair's "caution" in communicating with the "unsocialized" local population indicates their conscious attempt to distance themselves from the local community, constraining themselves to the medical one.<sup>16</sup> It also indicates that they consider creating a network of social connections to be unworthy of their time and efforts, since their families do not plan to stay in the town for a long time. In other words, the feeling of being "orphans" (*siroty*), caused by the lack of real knowledge of the town, its people, and surroundings ("*we don't know where to go—it's, well, [after pause] hard just to leave the home*"), as well as by the imagined indifference of the administrative bodies, resulted in the plain urge to leave the town: MD intended to do that in July 2015, while ND planned to leave before 2017.

On the contrary, people who live in Tilichiki for a long time and have no relocation plans highly value consistent exchange networks that function within the local community.<sup>17</sup> Embeddedness in such a system, especially a kinship-based one, can become a strong reason against out-migration. For instance, one of the younger women who recently returned to Tilichiki regards the incorporation of her son into his father's (her ex-husband's) kinship network, which opens access to numerous resources, as fundamental for her son's future economic and social well-being, not the opportunities provided by her family (particularly with her second husband striving to move out of the town).<sup>18</sup>

The intention to live in the town for a long time also changes attitudes toward the employment opportunities. For instance, the

infrastructure *drawbacks* can become a potential source of income: in this case the lack of something is considered an advantage that can be pursued by developing small-scale businesses. A good example is one of the young local families: they were able to identify a gap in the local childcare infrastructure, and they considered it not an obstacle to bringing up their children but an opportunity to develop economic initiatives (AFD: MA).<sup>19</sup> In June 2015, another family was preparing documents to establish a limited liability company focusing on providing Internet and satellite TV services in the town (AFD: KO). These business initiatives, of course, require a certain level of legal skills (such as knowledge of the prerequisites for state support of small-scale businesses), but far from everyone who possesses such skills thinks of *bridging the infrastructural gap* in the town.

The *infrastructural gap* can be *managed* not only through the emergence of new economic factors but also through maintaining the community's particular pattern of circulating goods and people. For instance, the intention to stay in the town for a long time shapes a very special way of purchasing goods that compensates for the insufficiency of the existing supply system. This pattern includes separate purchase sources for different kinds of goods, diverse ways of delivering goods to the town, and a much broader set of purchase mediators beyond the traditional *vendor–customer* pair. A good example is the way the residents who are well-embedded in the local networks categorize food products. They do not purchase fish at all but procure it themselves, or receive it as a gift or in exchange (e.g., for other seafood). During the winter, residents purchase reindeer meat from farms in Khailino and Achaivaia, or it is provided by their relatives, and they keep this meat in their refrigerators.<sup>20</sup> Some vegetables, like cucumbers and potatoes, are grown in private greenhouses (nearly every household in Tilichiki possesses one, its size and scale depending on the duration of a family's residence). Perishable goods like fruit and dairy products are purchased in the local stores or in Petropavlovsk hypermarkets, while storable goods like flour, buckwheat, canned food, and household chemicals can be preordered from Petropavlovsk wholesale depots or through an advance request to one of the local shops and then brought to Tilichiki by cargo ships upon occasion.<sup>21</sup>

Occasional purchases can be made remotely in Petropavlovsk-Kamchatskii and delivered to Tilichiki by air-traveling friends or neighbors; larger items like household appliances or vehicles are also purchased in the city but delivered by sea transport. Clothes and footwear, the kind of goods least available in the town, are purchased by

locals from online stores, in the same way that the residents of other Kamchatka towns and even the regional capital buy such goods. The orders are delivered by postal mail; the costly and lengthy delivery is compensated by higher-quality and bargain price of the products. Sometimes these goods can be purchased during vacation time in Petropavlovsk-Kamchatskii or outside the region. It should be noted that those local families who apply different models of purchase to different types of products usually consider the food security of the town to be satisfactory, the local market supply to be manageable, and the existing categorization of goods to be quite convenient. At the same time, residents who consider themselves *temporary* do not engage in the complex schemes of goods purchasing and time-consuming exploration of saving opportunities described above. They are not interested in building long-term consumer strategies, even if they know that such opportunities exist. From the perspective of those young people who compare the shopping facilities of Tilichiki to the shopping malls of large cities, the former appear to be underdeveloped, with a narrow range of products and high prices.<sup>22</sup>

Compensating for the lack of infrastructure can also be accomplished through regular practices of traveling outside the town to obtain certain services: the best example here is the case of receiving health screenings in Petropavlovsk-Kamchatskii. In this case I am speaking not so much of getting medical treatment in regional institutions on the recommendation of local doctors than of regular—and voluntary—preventive visits to the medical institutions of the regional capital. For instance, several young Tilichiki women who live there permanently with their families do not complain of the local medical services, but they check their children's health annually in the regional capital (AFD: ZM, KO).<sup>23</sup> Some other residents regard local medical services as sufficient and visit regional hospitals only in case of emergency. At the same time, some informants use their critical attitude toward medical services provided in Tilichiki as a powerful tool for legitimizing their family's urge to move out:

*Speaking of medical services, I would say that they are close to nothing here. Of course! There are no decent doctors here. [after pause] Some skilled doctors come here; well, they could as well stay home because they are not that skilled . . . We chose to deliver our baby in the city because we didn't want to do it here, that's how it is. All the screenings during my wife's pregnancy, we took those in the city because it's not OK here. [after pause] Well, the gynecologist working here is fine, but she advised us herself: you'd better go to the city. (AFD: VL)*

It is crucial to note that neither negative nor positive attitudes toward local infrastructure articulated in the interviews can be automatically equated with the reasons for leaving the town or staying there—not even on the level of individual rhetoric. In this sense, indicative are rhetorical fluctuations expressed by another interviewee, MA, a young woman who holds an administrative position in Tilichiki. Describing her life plans, she simultaneously expressed loyalty to the town and a wish to leave it (AFD: MA). MA had once lived in Petropavlovsk: she studied there but did not complete her course. As of June 2015, she has been working in Tilichiki for several years and was constantly highlighting her plans to leave the town (unlike her husband). Nearly all her judgments supported the general negative image of the town. However, it was hard for her to find sufficient motivations to leave: the clearest one referred to some vague “opportunities for the child” available in a larger city. At the same time, when asked, “What do you think should be changed in the town?,” she answered, “*Well, you know, I was kind of born here, it’s hard for me, I’m so used to all this. . . . It’s quiet and cozy here; you can make progress here—yes, you can do that if you want to.*”

It is possible to explain such fluctuations toward a more positive attitude by the fact that MA is familiar with the rhetoric of “Northerners’ Friendship” (*Druzhba severian*), a public youth organization popular in northern Kamchatka. The main articulated goal of the organization is to curb the depopulation of northern towns and alcohol addiction among the “natives” (indigenous ethnic groups—namely, Koryaks, Chukchis, Evens, and Itelmens). To accomplish this, the organization delegates “youth mobile parties” to northern Kamchatka; organizes forums, workshops, and career seminars aimed at developing small-scale businesses; and promotes “traditional” occupations, ethnic culture, and youth policies (AFD: GK).<sup>24</sup> MA is a member of the regional branch of this organization and, when we first met, was preparing the “We are strong together” forum, organized jointly by “Northerners’ Friendship” and the Tilichiki administration (August 2015). The discursive ambiguities reveal themselves in MA’s narratives exactly when the topic of leaving the town is brought up: on the one hand, she creates an image of the opportunity-lacking town through negative characteristics of infrastructure, thus legitimizing her urge to leave the town. On the other hand, in sharp contrast to that, she reproduces the ideology of the organization she is loyal to—the one that encourages looking at the economic opportunities of the North from a new perspective. Which of those positions should be qualified as “real” motivation to leave—if

she leaves after all—besides her undoubted desire to do so, is unclear to MA herself.

## Conclusion

It is productive to analyze the notion of sufficient or deficient infrastructure in the northern town as a component of local discursive tradition that requires deconstruction, not objectivation. In this article, I have analyzed how judgments about social infrastructure can work as a rhetorical tool, *as an argument*. The pragmatics of those arguments—especially when discussing life plans with an outsider, that is, the anthropologist—lie in the legitimization of one's conscious urge to leave the town or to stay there.

To answer the question of how infrastructure opportunities in the town are represented by local residents, I revealed the ways of describing life strategies that include perspectives of living in the town for a long time (both in the past and in the future); after that, I analyzed the features that distinguish them from the strategies lacking “long-term” perspectives. As it turned out, the long-term residents consider infrastructure opportunities to be sufficient in the majority of cases. In addition to that, they build their argument on the description of *infrastructure-gap-bridging* practices that are carried out through special patterns of commodities circulation or through regular mobility of local residents aimed at obtaining services unavailable locally. In this case, complicated strategies for purchasing goods or obtaining the city-based services are regarded as worth the effort, while the system of consistent exchange networks that exists in the town is perceived as a tool to overcome the lack of infrastructure.

On the contrary, people who expect the period of their life in Tilichiki to be short choose negative characteristics of the infrastructure opportunities, supporting the legitimacy of their desire to leave the town. The negative attitudes of temporary residents who do not possess any significant experience of living in the town are augmented by their fundamental lack of embeddedness in the community, as well as by missing knowledge about possible integration, or desire to integrate. In addition, on a discursive level, dissatisfaction with infrastructure and the decision to relocate are typically attributed to female residents (a situation that reflects one of the aspects of the female flight process described for other Arctic countries and regions), who comprised the majority of my respondents in Tilichiki.

The temporal dimension of life scenarios—the real (i.e., past) or imagined (future) span of living in the town—defines, in the contexts I analyze, the selection of “infrastructural” arguments used for justifying the need of relocation or for displaying loyalty to the town, not only by those who never left the town but also by those who returned. The last observation can be used as a starting point for exploring the attitudes toward infrastructure effectiveness as an instrument of discursive adaptation to unsatisfactory life conditions of the town in general, but this goes beyond the scope of the present article.

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**Ksenia Gavrilova**, PhD, is research fellow at the Center for Arctic Social Studies, European University at St. Petersburg. Research interests: nation and nationalism studies, ethnography of the Volga region, industrialization of the Arctic, Northern Sea Route, discourse studies. E-mail: kgawrilova@eu.spb.ru

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## Notes

1. The migration balance for the region in 2011: –1,631 people; in 2012: –58 people; in 2013: –1,203 people (*Kamchatskii statisticheskii ezhegodnik* 2014: 63). The population of Oliutorskii District: 4,711 people in 2011; 4,547 people in 2012; 4,341 people in 2013 (*Ekonomika i sotsial'naia sfera* 2014: 315). The economic crisis of the 1990s and the social processes that induced the population decrease in some Kamchatka settlements are described in Hitztaler (2004a, 2004b).

2. According to the data provided by the administration, the total population of Oliutorskii District as of 15 January 2015 was 4,209 people. For the official information about the town see Oliutorskii-raion 2017.



3. I should note that there is a huge gap between the schedule and actual frequency of flights. Due to highly unstable weather conditions, a flight delay is a regular thing, which means that Tilichiki residents normally add several days to their travel plans (a flight delay may last from several hours up to a week). The Tilichiki airport (located in the nearby town of Korf) works as an additional air hub to the main Kamchatka airport in Ielizovo: helicopters to the towns and villages of Northern Koryakia (of both Oliutorskii and Penzhinskii Districts) depart from here. In 2015 a round trip to Petropavlovsk cost around 22,000 rubles (approx. 440 USD) for a Tilichiki resident and twice as much for an outsider. The situation changed a year later, when the cost for a round trip for locals was raised to 40,000 rubles (approx. 680 USD as of March 2017; [AFD: AP]).

4. The best way to get information about the balance between those who left and those who stayed in town is to ask about the life trajectories of a person's classmates during the interview.

5. The contradiction between a discursive formula ("everyone tries to leave") and personal experience, choice, or opinion is also quite common during interviews. Cf. VL: "*If it were possible, we would [definitely] leave the town, using a strong Russian word. I would leave, at least.*" VS: "*Speak for yourself. If you take me, I would never leave.*" VL: "*Well, I mean . . . just . . . I would prefer to stay, but my wife would leave!*" (AFD: VL, VS). The discrepancy between the sense that "everybody is leaving" and the existence of a "stable core of the people in every community" who do not want to leave is analyzed in Martin (2011: 153–154) on the basis of research in rural Alaska.

6. On regular educational migration from remote settlements to larger cities, and on the life strategies of young people from Arctic regions other than those in Russia, see Hamilton and Seyfrit (1993); and Seyfrit et al. (1998).

7. A state-sponsored housing certificate (*gosudarstvennyi zhilishchnyi sertifikat*) provides a Russian citizen with a rent subsidy from the federal budget to purchase a house or apartment. These certificates are granted to different categories of citizens (on different conditions)—e.g., members of the military, emigrants from the Far North, or permanent dwellers of areas that have suffered from natural disasters or other emergency situations (Government Decree 1995). On the earthquake in Tilichiki, see Chebrov (2007); on the regional support for relocation, see, for instance, Regnum (2010). Recollections of the 2006 catastrophe, as well as narratives about how the affected families have used their real estate certificates in all sorts of informal (even illegitimate) ways, or about regional authorities' inability to close down the town of Korff, are a significant part of the contemporary discourse of the town.

8. "Overall, the sixteen regions defined as the Russian Arctic have 80% of their populations residing in urban areas, reflecting the structure of their economies based on resource extraction and transport and small agricultural sectors" (Heleniak and Bogoyavlensky 2014: 95).

9. "There is an impressive imagery of the North as a harsh environment where men have to struggle against the elements to acquire mineral resources

for the benefit of the motherland. In contrast to this harsh environment, the town with its 'civilization' achievements (paved roads, water from the tap, etc.) is considered a much more amenable setting for the 'weaker sex'" (Povoroznyuk et al. 2010: 18).

10. As of December 2013, the total number of men in Oliutorskii District was 2,178, whereas there were 2,163 women (the decline of the male population in 2010–2013 equals 315, while for females the number is 292) (*Ekonomika i sotsial'naia sfera* 2014: 315–316).

11. In this case the interpretation scheme linking migration behavior and infrastructural deficiency even succeeds in undermining statistics: "The 'pushing' role of low-quality and undersized housing cannot be clearly seen through the analysis of average indicators. . . . There is little difference between the migration plans of people pleased with their housing in general and those dissatisfied with it. . . . On the other hand, when the intention to move has already arisen (quite possibly due to reasons other than housing), the role of housing in making the decision can be clearly seen" (Florinskaia 2009: 12). I am grateful to Anastasia Karaseva for suggesting this paper to me.

12. "There is a negative relationship between how long people have lived in a region and their probability of moving, so the longer somebody lives in the region, the more place-specific social ties they put down" (Heleniak 2011: 147, 151–152).

13. Compare a statement by Hamilton and Seyfrit that points in a similar direction: "The tone of respondents' comments [of those school graduates who wish to enroll at a university —KG] indicated that many viewed their rural high schools as too easy, leaving them inadequately prepared to complete college or compete for desirable jobs" (1994: 191).

14. According to the data provided by Tilichiki Employment Bureau ("Information on the Status of Labor Market of Oliutorskii Municipal District for the Period from January to May 2015"), as of 1 June 2015, the number of economically active residents of Tilichiki was 932; of these, the number of people officially registered as seeking employment equaled 101—that is, 3.5 percent of the residents of working age (the numbers for 2014 are, respectively, 115, or 3.9 percent); of these, 91 were unemployed, and 51 were paid an unemployment compensation. "The labor market [of the district] is constantly lacking subject teachers; the medical care system has a longstanding need of doctors, nurses and medical assistants. The unemployed people are generally those with low professional qualification" (ibid.).

15. According to the Federal Law "On mandatory medical insurance in Russia" (326-FZ of 29.11.2010) and the subsequent amendments and clarifications, starting from 2012 there is a state program that pays a one-time compensation of one million rubles to all medical workers under 35 who choose to move to rural areas to work there.

16. Both of them admitted that since 2014 they have been able to make “acquaintances” only among their colleagues and that it is this company that they meet from time to time at various organized festivals.

17. The strategy of living inside this kind of community is generally described with the definition of *easier* that implies social stability and mutual assistance: “*It’s still easier [to live in the town]. Everyone knows each other; hardly anybody would refuse to help you*” (AFD: LTs).

18. “*The reason why I chose to stay here is probably that the relatives of my son live here. . . . Speaking of his future, I can’t give him as many opportunities as his father’s family can provide. . . . That’s why I want him to know them directly, both his closest kin and all those uncles and others who come and leave all the time; he also must visit them. Like now, for instance, he’s planning to go to Crimea in August—or Sochi, I can’t remember—with his grandmother; she’s taking him along*” (AFD: MF).

19. “*I keep telling him [my husband] during our entire stay here: our children have absolutely no facilities here. There are no summer activities for children, absolutely none, even for the babies: we have a baby ourselves, and there is nothing. I’m planning to tell my husband to think at least of some kind of children’s amusement park . . . I’m not sure we will have enough time to start this year, but we can at least do the paperwork, so that our children can have trampolines and electro-cars next year*” (AFD: MA).

20. For a comparative case in Iamalo-Nenetskii AO, see Liarskaya in this issue.

21. Those are the general patterns of purchasing common goods; of course, individual strategies can differ throughout the town population: “*If possible, we make purchases for winter in the city supply depots, which have lower prices; then we transport stuff here upon occasion, by steamers—it’s still cheaper. . . . I’m speaking of meat, grits, canned food, probably cucumbers and tomatoes. We don’t have a vegetable garden, so we buy some vegetables there, for pickling as well, and basically we have enough of this. It’s still cheaper to purchase all of that in the city, even given the sea transportation costs*” (AFD: MA).

22. [What do you think of the food and clothing supply of local shops?] ND: *Horrible. I myself would call it horrible. The food is superexpensive; that’s one thing, then, the choice is very poor. They sell some stuff that is exotic for these places—but its quality is not that good. Still, we have to purchase it, because we need to give some joy to our kids.* MD: *There are no dairy products.* ND: *And, of course, no fresh vegetables.* [What about clothing?] MD: *I wear the same stuff for the whole year, I should say. Well, I visited Petropavlovsk last fall, so I bought a pair of trousers for myself, and some new blouses.* ND: *Me too: when I went there to pick up my kids, I managed to buy some stuff for myself; I think the next clothing update will not come shortly [laughs]* (AFD: MD, ND).

23. One of them rents an apartment in Petropavlovsk-Kamchatsky for her husband and herself, all to stay there and perform a checkup of her child in the regional infirmary.

24. The leaders of this organization consider the out-migration of young people to be the main problem of the towns. So, the statements reproduced by MA during the interview are directly aimed at these young people: “I’m also a member of ‘Northerners’ Friendship’; our young people aren’t very cooperative. Our young people stay here until their last school year, moving away after that—so we educate them in diverse ways here, then they go away and start using these skills in Petropavlovsk or further in the mainland. So we would greatly like to have at least some of them returning here, because the percentage of graduates who return after obtaining their degree is very low” (AFD: MA). “Northerners’ Friendship” holds regular business workshops, inviting the representatives of the regional government to consult on matters of business initiative support, benefits distribution, and intraregional institutional cooperation.

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## Field Sources (Author's Field Data, AFD)

Field journal and interview data, June 2015:

AFD: AP: female, born 1962, university degree, lives in Tilichiki; head of district Department of Culture

AFD: GK: female, born 1986, university degree, lives in Petropavlovsk-Kamchatskii; head of the "Northerners' Friendship" indigenous youth organization for Kamchatskii Krai

AFD: KO: female, born 1993, lives in Tilichiki; medical statistician

AFD: LK: female, born 1983, university degree, lives in the town of Esso

AFD: LTs: female, born 1991, university degree, lives in Tilichiki; counselor for youth affairs at Tilichiki Culture and Leisure Center

AFD: MA: female, born 1992, a student at the Modern Academy for Humanities in Petropavlovsk-Kamchatskii ("State and municipal service" program), lives in Tilichiki; works in the Oliutorskii District administration

AFD: MD: female, born 1986, university degree, lived in Tilichiki between June 2014 and July 2015; GP physician at the local infirmary

AFD: MF: female, born 1987, professional school degree, returned to Tilichiki with her family in 2013; unemployed

AFD: ND: female, born 1983, university degree, has lived in Tilichiki with her family since 2014; GP physician

AFD: OI: female, born ca. 1960, university degree, lives in Tilichiki; head of Tilichiki Culture and Leisure Center

AFD: VL: male, born ca. 1985, professional school degree, lives in Tilichiki; driver for Koryakenergo JSC

AFD: VS: male, born 1987, high school diploma, lives in Tilichiki; service technician for Koryakenergo JSC

AFD: VSh: male, born ca. 1955, lives in Tilichiki; driver

AFD: ZM: female, born 1983, has lived in Tilichiki since 2009 (born in Perm'); saleswoman in a grocery store