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Rewiring remote urban futures? Youth well-being in northern industry towns

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ABSTRACT

Many small remote cities in the circumpolar North lose population. Our starting point is that such settlements have a viable future when young people see perspectives for their own well-being there. This article studies such perspectives using cases from northern Russia and northern Finland, based on empirically grounded fieldwork. Emphasising contextuality, we analyse how authorities, civil society and industrial companies provide conditions for youth well-being in northern industrial settlements. The results show, how a viable urban community could look like for young inhabitants: crucial determinants are education, social networks and family ties, nature, housing, comfortable infrastructure, meaningful work, mobility and good health. While many of the results resembled between the case study regions, among the differences in the two countries, we found that in Finland notions of a good life in the North base more on individual preferences than in Russia, where collective notions are more important. In conclusion, we suggest that youth well-being becomes a principal component of concepts of viable urban communities, including but not limited to such cases as Arctic peripheral single-industry towns.

Introduction

What is a viable city, and can single-industry towns be viable in remote areas? Dependence on one resource often means little diversity not only in employment opportunities but also in options for social life. This is emphasised by the holistic approach to city viability in the UN Sustainable Development Goal eleven, according to which 'cities provide opportunities for all, with access to basic services, energy, housing, transportation' (United Nations 2020). But can young people who grow up in remote northern towns imagine a good life there? What can studies in Arctic and Subarctic urban communities bring to a theory of well-being for young people? Our starting hypothesis is that only if young people see opportunities to live well there, industry towns in our study region have a viable future. We define Arctic and Subarctic as the area with an expressed Arctic or

northern boreal climate (Lu et al. 2021). Case towns in our study area share besides the coarse climate classification the remoteness from capital cities and a small size of the population. This associates our case towns analytically to the field of Arctic urban studies. The dependence of many Arctic and Subarctic cities of a single industry has made urban viability fragile and connected to fluctuations on the market for the main material that this industry produces – in our cases mining and forestry. Keeling and Sandlos (2015, 22) have attributed this to the 'ephemeral nature of the mineral economy'. As a result, some of these single-industry towns have been shrinking significantly or abandoned altogether (Florinskaia and Roschina 2006; Hill and Gaddy 2003; Martinez-Fernandez et al. 2012; Heleniak, 2009a, 2017; Khlinovskaya Rockhill 2015; Laruelle 2019, 7). Recent research on industrial cities (Hollander 2018) has emphasised that shrinking does not have to mean decline automatically, and called for more research on the positive sides of population decrease in cities. From the Arctic peripheries in what are some of the world's wealthiest countries, there is hardly any evidence of a successful smart decline (Hollander and Németh 2011) or right-sizing of settlements (Coppola 2019). We argue that this is because young people's ideas about a good life are not usually taken into account in programmes and policies, even though it is this group that is decisive for the long-term viability of settlements.

This article contributes with evidence from young people from the North to a theory of urban well-being, as 'an optimal state for an individual community, society, and the world as a whole' (Mathews and Izquierdo 2009, 5). In our research area between 10% and 14% of the population are youth (between 15 and 24 years) according to the OECD definition (Ader and Igrioglu 2018). These people are vital for the future of Arctic and Subarctic settlements. According to the Finnish Youth Act (Nuorisolaki 2020) persons until the age of 29 years qualify as youth, while in Russia the age range is 14–30 years (Government of the Russian Federation 2014). Our studies work with these respective national legal definitions. Arctic and northern cities are small in terms of population (under 300,000), and many of them rely on a single industry as their prime *raison d'être*. In the Eurasian Arctic, the majority of the urban population are incomers or their descendants, although nowadays most indigenous youth also resides in cities. From these numerical considerations follows that the future of human settlements in the Arctic and Subarctic will significantly depend on how cities will be able to provide conditions for well-being of youth.

In order to clarify what these conditions are, we need to study the determinants of well-being for youth in the urban Arctic. In this article we take an ethnographic approach basing on fieldwork by three authors in four different settlements, two in the Asian Russian Subarctic/Arctic (Republic of Sakha Yakutia) and two in the Finnish Subarctic/Arctic (Northern Ostrobothnia/Lapland). On the one hand, our research highlights some major structural shortcomings of Arctic settlements, which are impossible to overcome. We studied what conditions for youth well-being in our case cities authorities, civil society and industrial companies provide, and if their ideas overlap with the hopes and ambitions of the young people themselves. On the other hand, our results show that people see some competitive advantages in their small cities in what residents of capitals conceive as periphery. We found that some of the very same determinants can have the effect of increasing well-being for some young people, while they present a threat for well-being of others. Interestingly, this is less country-dependent than age-dependent. However, there are differences in perceptions, which are culturally determined.

Based on these findings, we explore what cities and regulators can specifically do to capitalise on their structural 'plus' factors that youth have mentioned as increasing their sense of well-being in their places, while on the other hand working on measures to mitigate the factors that young people have mentioned as threats pushing them to out-migrate from their Arctic communities. By including the perspectives of these young citizens, their voice can be heard when thinking about how to build sustainable small cities for the future in general, and the Arctic and Subarctic specifically.

Theoretical considerations

The United Nations Sustainable Development Goal eleven is 'to make cities inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable' (United Nations 2020). Gentile (2018) has shown that scholarship and theory building on urban sustainability has been too narrowly focused on a limited number of big cities, predominantly from the North-American hemisphere. To a lesser extent this is also true for scholarship on shrinking cities, much of which is inspired by North-American cases (Hollander 2018), although urban depopulation and city viability during industrial decline have also been studied in Europe more recently (Bernt et al. 2014). However, this scholarship has so far remained separate from studies of youth and human well-being – the way in which humans can build fulfilling lives. Human well-being has been studied in different social sciences, of which each has their own orientation. Most prominently, psychology focuses on individual fulfilment and mental health (Ryan and Deci 2001; Usborne and Taylor 2010), economists concentrate on measures such as GDP and public social budgets (such as in the Human Development Index), while educational sciences highlight the difference in policies between what they call 'objective' and 'subjective' indicators (Wright and McLeod 2015, 2). More explicit interdisciplinary integration of well-being as a concept has been attempted by Oades (2021) and Stammler and Toivanen (2021). The anthropology of well-being – the focus in this article – explores notions of people's idea of a good life in particular societies, cultures or places. The volumes edited by Mathews and Izquierdo and by Jimenez (both 2008) focus on this cultural diversity. However, Thin (2008, 36) notes that often this scholarship fails to identify clear criteria for that well-being. We aim to contribute in this article with such criteria, coming from youth in industrial cities in the Russian and Finnish Arctic and Subarctic.

The subjectivity and cultural diversity of well-being do not mean that social sciences should not have a say in shaping the concept theoretically. Thin (2008) makes the case for examining social determinants in a quest for identifying better the universals and diversities of the concept. We suggest that in this respect, scholarship on well-being must be pluralistic enough to consider not only different scholarly disciplines and currents (Smith and Reid 2018, 807), but also different age-classes and social and material environments. If as a universal concept well-being should be relevant for understanding the determinants of a good life, we must find out if there is something specific to those determinants among young people.

Some studies on well-being focus on social cohesion and cultural identity (Duhaime et al. 2004; Usborne and Taylor 2010) as related topics, while the few circumpolar comparisons that we have on Arctic indigenous youth have more an overview character with coarse generalisation (Ulturgasheva et al. 2014). We therefore explore in greater

detail the link between well-being and the pursuits of happiness among urban Arctic youth, by developing a finer-grained catalogue of determinants in such cities where the majority of youth of the region lives. These findings should contribute to our understanding about development perspectives for industrial urban spaces in the Arctic and Subarctic– a region which has received much recent international attention as resource-frontier and hotspot for climate change, but which is so far under-represented in urban studies.

On the contrary, it was in the global south where well-being became an element of development critique, through the related concept called *Buen Vivir* (good life) in Latin America, highlighting people's subjective perceptions and priorities in life for political agendas rather than ideologies of economic growth and restructuring measures imposed by western agents (Gudynas 2013, 35–41). It might seem obvious that inhabitants' well-being should have a prominent role in considerations of urban viability, and that cities in the periphery can retain their population best when the young generation feels that it is attractive for them to invest in a living in a smaller remoter city than in a metropolitan area. However, these links are often missing from the above-mentioned literature.

Arctic urban studies is a relatively recent field of research. After Hill and Gaddy's (2003) seminal volume on Siberia's economic decline, Orttung's (2016; 2014) Arctic urban sustainability network has been trend-setting in the field, focusing on Russian Arctic city vulnerabilities to climate change, to migration flows and multicultural developments (Zamyatina and Pelyasov 2016). First research on how remote industrial cities can become home for people who built them or came to work there touches upon place-attachment as one aspect of urban well-being (Bolotova and Stammler 2010; Heleniak, 2009b; Stammler and Khlinovskaya 2011).

Zamyatina (2013) has made first attempts to incorporate the perspective of youth for their present and future well-being in order to achieve a deeper understanding of urban community viability. In her article, she identifies desired outmigration destinations for youth from Arctic single-industry cities. However, she does not analyse the aspect we are interested in here, namely what could possibly attract young people to stay in their home towns and contribute to a viable city community in the Arctic and Subarctic. Pilkington (2012, 2014) has covered this aspect partially: she found that connections of people to their place in the city are emotional and sensual responses to the material and symbolic environment. This suggests that decision makers in cities can facilitate the emplacement of young people in their city by creating conditions for emotional and symbolic attachment to their city, through material agency (designing urban public spaces) and symbolic initiatives (initiating patriotic local narratives, creating reasons to be proud of one's city). Here Nuykina's argument (2014, 167) is relevant that in more marginal places the presence of innovative and charismatic city-leaders can make an even bigger difference than in bigger metropolitan areas.

In the Western European Arctic, studies have highlighted the structural problems of northern towns leading to gradual out-migration, especially among young people in search for satisfying their need for education and professional development (Karlsdóttir, Heleniak, and Kull 2020). It is not uncommon for rural towns to lose 40–60% of their youth as they migrate to bigger cities to more Southern regions (Karlsdóttir, Heleniak, and Kull 2020, 36; Penttinen 2016). In Finland, the academic discourse and public discussions tend

to represent the Finnish rural north as a region of inevitable decay and a 'marginal periphery' in comparison to the southern growth centres (Armila, Halonen, and Käyhkö 2016 & Tuuva-Hongisto 2018). Tuuva-Hongisto (2018) argues, in line with our findings, that questions of staying or leaving are at the centre of young people's future decision-making processes. Other examples from the Swedish North in mining towns have shown similar problems to those in Russia and Finland: 'The outflow of youth has been cited as a key social factor limiting community sustainability', as Zeff (2007, 33) describes the situation in Kiruna and Malmberget. A recent study by Rönnlund (2019) contributes to the discussion about relationships between space, place and identity. Furthermore, she shows how material conditions, social relationships and practices are connected to the choice of the place of residence. Along similar lines, Komu (2019) argues for greater attention to dreams and utopias for understanding people's priorities in remote northern towns. In Finland, the cultural expectation of mobility tends to characterise youth who stay as inferior (Adams and Komu 2021; Juvonen and Romakkaniemi 2018). While mobility and migration are being viewed as a way to 'realise one's potential', staying is often seen as unprogressive or even to some extent peculiar (Komu and Adams 2021; Hartikainen 2016; Ollila 2008). In addition, other key life changes work as triggers for staying or leaving, for example, starting a family or getting a career opportunity elsewhere (Stockdale and Haartsen 2018).

Our focus is on what is specific about Arctic and Subarctic urban youth's ideas of well-being, on their background of having grown up in an environment that is remote and marginalised, yet, on the other hand urban and industrial. It is along these lines that we see our contribution to concepts of viable communities in urban studies as well as of well-being: to test the claim of established scholarship on the general applicability of concepts with empirical material from youth in Russian and Finnish northern industrial cities.

Materials and methods

Our methodological approach in this research is holistic rather than distinct and is guided by the principle of integrating diversity and achieving comparability. This approach allows us to identify the common roots of youth well-being in different cities, countries and among different age groups, using methods grounded in ethnography, participant observation, policy and literature analysis, revealing different determinants and improve our understanding of what constitutes well-being. This allows to integrate such different findings as for example threats to youth well-being from the Western Arctic (Young and Bjerregaard 2008) with those of Russian research on Arctic youth (Osipova and Maklashova 2016) alongside those on sustainability of single-industry towns in the Arctic (Zamyatina and Pelyasov 2016).

Due to its non-interventional methods, our research did not require ethics approval and complies with Finland's 2019 ethical principles of research with human participants and ethical review in the human sciences (TENK Finnish National Advisory Board on Research Ethics 2019, 61 in particular). All research participants involved were asked if they wanted to remain anonymous, and to what extent the anonymity should be implemented. If needed, we double checked after extensive conversations again. Some participants preferred not to be mentioned by name, but all agreed to have their

places of residence disclosed. This allows us to mention locations by name in this article. Further, all municipalities were consulted prior to the start of the research. They were supportive of the research project, and were interested in its results, which were shared in the form of a best practice guide (Adams et al. 2020).

Grounded in ethnographic participant observation, we wanted our interlocutors to determine their most important topics of the conversation themselves. Correspondingly, we refrained from asking standardised questions. However, in order to ensure comparability between cases, we developed a catalogue of possible determinants for youth well-being in Arctic industrial cities (see Figure 1), which we used as a guidance in our conversations and interviews. In forming this catalogue, we aimed to include determinants pointing towards both eudaemonic and hedonistic aspects of well-being. From visits to the field sites prior to this research we knew that these variables mattered in both countries. In many cases, these determinants evolved naturally during the extended conversations.

Having such variables in mind as topics for an informed conversation with practitioners, in this article our focus is on those aspects that figured most prominently among our field partners. In our data analysis we used 'soft comparison', which incorporates 'all the nuances of sociocultural context ethnographically portrayed' (Mathews and Izquierdo 2009, 6). This is supplemented by our analysis of youth policy, measures and frameworks by authorities, industrial companies and the state.

We conducted ethnographic fieldwork in the Finnish towns of Pyhäjoki and Kemijärvi, and in the Russian cities Neryungri, Nizhnyi Kuranakh (Yakutia) between February 2018 and August 2020 (a total of seven person months). The towns as cases offer insights into youth issues in settlements in pre-industry phase (Pyhäjoki), single-industry towns (Neryungri, Nizhnyi Kuranakh) and post-industrial phase (Kemijärvi). The significance of a single industry, the size of the city and its position as periphery in relation to metropolitan areas of their countries also guided the choice of our field sites more than just their northern latitude.

During this time, we lived in our field settlements and spent time together with young people, for example in public spaces outdoors and indoors. In our ethnographic fieldwork we made a deliberate effort to co-create knowledge jointly with the young people, for making sure that our findings focus on their own notion of well-being. Rather than

Economic Perspectives: Labor market and Career Opportunities	Connection to Nature	Housing Possibilities and Living Enviroment	Access to Medical and Health Services	Pride in "Northernness" or similar local loyalities
Infrastructures, Mobility and Spatiality	The extend to which legislation correspnds to actual needs and desires expressed by youth	Religious Views	Multiethnic Relations	Social Fabric of the City Community and Openness of Civil Society for Youth
	Education Opportunities	Quality and Diversity of Free time Activities, e.g. Culture, Education, Nature, Sports	Safety/Security	Network of Family and Friends

Figure 1. Catalogue with main variables of well-being.

representative sampling, we consciously chose conversation partners from the different groups we aimed to incorporate in our research, from all genders, such as students, employees from industry, municipality and elsewhere, those intending to leave, and those having come back after education. Youth centres, municipal services, companies and our long-term live helped to access these people, both in individual and collective settings (focus groups). However, in this co-production we acknowledge that there are power-relations, particularly in relationships between youth and adults (Leyshon 2008). A lot of the conversations were spontaneous, happening for example on the main square with youth 'hanging out', at a petrol station's restaurant, or with young people fixing their vehicles at a workshop, in youth centres and other common places where young people felt comfortable talking with us. Thus, living in the settlements was crucial for informing our understanding of the key determinants of community viability there. Besides important unstructured conversations, we also conducted 36 interviews and 14 focus-group discussions. In the Russian case cities, these were co-hosted by indus-trial companies who are the most significant employers in their settlements (Yakutugol', Kolmar, Polyus Zoloto Aldan) and therefore participants were mainly the older age-group of what is classified as youth (between 20 and 26 years). On the Finnish side the co-oper-ating partners were mostly youth-centres, secondary and high schools and individuals, where the main age-group consists of young people between 15 and 22 years. We included young employees of industrial companies, young people living and working in and around the cities/municipalities, social workers in municipalities, religious organis-ations and youth activists.

Determinants of Arctic youth well-being

Among all topics from our catalogue covered during the fieldwork, the possibility to work, a well-organised education system, a functioning network of family and friends, a connec-tion with the surrounding nature, sufficient and convenient infrastructure, a safe social environment, social security and personal mobility are key components of personal well-being addressed by young people. On the contrary, local youth mention that long distances, the absence of friends, loneliness, lack of activities, too limited offers for post-secondary education, poor shopping and leisure options, poor healthcare quality, the misuse of intoxicants and mental indispositions, are issues that they are struggling with. In the following, we discuss these well-being factors, showing the relevance of results from youth in northern small urban settings for our general understanding of well-being as a concept in social sciences.

One major reason for either staying or leaving the respective towns is connected to the access to educational opportunities and the possibility to work. Our field partners are satisfied with the general quality of education in the Northern parts of Finland. Similarly, in the Russian case towns school education is a highly valued asset both by the state and by the parents. However, the limited options of further education after finishing second-ary and high school are constantly being thematised by young people across these regions. This results in young people having to leave the area if they want to pursue their individual career aspirations. If there is the possibility to study further after school close to their hometowns, the variety and the choice of specialisation is narrowed down to a few options to choose from.

Once the adequate and desired education is achieved, youth faces the challenge of finding an adequate job in their hometowns. Depending on the educational background, it can be hard or impossible to find work in the field of one's own specialisation, which often leads young people to make the decision to move away for an adequate job. In some cases, young people take on a job, which does not exactly comply with the applicable qualification, but enables them to stay within their social and family networks:

> I have been working at the local store, in my family's business and as a cleaner. These jobs have not much to do with my actual degree but if I want to stay here, I have to take whatever work I can get. (Young female, Kemijärvi)[1]

In both Yakutian cases, people were clear about whoever is willing to work in the extractive industries can find a job there. Correspondingly, the Neryungri branch of Yakutsk University, the Technical College there and the Aldan polytechnics have almost a 100% employment rate of their candidates in the mining, oil and gas professions among their graduates. Mechel Yakutugol' and Kolmar, the two big coal companies in Neryungri, literally compete for young local graduates, sometimes even with premia and award programmes for recruiting new employees:

> It's not hard to get a job in the company for a graduate from the college or the technical university. The Yakutian government also has a programme to support local young hiring. But there are not even enough locals that graduate so the company invites specialists from outside. (Young employee, Nizhnyi Kurannakh)

Some youth in our field sites have become very innovative in terms of starting their own businesses in order to stay in the area. These small enterprises vary from innovative food, clothes and brand marketing, to small servicing enterprises, to technology companies that can be located and operated anywhere. For example, young entrepreneurs in Pyhäjoki run during the summer months a small kiosk, where they sell ice-cream, cakes and coffee. With an uncertain future, the pressure in succeeding in education and finding suitable work is noticeably increasing anxiety among young people in the area.

Especially, in the Russian cases, a higher salary stipulated by law (Trudovoi Kodeks Rossiiskoi Federatsii, 2001 article 146) in the North than in more temperate regions is also a relevant factor that makes living in northern cities attractive. In addition, the salary is even higher in those northern areas where extractive industries are active, as people working there own a higher than average salary (80–90 thousand RUB, which is seven times the existential minimum in Russia for 2020). Rather than just for the sake of getting money, in our fieldwork interviews and focus group discussions, salary figured as an enabling factor for well-being and a balanced life:

> Here (in Yakutugol') we can afford nice holidays and finance our hobbies. It's not only the salary. The company also pays us holiday flights for the employee and also the children, every second year. (Young coal company employee, Neryungri)

For example, their salary in combination with a longer yearly holiday enables them to spend quality time with family and relatives in warm destinations. If combined with other factors, salary therefore can be seen as a determinant of well-being in the northern industrial city in Russia. On the contrary, Finnish salaries are not higher in the North than they are in the southern parts of the country. Moreover, seasonal employment offers in the tourism industry are continuously being advertised, but temporal jobs in Finnish

Lapland are often not appealing enough for Finnish young people because of the relatively low salaries and the seasonality:

> There are some jobs in the nearby Pyhä-Luosto area. I have sometimes cleaned cottages there. But it's only a temporary employment during the winter season. It's nothing that you can rely on long-term. (Young student, Kemijärvi)

Another place-specific variable for well-being is housing, which we found of crucial importance especially among the age-group of young people beyond secondary school. Affordable housing of good standard and close to one's social network as well as necessary services importantly positively influences young people's sense of good life. Young northerners want to be emplaced, and the principal condition for this emplacement is housing. Correspondingly, in the Yakutian cases housing was among the most prominent determinants for well-being that young adults mentioned when asked about their present and future preferred living options. In Finland, the relatively low prices compared to urban centres to purchase or rent houses and apartments were mentioned as a key factor of well-being:

> My girlfriend and I just rented a brand-new apartment and it's so much cheaper here than for example in Oulu. We are happy that we returned because we are surrounded by nature . (Young male, Pyhäjoki)

The contact to nature is being described as an integral part of Finnish youth, meaning that they relate to the surrounding nature in a unique, personal and emotional way. Nature determines their daily activities and the connection to nature was apparent throughout our conversations with the local youth. Various activities, such as outdoor sports, gathering or/and hunting food and simply being outdoors potentially enhance personal well-being. Some youth emphasised how difficult the thought of moving to a bigger city or the experience of having had to live elsewhere has been because they were missing the connection with nature. On the contrary, for some young people having 'only' nature around them, results in a longing to move away to a city with infrastructure and more available services. Nature and the northern climate also figure prominently in the Russian conversations, but often from a very different angle: usually first of all Russian young northern city-dwellers repeat the narrative of their parents with more southern roots about the harshness of the northern climate and the negative effect it has on human health. Usually, only in answer to our question would they remember the advantages and beauty of the northern nature as a factor increasing their well-being. Hence – although differently – in both the Finnish and the Russian cases, the northern nature can be perceived as a push or a pull factor for staying or leaving the region, and as one increasing or threatening well-being.

In both study regions, distances and the importance of well-working mobility figured in discussions with youth. The scales and dimensions, however, differ significantly: from the Yakutian field sites, the best accessible metropolitan city is a six hours flight and one monthly salary away, while our Finnish case towns are much closer to the bigger cities of Rovaniemi and Oulu, which can be reached within a one-hour drive. The various means of transport were addressed by youth in these Northern areas as important for their personal well-being. From the youth's own perspective the access to transportation matters, as it is for the Finnish cases related to connecting them with their peers, and for

the Yakutian cases it is considered an indicator of independence from parents. Someone's status within a peer-group is often determined by the means of transport and the possibility of moving around without being dependent on others. For example, at a summer festival in Neryungri, the display of fancy cars equipped with high-capacity car hifi was an attraction that additionally provided background (or foreground) music for thousands of young festival visitors at the artificial lake of the city. In all our case cities, motocross, car and snowmobile races, and for older youth off-road jeep rallies are a prestigious means to show off in the sphere of transport:

> My friends and I like to race around town with our motor-bikes. When we were younger, we cruised around in our bikes. Now we are waiting for the day when we get our driver's licences. It would be a dream come true, if I could afford to buy my own car. (Young male, Pyhäjoki)

The access to services, such as a variety of free-time activities, cafes, fast-food chains, bars restaurants and shopping malls, is one continuously mentioned aspect by young people.

> Here we have great sports facilities, and it's all free of charge. We can give our children to all kinds of training here. This makes it easy to start life as a young family. (Young mother, working for Polyus Gold company, Niznhyi Kurannakh)

The company-sponsored sports facilities in town are indeed a pull-factor for Nizhnyi Kurannakh. According to company statistics, they counted almost 30,000 visits in the first half of 2018, at a total population of just 5300 inhabitants in town. A lot of the sports and hobbies is done through training in teams, which also enhances collectivity. This shows the benefits of having certain services close by to increase people's well-being. For the Finnish cases, young people need to travel long distances in order to satisfy their needs (also see Komu and Adams 2021). In Yakutia, travel in the region does not help. Differently from sports and hobbies, shopping malls and the quality of medical services were mentioned as so poor that they threaten well-being:

> You can't buy anything here, everybody looks the same, and everybody immediately knows from which shop you got your new dress. We try to buy everything during summer holidays. (Student, Neryungri)

The poorer medical services were more of a concern among youth who plan or already have small children. Some mentioned that they could not even give birth in their hometown and had to go to a bigger city for the imminent delivery. Further pressing health issues among some northern young people, in all our fieldsites, are extensive alcohol and drug abuse, mental problems, depression and different forms of violence. While we acknowledge and are aware of the problems, we restrain from dealing with such issues in this article as our focus is on well-being. In this respect, income facilitates well-being again, as people with an industry salary, as in our Russian cases, actually have the means to go to places with better healthcare for their needs. In smaller towns in the rural south of the country they would not be able to do so. This shows how we need to rely on empirical data from long-term fieldwork for understanding the nexus between economic and other determinants of well-being.

Our fieldwork shows that there is an expressed age-class bias in the perception of well-being among youth in our field sites. While the tendency of under 20-year-old youth is to move away because of a lack of activities and educational possibilities, the above 20-year-

olds who stay, mostly emphasise stability, opportunities for young families and good conditions for raising children. This is connected to the accessibility to work and income in both countries. Specifically, for northern industrial cities, the bottleneck in well-being is for teenagers, many of whom feel disadvantaged in comparison to their peers in big cities who have all the opportunities for activities, services and entertainment that they lack in the North. Even older youth in our conversations in Russia and Finland who value life in the North now, remember boredom during their teenage time.

Our Finnish – Russian comparison has shown that in both cases decision-makers could learn from each other's experiences. While patriotism in general has been on the rise in Russia for the last 20 years, its local form is a welcome opportunity for a northern industrial city to create attachment to place through group experiences among their youth – a factor that has been particularly emphasised in the existing works by Pilkington (2012, 2013, 2014). Patriotism for one's homeland is highly developed and valued in Finland as well, but its local form is currently not used much as a resource to create attachment of youth to their places in the North. Among Finnish youth the 'demand' for a collective pride and sense of belonging to their northern towns is also developing now, but still less than in the Russian cases, because group dynamics work very differently among youth of either country.

Discussion

Our research on the determinants of youth's well-being in our case cities shows three general key findings:

(1) Age matters: life-period is important for getting a more exact idea how each determinant of well-being possibly influences young people's decision-making for leaving or staying in a city. For example, while for younger youth entertainment and hobbies are more important (hence: hedonistic determinant of well-being), affordable quality housing determines youth well-being more during the life-period when they start thinking about leading an independent life (hence: eudaemonic determinant of well-being). The same goes for other determinants: Accessible diversity in education determines well-being while youth make decisions about choosing a profession. Availability of services and infrastructure in the cities matters while children are young and short distances to school, shop, kindergarten and hobby facilities save time and effort to access them. Correspondingly, such factors wake up from hibernation among those who value the North as a safe place for raising children.

(2) In spite of all similarities, a difference between the Russian and Finnish priorities for youth well-being we found was the prioritisation of collective approaches to well-being in Russia vs individual in Finland. We found that in the Russian cases more collective activities enhancing well-being were on offer than in the Finnish cases, and that young people actually make use of these offers for their own development. This is also due to the fact that in Russian society as whole, collectivism as an idea is still promoted as a high value, more so than in Finland. This became particularly obvious in the potential of access to nature and a clean environment: In Finland, Pyhäjoki and Kemijärvi youth expressed this as a source of individual mental well-being, while our partners in Nizhnyi Kuranakh and Neryungri emphasised the environment as an important space

for activities that they like to do in groups, such as picknicks, berry-picking, mushroom-ing, extreme sports, survival training, winter-sports and the like. The difference between the individual and collective also becomes evident in the urban settlement structures of our case cities: whereas in our Russian cases there is hardly any individual housing and everybody lives in apartment blocks, in the Finnish cases it is the opposite, which makes the cities much larger in territory relative to the population density there. This gives geo-graphic evidence of an individualist vs collectivist approach to urban communities between Finland and Russia, as has been argued before (Stammler and Sidorova 2015). We therefore suggest that the key for understanding well-being lies in the socio-cultural context and the relevance of the age-group.

(3) in spite of national and political differences, determinants of youth well-being are often the same across borders. We see this also as corresponding to the general findings by Martinez-Ferndandez's et al. (2012, 245) on the factors that influence life-styles: climate conditions, knowledge, education and health services, and transpor-tation links. They mention as distinctive feature of single-industry towns that on top of such general variables, changing company-policies 'ultimately define' urban development in what they call 'capitalist economies'. Our research with youth shows that such arguments are valid also in countries such as Russia that can be labelled post-socialist. Our research results therefore empirically confirm Gentile's (2018, 1140) postulate that the category of 'post-socialist' confines the theoretical capacity of urban research. Comparison of cases in the Russian and the Finnish North show that the relevant variables do not lie in the political organisation of a country but in other structural factors such as geography, industry life-cycles, human individual and collective preferences, and municipal and corporate policies.

Therefore, general variables constitute the background for human well-being in urban space, while our research reveals what are the socially and culturally embedded factors that determine the status of those variables as 'expressed' or 'hibernating'.

Conclusion

This paper contributes to ideas about the viable city in the industrialised North from the point of view of youth determining the future of pre-, industrial and post-industrial urban communities in the Arctic and Subarctic. We argued that such settlements thrive if young people see their better perspectives for their future than in bigger urban centres in the South of their respective countries, and therefore suggested youth well-being as impor-tant research topic of urban sustainability research. We have contributed to filling the research gap identified by Hollander (2018) on the positive sides of population decrease in cities, highlighting access to a clean environment and compact comfortable size and infrastructure as positive factors for youth well-being. Focusing on specific social determi-nants, our research has highlighted some of the criteria for people's well-being in particu-lar societies that Thin (2008, 36) identified as lacking for identifying the universals and diversities of the concept. In identifying such universals across the borders of the former iron curtain, we established that life-period and socio-cultural context contribute to influencing which of the determinants of well-being become significant and which remain dormant in a particular city and for particular people.

The question is, which indicators can be externally influenced in making such towns a good place for youth to stay, and what are the internal issues that every young person needs to deal with on an individual level. The individual is and will always be a principal subject in determining what well-being means in a particular urban environment. However, we have found that in Russia collectivism remains a crucial variable that shapes discourses and practices enhancing well-being. We have outlined common denominators that help us categorise preliminarily which indicators of youth well-being remain dormant and which become significant for particular people in particular places in particular periods of life.

To conclude, Arctic youth is a relevant group of research partners for contributing to concepts of viable urban communities in peripheral areas. Evidence about their well-being in smaller cities located in the circumpolar North shows that these places under-represented in urban research have not only disadvantages, but also several structural advantages that make them attractive as places for living of youth. While it is largely the same universals that determine well-being among Youth in the Arctic city, we caution against too coarse generalisations for this group. The same factor can function as a boost for youth well-being among one age group, while it works as limiting factor for another. In order to 'make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable' as stated in the 'United Nations Sustainable Development Goals' (2020) eleven, decision makers on national, regional and municipal level can learn more from their own young populations for making their cities attractive places to live, thrive and accomplish their dreams.

Note

1. All quotes translated by the authors from Russian and Finnish.

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