

Cultural policy in Ust-Tsilma (Russia) between neoliberalism and sustainability

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ABSTRACT

The article analyses the cultural policies and practices in the municipal district of Ust-Tsilma (Komi Republic, Russia) from neoliberalism and sustainability perspectives. Ust-Tsilma was chosen as a case study for the broader NEO-BEAR research project¹, which has aimed to establish how neoliberal and sustainability discourses change life in small municipalities in the Barents region. This study shows that the cultural sphere in the municipality of Ust-Tsilma is rapidly moving towards the neoliberal principles of organization of life, marked by economic and managerial efficiency, cultural consumerism, state–private financial partnership, competitive distribution of finances, and contract-based relations. Furthermore, the study shows that, in the context of declining population due to globalization and urbanization, a sustainability approach to culture (giving high priority to social-cultural capital, cultural heritage, and cultural landscape as well as to cultural access and participation) is extremely relevant for the future existence of the Ust-Tsilma municipality (and for the rural areas in general), because it brings a necessary adaptive potential for the survival of rural settlements and for the development of their communities.

Keywords: *sustainability, neoliberalism, cultural policy, Ust-Tsilma*

INTRODUCTION

The principal focus of this article is the cultural dimension of neoliberal and sustainability policies and practices in a rural community of the far north of Russia. The working hypothesis is that local culture is a domain where these new policies meet and struggle – not only with one another but also with conservative managerial practices – in order to find a possible equilibrium. While the neoliberal paradigm currently appears irresistible, a sustainability approach can be seen as a way to balancing the rough ride of neoliberal practices.

During the last decades, localities have been pushed by the State towards the realities of neoliberalism, which have become a cognitive pattern for managerial strategies at all administrative levels in all societal spheres. In remote rural areas, survival is a principal task. When this is combined with policies of market domination and economic efficiency, the result is a major challenge. One is faced with economic issues (new models of budgeting), administrative questions (new managerial strategies), professional considerations (new standards of work and personnel), social challenges (new skills and competences), cognitive trials (new type of rationality), behavioural difficulties (new patterns of communication), axiological matters (new system of values), and anthropological issues (new principles of self-esteem). It is in such situations that strategies of sustainability bring a huge adaptive potential for social and economic existence and for the cultural sphere. The research presupposes that local cultural policies and practices spontaneously and unconsciously reproduce the sustainability strategies that are the naturally most adaptive ones.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The notion of cultural policy

Cultural policy is an umbrella term with variations of evolving meaning. It can be defined as a set of teleonomic activities of public institutions (international, national, regional, and municipal), as well as of private organizations, to preserve and promote culture, to implant certain cultural values in the society, so that they become an indispensable part of the lives of humans and communities and that their support and further development would become a natural human and social need. Historically, cultural policies were focused on the preservation of high culture, or cultural heritage, mainly in the arts, but with time the horizon of aims, objectives, and practices broadened, based on the assumption that culture is “a way of life” (Throsby 2010, 2). This modern trend of “generalization” or “universalization” of

the idea of culture, as no longer focused exclusively on creation and preservation of cultural values within the arts, but rather seen as a content filling human and communal life with day-to-day actions and practices, would justify the growth of public and private investments into the cultural policies, as well as the transformation of the policies themselves (Throsby 2010, 14).

Depending on the dominating social context, cultural policies are represented in many different ways depending on their aims and tasks, subjects and objects, methods and instruments, content and functions. Certain policies are aimed at the sphere of culture in the narrow sense (including the process of creating cultural values and the corresponding institutions responsible for collecting and preserving cultural heritage), or in the wider sense (as an environment of human life, where every artefact becomes a cultural good and every act is seen as a fact of either consuming or producing cultural values), or they can be aimed at the cultural phenomena implemented in other spheres. Cultural policy can include long-term strategic goals as well as short-term tactical solutions.

The main object of cultural policies is the creation of cultural capital, which can be defined as a system of accumulated and structured elements of culture, forming beneficial background and life foundation for a human being or for a social entity (Bourdieu 1986; Axelsson et al. 2013). Cultural capital includes both material and non-material phenomena, which compile its tangible and intangible elements (Axelsson et al. 2013). Tangible cultural capital consists of created (produced type) and modified or affected (natural type) phenomena (Ferreira and Hamilton 2010). All artificial phenomena – built, made, constructed, assembled – can be united in the *produced* cultural capital, whereas the *natural* type of cultural capital refers to the habitat included in the circles of social life and endowed with meanings and functions (for example, the recreational meaning of parks, the protective function of conservation areas, the commercial meaning of agricultural lands). Intangible cultural capital includes cultural norms of behaviour, sets of values, patterns of living, traditions, lifestyles, languages, social practices, knowledge and skills used in crafts, spiritual practices, and intellectual activity (UNESCO 2003; Lenzerini 2011).

The environment in which cultural policies function becomes a battlefield for different paradigms; and while some of them manage to overcome their antinomic character, others stay incompatible. Currently, the principal framework of cultural

development is formed by the paradigms of neoliberalism and sustainability, which are, in many aspects, opposed to each other

Cultural Policy within the Neoliberal Paradigm

Neoliberalism is a complex and controversial set of political ideas, concepts, policies, and practices, with rather different implementations in the reality of different states (Birch and Mykhnenko 2009). There is nevertheless a common principal concept on the neoliberal agenda: domination of the free market. What follows from this is logically consequent, namely a universalized consumer approach (everything can be converted into a service), deregulation, privatization, enhancement of efficiency, cost minimization, shrinking of the social functions of the state, growth of private initiatives, and individual responsibility (Bikbov 2011; Larner 2000; Harvey 2007; Comaroff and Comaroff 2001; Treanor 2005). What also follows is managerialization as an “assumption that public agencies should function like private businesses in order to work efficiently” (McGuigan 2005, 236). Even the neoliberal cognitive model is seen through the modern economocentric phenomenon of enterprise (Scharff 2015) with efficiency as its dominant, essential value. Neoliberal policies seek maximized human freedom, liberalization of trade, increasing mobility of capital, and growing efficiency of local economies as a consequence of diversification of competing free markets.

Culture comes into the neoliberal discourse through debates on the ways of expanding the free market ideology towards cultural policies (Bikbov 2011; Kagarlitsky 2011; Larner 2005). Neoliberalism pushes culture towards commodification of its values and drives cultural policies towards profit-making activities. When this happens,

[c]ultural policy ceases to be specifically about culture at all. The predominant rationale for cultural policy today is economic, in terms of competitiveness and regeneration, and, to a lesser extent, social, as an implausible palliative to exclusion and poverty. (McGuigan 2005, 238)

Thus, the current discourse of both cultural studies and cultural policies is predominantly economic – one speaks of profitability of cultural services, role of culture in a marketplace, production and consumption of cultural goods, overheads elimination, quality criteria of cultural services, competition-based money distribution, short-term contracts, and partnership strategies. The focus shifts from

“high culture” to “mass culture” and then – via “cultural industry” (Adorno and Horkheimer 2002) and “cultural industries” – to “creative industry” or “creative economy” (McGuigan 2010, 122–123). This drastically changes the perception of economic intervention into the sphere of culture, from negative to positive, from critiques to apologetics.

Strategic planning and realization of cultural policy have rapidly won friends, because culture is seen as a powerful tool of economic growth. (Re)branding of places gets a high priority on the local agenda, as the cultural environment becomes a main indicator for a hospitable investment climate. The targeted recipient of cultural policies is the financially reliable consumer (Bikbov 2011), which again impacts heavily on the character of cultural practices.

A well-balanced economic approach to cultural policies, along with the economic value of the produced and consumed cultural goods, should also take into consideration their cultural value (Throsby 2010). In reality this balance is quite often lost – the pure economic value prevails. Neoliberalism also introduces the collaborative model of organization of cultural policies as a replacement of the paternalistic approach. This entails a change in the strategies of financing and development of state–private partnerships, while “public budgets for support of culture are shrinking, without there necessarily being an expansion of private funding to compensate” (Throsby 2010, 4–5).

Sustainability Approach to Cultural Policies

Sustainability, or sustainable development, is another global discourse, implemented in theory and practice by modern states. The political history of the sustainability paradigm starts in 1987, when the Brundtland report *Our Common Future* introduced new rationales and a cautious approach for further developing strategies concerning nature and society. The concept of sustainable development usually sees three pillars underpinning the sustainable world: sustainable economy, sustainable society, and sustainable environment. The notions of sustainability and sustainable development are used as synonyms in the current research as their difference — sustainability being the desired result while sustainable development being the way to reach it — practically disappears in the Russian discourse.

To be defined as sustainable, the economy should become “green” or maintain a balance between efficiency and environmental and social “costs”. Sustainable

development in the social sphere is about implementing the principles of social justice and equity in contemporary social policies and practices. Environmental sustainability means protection of existing biodiversity and natural resources and presupposes the rule of ecological consciousness guided by the principles of conservation of nature, harmonious exploitation of natural resources, and rational nature management (Goodland 1995; Moldan et al. 2012). Because economic, environmental, and social interests do not coincide in most cases, the principal task for sustainability programmes is to overcome the controversial nature of societal sectors or at least to reach a possible equilibrium with minimization of losses and side effects.

The most vulnerable point of the sustainability paradigm is its rather vague character. The broad spectrum of interpretations of the concept often leads to pure academic speculations without implementation into real policies and actions. Thus, a great idea gets quite low practical impact or little “serious on-the-ground action” (Drexhage and Murthy 2010, 7).

In the sustainability paradigm, culture is mostly seen as the “fourth pillar” (Hawkes 2001; Axelsson et al. 2013) with several roles, supporting, mediating, and creating sustainability. This is culture “in, for and as” sustainable development (Dessein et al. 2015, 28–33). Sustainable culture – culture in sustainable development – refers to the self-supporting and self-promoting role of culture with cultural policies adopting the strategies and principles of sustainability. Culture, as a coupling channel – culture for sustainable development – links together the various spheres of society and thus becomes responsible for the possible breakdown between knowledge and its appearance in certain spheres or for the distortion of knowledge. Culture as environment – culture as sustainable development – means that culture is a universal foundation of personal and communal existence through the perpetual creation, preservation, and outreach of knowledge, norms, and values by nurturing, educating, enlightening, and spiritualizing human beings. Therefore, culture is the main source for creating personal and communal identity.

To be seen as sustainable, cultural policies have to make a new turn from profitability in its literal meaning to profitability as a mutually beneficial strategy, and they have to contribute to the social and environmental development, as well as to economic growth (Dessein et al. 2015). Sustainable culture means both the integration of cultural indicators into the criteria of socio-economic development, such as quality

of life, human development index, and index of happiness (Axelsson et al. 2013), and the functional expenditure and actions of cultural institutions. Museums, libraries, recreational centres, and even schools multiply their tasks combining educational, leisure, and sport activities not only for neoliberal cost reduction but for developing their social-enlightening missions (Tartygasheva and Tsybikov 2013). This is why

[t]he best hope for introducing culture into the development policy agenda is by demonstrating how the cultural industries can contribute to sustainable development, through the contribution that artistic and cultural production, dissemination, participation and consumption make to economic empowerment, cultural enrichment and social cohesion in the community.
(Throsby 2010, 196).

It is the cultural environment that allows the promotion of approaches with a specific system of values, be it ideas of sustainability, diversity, or consumerism, or economic, social, cultural, or any other superiority. Adopting cultural instruments by the discourse of sustainable development is a far-sighted policy which helps extend the ideas of sustainability by means of soft power and introduce the values of sustainability bottom-up, making them natural human needs rather than inculcated ideas.

Can Neoliberalism and Sustainability Work Together?

The political discourses of both neoliberalism and sustainability claim to be universal, so that they inevitably meet in social practice. But the goals of sustainability and neoliberalism vary: neoliberal economy is oriented towards efficiency, measured by means of profitability, whereas efficiency from the viewpoint of sustainable economy is seen as adequate satisfaction of the *essential* (but not consumerist) needs. Thus, sustainability turns to the development of infrastructural and industrial projects with innovative technologies, while profit-seeking neoliberalism separates the financial sector from the real sector of the economy and starts making money “out of thin air” by selling and buying without producing actual goods..

Economic efficiency and “marketization” (McGuigan 2005) challenge the fair distribution of economic assets of the sustainable economy, the human equity of the sustainable society, and the protection of biodiversity and natural resources of the sustainable environment. The values of green economy and social justice fail under the pressure of neoliberal demands, especially in the developing countries.

Furthermore, privatization, deregulation, and liberalization give a green light to corruption (Kumi et al. 2014). Economic efficiency, as a supreme neoliberal value, leads to growing poverty and inequality (McGuigan 2005), especially in the rural areas (Reed 2015) and thus contradicts the main principles of sustainable development – a stable economy and social equity. The neoliberal approach grafted into the sustainability paradigm causes the loss of balance among its pillars, reducing all sides of sustainability to economic growth only (Drexhage and Murthy 2010), or to the environmental issues understood through the concept of environmentality, or managerialization and marketization of conservation policies and practices towards nature (Fletcher 2010; McCarthy 2012).

While the neoliberal discourse promotes the idea of individualism, the theories of sustainability motivate active social communication, interrelation, and development of communal and global consciousness. Both sustainability and neoliberal policies seek the development of partnerships, private or state–private. However, the essence of these partnerships differs: for a cooperation to be seen as neoliberal, it must, *prima facie*, stay economically profitable. To be viewed as sustainable, the cooperation must foster a synergetic effect in solving economic, environmental, and social problems.

Hence, due to their rather different goals, neoliberalism and sustainability are hardly compatible within the same social reality: “The neoliberal order is unstable and, ultimately, unsustainable” (McGuigan 2010, 120).

REGIONAL CONTEXT

Russia-specific additions

In Russia, both the neoliberal and the sustainability discourses meet unique challenges of the local economy and administration. Privatization, for instance, comes together with deprivation and redistribution of proprietary rights (Batchikov and Kara-Murza 2008). Economic efficiency is replaced by bureaucratic effectiveness, which is measured by the number and the strength of informal connections in the governmental sector (the so-called administrative resource effect), and this nourishes shadow economy and corruption (Barsukova 2004). The neoliberal discourse with its highly valued short-term contracts and insignificance of the employee as an individual makes the growth of the shadow economy even stronger. In the recruitment of new workers, the price of the work force is the main criterion (“cheaper is better”), and low professional requirements help, too (Slonimczyk 2014).

To avoid a social burden, employers offer informal (unregistered) work or short-term formal contracts (Lehmann and Zaiceva 2013). Small businesses and salaried employees in many economic sectors view survival as a much more important goal than financial growth or stock accumulation. Informal economy, including the shadow economy and even more the “moral economy” of unofficial family/friend-related reciprocal connections and unwritten contracts, dominates the national economy (Barsukova 2004).

The cultural sphere reflects, in one way or another, all these features.

Commodification of culture mostly means budget cuts and the closure of profitless institutions. Altruistic sponsorship and communal involvement are not yet widely developed, and enthusiastic Soviet-style activities – voluntary work with the utmost mobilization of minds and wills and a readiness to face adversities for the radiant future of the coming generations – are no longer widespread. Nor are there any legal privileges for charitable or volunteer work.

The legislation for cultural policies is rather weak and inappropriate for today’s situation. Mainly enacted in the mid-1990s, this legislation consists of the national-level *Fundamentals of Legislation of the Russian Federation on Culture* (No 3612-1, from 9 October 1992 with the additions), regional laws (such as *Law of the Komi Republic “On Culture”*, No 15-P3, from 22 December 1994), and other federal and regional sectoral laws (on museums, libraries, etc.). It also includes general legislation intended to regulate administrative, civil, and labour relations (for instance, federal law FZ-83 from 8 May 2010, which severely limits the ways and means of spending budget funding). The new state law on culture was introduced for public debate in 2011 and has since had the status of a draft. A new fundamental document – *The Basic Principles of the State Cultural Policy of the Russian Federation* – appeared in the national cultural sphere in 2014 (No 808 from 24 December 2014). This document defines the main directions, strategic tasks, and key principles of the development of the state cultural policy. It brings together the development of creative arts, and the preservation and study of the cultural heritage and education with the development of creative industries and activities oriented towards organization of communicative and presentation domains. This document underlines the priority of cultural capital of the state over its economic capital. The document also identifies society as the main subject of the state cultural policy, while the state itself gets an instrumental role. Thus, current legislation in the sphere of culture neither exerts any positive influence on the cultural situation in the regions, nor does it make any contribution

to its development. However, the legislative situation has recently started changing, and the significance of the development of national cultural policy is widely considered an overriding priority. Cultural modernization in modern Russia thus becomes a challenge for all those participating in the process: cultural institutions, regional and municipal administrations, NGOs and other involved groups, and individuals.

Ust-Tsilma municipality: general description

Within the NEO-BEAR project, which focuses on neoliberalism and sustainability in the communities of the Barents region (Tennberg et al. 2014), Ust-Tsilma (Komi Republic), the subject of this case study, represents the northeast of the European part of Russia. While the first part of the project mostly explored the social and economic aspects (with a special focus on tourism), the second part broadens the framework by considering the transitional period in the Russian cultural policies and by examining the processes and challenges of this sphere.

Ust-Tsilma is a rural area in the remote part of the Komi Republic. The settlement of Ust-Tsilma is the centre of the Ust-Tsilemsky municipal district, located in the northwestern part of the Komi Republic on the border with Arkhangelsky Region and Nenets Autonomous Okrug. Ust-Tsilma has 5064 inhabitants, whereas the municipal district consists of 37 rural localities and has a population of 11,898 people (according to the Russian Federal State Statistics Service). The municipal district, together with its centre, is losing population drastically – 1% annually (Pozdeev 2014) – due to remoteness of the area, severe climate, lack of career opportunities, and the general trend of urbanization. Even within the district, there is a distinct trend of migration from the villages to the municipal centre.

Culture is estimated by the local administration and stakeholders as one of the main sources for municipal development, a growth point with big potential. The local inhabitants speak a unique dialect of Russian, belong to the Church of Old Believers, and preserve their traditional lifestyle. They stress their identity by calling themselves *ust-tsilyoma*, which is a claim to be seen as a specific (indigenous) ethnic entity, neither Russian nor Komi – the two major neighbouring peoples. Their constructing the communal (even ethnic) identity on the cultural foundation is highly interesting from the perspective of our research.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The analysis of the cultural life of Ust-Tsilma through the neoliberal and sustainability perspectives is based on a set of criteria with corresponding indicators.

The impact that the neoliberal paradigm has on the culture of Ust-Tsilma municipality is measured by institutional change, commercialization of culture, new strategies of financing, and new types of cultural actors, that is, producer and targeted recipient. The indicators for *institutional change* are a shift in ownership of the cultural institutions (reduction of the state share), growth of the self-financing sector, and transition of cultural management from local administration to separate institutions. *Commodification of culture* can be shown in the growth of paid services (in number and variety), rising prices in the sphere, shutdown of unprofitable projects and institutions, cancellation of measures of support towards specific groups, activation of competition, and (re)branding and self-representation through the cultural environment in order to attract investments. The indicators of *change in financing strategies* are devolution of the financial burden from the state down to the regions, municipalities, and further to stakeholders; budget cuts; short-term contracts; and grant-based distribution of money. The criterion of *new key subjects of the cultural policies* has the following indicators: investments in successful candidates – individuals, teams, companies (previous success of an author or a project guarantees future success; “money comes to money”); price growth (which restricts access for low-paid audiences); rising consumer standards; shift in the targeted recipient of cultural services; and emergence of investors as new consumers of culture.

Among the possible criteria for assessment of cultural development from a sustainability perspective, those suggested by Axelsson and co-authors in their study of Swedish realities (Axelsson et al. 2013) appear to be applicable to the analysis of our case study. On the basis of these criteria, we developed a new set of indicators. These include, first of all, *cultural heritage* (UNESCO 2003), which embraces historical remains and surviving cultural tradition in its tangible and intangible forms. Second, we have *cultural landscape* (Rössler 2000) as culturally enriched natural habitat, a recognizable living environment as an image of the place or as a unique combination of its geography, history, and existing narratives. This also refers to the unique “spirit” and aesthetics of a place, which stem from the preservation of traditional practices such as farming, fishing, hunting, foraging, woodcarving, and folklore performances. Third, there is *cultural access*, the number and variety

of available cultural institutions and services, both free and paid, including public accessibility and outreach scale. And the fourth set of indicators pertains to *cultural participation* or the number of voluntary groups and NGOs, attendance and popularity of cultural events among the audience, number of people involved in various cultural events and activities, and types of participation in cultural activities. The first two “sustainability” criteria have a more qualitative character, where the numbers (of monuments, places, or events) are less in focus. The criterion of *cultural access* is mostly quantitative, whereas *cultural participation* has both a qualitative and a quantitative character.

Methodologically, this research is based on interviews; analysis of the legal base and of documents (reports, plans, grant applications, etc.) and other data collected during fieldwork (in February 2015), and examination of the websites of the municipal and local administrations and other open-access Internet resources of the local NGOs, centres, and other groups. We conducted 20 interviews during the first phase of the research with heads and employees of municipal cultural institutions (museums, libraries, cultural centres), leaders and members of local NGOs, representatives of the municipal administration, and with entrepreneurs.

ANALYSIS

Neoliberal practices introduced into the cultural sphere of Ust-Tsilma

The study on Ust-Tsylma cultural policies and practices through a neoliberal prism creates a picture which is rather indicative of contemporary Russian cultural life.

Neoliberal generalization of the principle of economic efficiency and its demand for increasing profitability of all policies and activities force the municipalities to rebrand their communal identity as business projects. Ust-Tsilma is a case in point of the modern branding of a place, and this particular brand-making project directly influences the local cultural policies and, in a sense, becomes a cultural policy of its own. The municipality brands itself through nature and culture: its pristine nature and location on a high bank of the Pechora river, on the one hand, and vibrant cultural traditions together with the religion of Old Believers (with no priests), on the other, help to create an attractive tourist image, also in terms of inviting investment for the development of cultural initiatives. The best-known cultural event supported by local, regional, and federal financial resources is the summer ritual “Red Hill” celebrations (*Krasnaya Gorka*). “Gorka”, and the places sacred or historically linked to

Old Believers, are the cornerstones for the development of event tourism. However, they are not enough to make this branch of the local economy profitable. While “Gorka” and some other festivals became a successful example of the local brand-making process, it turned out – in accordance with “the Matthew effect”² – that when only previously successful projects are supported (Bikbov 2011; Kagarlitsky 2011), all local endeavours have to include manifestations of folklore to a certain degree to be successful in future.

As underlined by one of the interviewees (a representative of the municipal management), culture is seen as “an essential source for the area, a powerful impetus for the local development”, especially in its direct links to the development of ethnic tourism. All interviewees also drew attention to a lack of finances, caused by “optimization” of state cultural funds³, as the main obstacle for the cultural development in the region.

As cultural renaissance in new conditions is potential for economic growth, these growth points are expected to attract investments and help individuals to become entrepreneurs. For Ust-Tsilma municipality, tourism brings such expectations. Our interviewees, however, indicated that there has been a lack of initiatives among the local stakeholders, even though tourism could make a contribution given the underdeveloped provision of accommodation, transportation, and food services. Local inhabitants offering bed and breakfast facilities could successfully compete with the few hotels of Ust-Tsilma in giving the tourists a possibility to enjoy traditional northern rural lifestyle. Not many locals have done this, possibly because the tourist season is short, there is resistance to try a new activity, and the lifestyle of the Old Believers is rather closed. Also, the vast majority of those who get involved in this type of business do not register their enterprise officially. To avoid taxes and bureaucracy, they stay within the framework of informal relations and shadow economy.

The process of *commodification of culture* can be further illustrated by the growing number and variety of paid services in Ust-Tsilma cultural institutions, even though interviews showed that these paid services are not equally and regularly requested. The most profitable cultural activities have traditionally been leisure events (such as festivals and the cinema) and tourist souvenirs. For example, the A. V. Zhuravsky Historical Memorial Museum opened a visitor centre in 2013, with souvenirs as the main source of income.

Institutional change in the cultural sphere of Ust-Tsilma is reflected by the closure of the department of culture in the municipal administration and by the creation of the Ust-Tsilma Culture, Leisure, and Cinema Centre. Its work has been estimated by the local administrative managers and stakeholders as far more efficient and as “real work” as opposed to the “nominal work” of the abolished department.

Change of financial strategies becomes evident from the analysis of documents and interviews. There are now many more grant activities, and more private sector support from large companies such as Lukoil-Komi and from individual entrepreneurs. According to one of the interviewees (a local administration representative), “as far as state–private partnership is concerned, the municipal administration is still examining regulatory and legislative framework. We have some ideas, but they are not ready to be discussed yet.” The interviewees also said that a grant system was the most optimal source of targeted financial support, even though the application process takes a lot of time and effort.

As for the *new key subjects of cultural policies*, their appearance in rural municipalities like Ust-Tsilma is less obvious. The principal audience of all cultural events is the same, the local inhabitants. The consumer approach to cultural events is not the main approach; local culture still holds its educational, entertaining, and recreational potential. Ust-Tsilma cultural institutions (such as the Zhuravsky Museum and libraries, and NGOs like Rus Pechorskaya) offer cultural activities with a focus on knowledge and skills, providing scientific and educational programmes and activities to preserve and promote an understanding of the cultural tradition. It is the tourist who indeed appears to be the new key subject of the local culture. Tourists make the consumer approach relevant, because they want to be, first of all, entertained. Interviewees pointed out that tourists expect a certain level of service and that their expectations on transportation, accommodation, food, and tour programmes grow from year to year, thus demonstrating a rise of consumer standards.

To summarize, neoliberal practices have been introduced in the cultural sphere of Ust-Tsilma with major changes as a result. The ongoing processes show how the neoliberal demands for efficiency are implemented through the commodification of cultural institutions, actions, and practices, and also through changing financing strategies. As the financial burden of the state is shrinking, continuous investments are displaced by a more flexible yet sporadic and selective model of sponsorship or grant support. Institutional change in the cultural sphere demonstrates the growth

of managerial efficiency. And the very appearance of the new key subject of the cultural policies, activities, and practices – the cultural tourist – signifies the growing influence of the neoliberal approach to cultural policies. These policies turn away from educational activities, sense-creating art actions, and preservation of traditional practices and rather turn to economically efficient enterprises aimed to develop cultural services focusing on programmes of recreation and entertainment.

However, the cultural sphere of Ust-Tsilma still holds on to its main priorities and directions. The traditional patriarchal approach to the local cultural policies recognizes that there are new guidelines and starts entering new discourses without being fully aware of having absorbed something new.

Culture of Ust-Tsilma through the prism of sustainability discourse

The set of criteria applied to Ust-Tsilma cultural policies from a sustainability perspective yields rather interesting results that are far from typical for an average rural area. The criterion of *cultural heritage* sees the past as very much alive and as having a bearing on modern life. In the municipal district of Ust-Tsilma, the past and the present are closely linked. There is the ethnographic village of Garevo with its 18th-century legacy, the Skitskaya village as an Old Believer settlement, the copper and silver mines dating from the 15th century, the Zhuravsky station for agricultural experimentation in the conditions of the far North, and many more. At the same time, the municipality also maintains intangible cultural capital in the indigenous lifestyle, language, sacred places, and folklore tradition. New cultural projects constantly appear in order to preserve the social memory of the area.

The *cultural landscape* of the settlement of Ust-Tsilma is rather remarkable, highlighting both the traditional image of the place (large houses constructed on the terraced banks of a mighty river) and the new projects (such as the Patrimonial House, aimed to support ancestral places of living and strengthening family ties and family memory). If one were to add the specific cultural atmosphere to the characteristics of the landscape, it should include the local parlance, fairy tales, and traditions. Farming, fishing or foraging, costume stitching, knitting, and woodcarving all have their own unique features. Farming, for example, has developed in almost polar conditions. The place is also famous for its sheep and horse breeds, both called Pechorskaya. Traditional crafts are still in demand, not so much for creating useful everyday items, but more for their archaic-symbolic

meaning. There is plenty of ongoing research of folklore, history, traditional practices, costumes, and crafts, which adds an academic touch to the place. Cultural festivities also significantly enrich the cultural landscape.

The criterion of *cultural access* demonstrates the accessibility of cultural services. The municipal cultural life is enriched by the activities of Ust-Tsilma Culture, Leisure, and Cinema Centre, and by the A. V. Zhuravsky Historical Memorial Museum, the children's music school, and the libraries. The cultural institutions work with a variety of people: children, teenagers, young families, women, adults, and pensioners. The vast majority of stakeholders — 96% according to the 2013 report (Pozdeev, 2014) — are satisfied with the quality of work of the local cultural institutions. However, the interviewees agree with the municipal reports that the lack of specialists, such as choreographers, sound engineers, and concert masters, is still a problem. And the need for specialists increases with the remoteness of the villages. The head of a municipal cultural centre mentioned in his interview that “people want to live in the centre of the municipality, and small villages are dying, suffering from lack of young people and professionals”.

The criterion of *cultural participation* includes the number of voluntary groups, NGOs, and participants as well as the results of the work. For example, 1200 local inhabitants are involved in the cultural activities of 120 groups (Pozdeev 2014), including traditional singing and dancing collectives, and the people's theatre. According to the interviews, 16 NGOs are currently working in the municipal district (three NGOs in 2009), and the major one, the interregional social movement Rus Pechorskaya has primarily cultural aims, such as the revitalisation of traditional living culture, and its cultural values respond to the growth of social scepticism and support the development of ethnic and cultural identity of *ust-tsilyoma*. Volunteer activities also grow in number and variety. People get involved in the cultural process as observers, supporters, and participants. As a local administration manager said, “people have become more active and they realized that without their participation nothing can be changed”. The interviews also showed a rise in volunteer work, even though it still has mostly a spontaneous and informal character. People prefer to help their friends, relatives, neighbours, and acquaintances, and participate in something they already know. Cultural participation is expected to grow due to the expansion of social networking and virtual social communication.

Ust-Tsilma at a crossroads of paradigms

A challenge for sustainable development comes from the necessity to skilfully reconcile often contradictory interests and goals of the economy, the environment, the social needs, and the culture. In case of Ust-Tsilma this challenge is crucially relevant. The culture of Old Believers, for instance, attracts with its pristine nature, history of endurance and high level of resilience. The Old Believers' closed disposition has helped to preserve age-old rituals and practices, which has made their culture a tourist attraction with high economic potential. This, however, can dissolve the core of the culture. Traditional culture meets the same challenge: in order to attract more funding, more audience, and more participants, folklore culture becomes "brighter" and more colourful, losing its authenticity, soul, and character, and suffering from simplification.

Tourism in Ust-Tsilma municipality is a domain where neoliberal and sustainability discourses meet. Cultural capital promotes tourism, and tourism helps to make culture economically efficient (Throsby 2010, 146–156), promoting economic sustainability as a result. But at the same time, there is a controversy in the development of tourism: if developed intensely, environmental sustainability could be questioned and the cultural capital devalued and partially lost due to the growing domination of a consumer approach to cultural values. At present, some external reasons, such as the remoteness of the area and the transportation problems alleviate this controversy. Tourism in the region has mostly an events-related and a seasonal character; it does not evolve as intensively as the municipal and regional authorities would wish. As stressed by the interviewees, tourist business is still a sore point in the municipality: "Our northern people, they cannot be rushed; they need time to get into the swing of things, to think, and to start acting".

In general terms, the neoliberal paradigm requires people to work hard, be proactive and creative, show initiative, take risks, and to strive for success. Neoliberalism promotes the new understanding of the human being as an "enterprise" with efficiency measured by the level of success as its main value. People, being subjected to the parameters of efficiency, seek better conditions and better places; remote rural localities get depopulated. Therefore, in order to keep the rural communities alive, to increase their adaptive potential, and to give them sources for revival and development, the neoliberal principle of efficiency should be redefined. The discourse should be changed from immediate profit-oriented solutions towards long-term goals of sustainability balancing the economic, social, cultural, and environmental needs.

CONCLUSIONS

Our analysis shows that both discourses of neoliberalism and sustainability are currently represented in the policies and practices of Ust-Tsilma municipality, even though the local authorities and stakeholders are not necessarily aware of these discourses or the relevant theories. This speaks volumes for the historically logical or unavoidable character of neoliberalism; it also shows that sustainability could underpin the present goals of development. The municipality of Ust-Tsilma combines new policies introduced from higher administrative levels (federal and republican) as a paradigm of modern life with the traditional, customary lifestyle and managerial patterns. In practice, the municipality, struggling with its remoteness and depopulation, has to realign the tasks for development with the goals of survival. The cultural sphere brings a strong, but not sufficient, potential for municipal growth.

The case of Ust-Tsilma shows that investing in culture is investment in the future. This sustainable strategy demands policies of long-term planning, which clashes with the neoliberal paradigm. Areas with a declining economy and population need to find ways of compensating for this, and the models of sustainable culture (promoting strong communal values) can be a source of necessary balance.

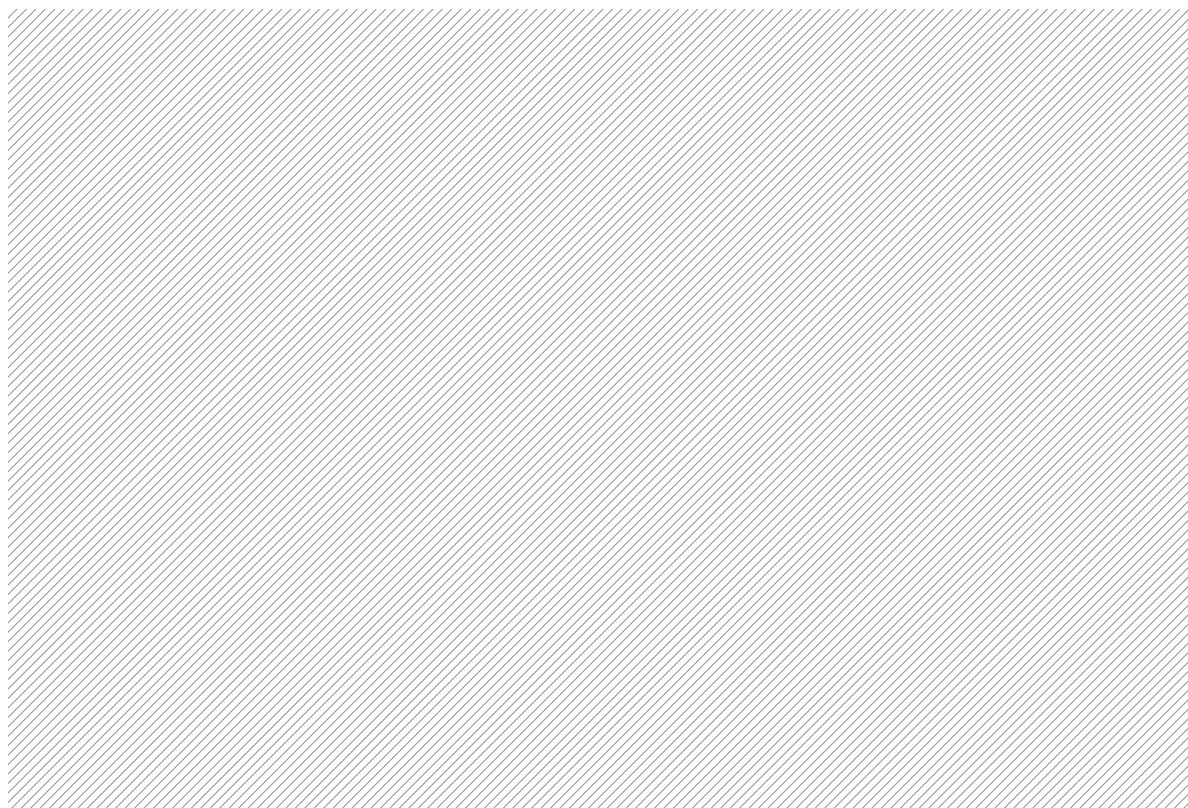
It is important to promote sustainability ideas and values further in the sphere of culture, because culture creates the universal ground for policies and practices of any type: economic, social, and environmental. It is especially important to strengthen natural links and relations between people, institutions, and settlements, and to support individual and organizational activities and partnerships aimed to empower the sense of community.

ENDNOTES:

¹ Neoliberal governance, local communities, and sustainable development in the Barents Region (NEO-BEAR) was an international project based in the Arctic Centre (University of Lapland) and funded by Nordic Council of Ministers' Arctic cooperation programme.

² As a term, "the Matthew law" or "the Matthew effect" descends from the Gospel of Matthew and was first used in academic literature by Robert K. Merton to refer to accumulated advantage: those who have previously received some life benefits, such as money, fame, resources, etc., would most probably get more of them, and those who have not yet got the benefits are least likely to get them.

³ Optimization of funds presupposes enhancement of the organizational efficiency through a set of measures, including budget cuts, reductions of employee numbers and (or) of salaries, and shortage of unprofitable projects.



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