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To cite this article: Kirsti Stuvøy & Irina Shirobokova (2021): Multiscalar entanglements in the post-socialist city: monotown restructuring, spatial re-ordering and urban inequality in Russia, Eurasian Geography and Economics, DOI: [10.1080/15387216.2021.1944246](https://doi.org/10.1080/15387216.2021.1944246)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/15387216.2021.1944246>



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Published online: 21 Jul 2021.



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Multiscalar entanglements in the post-socialist city: monotown restructuring, spatial re-ordering and urban inequality in Russia

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ABSTRACT

Monotowns in Russia epitomize the mixed history of Soviet industrialized urbanization and post-soviet transformation. The 2007–8 global financial crisis magnified socio-economic problems in these cities. In spite of the deepened neoliberal urbanization observed across post-socialist cities and the global impetus of the crisis, monotowns were typically discussed within a national political framework. Our point of departure is that the monotown is an instructive site in which to explore the conundrum of global-local interconnections. To develop this argument, we conceptualize multiscalar entanglements as a base to combine analytical attention to subjective narratives with an interest in (global) structuring forces. We use this to empirically examine logics of spatial re-ordering in Russian monotowns in two analytical steps: First, we observe how federal policy introduced in response to the global crisis redefined monotowns from being territories of “crisis” and “risk” into those that offered spaces of development. Second, we focus on a particular study-site, the city of Zapolyarny and explain how the city-forming enterprise has initiated a reconstruction of the city. We find that the enterprise has reemerged as an urban governing body. In conclusion, we draw attention to emerging trends in urban inequality and insecurity constituted by these logics of spatial reordering.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 6 October 2020
Accepted 14 June 2021

KEYWORDS

Monotown; company town; multiscalar entanglements; post-socialist city; spatial reordering; urban everyday; inequality; insecurity

Introduction

The study of post-socialist urban reconstruction connects the radical social rupture that took place in the 1990s – and introduced processes of marketization and privatization across the global east – to specific socialist histories of urban development. The monotown¹ is a regional variant of the global phenomenon of the company town; it is shaped by relations between production and residence and epitomizes the mixed history of Soviet industrialized urbanization and post-soviet transformation. We use the term monotown to

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underscore the historical and regional anchoring of this urban form. During the 2007–8 global financial crisis, monotowns gained increasing political and academic attention due to aggravated socio-economic problems in such cities across Russia (Aron 2009; Crowley 2016). Monotowns are typically discussed within a national political framework and are marginal in debates on post-socialist urban developments. How global (capitalist) practices have manifested in post-socialist cities has been studied mostly by looking at developments in metropolises, emphasizing for example the internationalization of real estate, gentrification, and the commodification of urban space (Büdenbender and Golubchikov 2017; Badyina and Golubchikov 2005; Golubchikov and Phelps 2011). A “deepened neoliberal urbanization” (Büdenbender and Zupan 2017, 309) has been observed across these cities however, linking post-socialist urban change to global urban trends about making cities attractive and globally competitive – and also to a changing global landscape of uneven geographies of development and associated issues of urban inequality and insecurity (Sassen 1991, 2014; Curtis 2016).

This paper addresses urban reconstruction in monotowns and is concerned particularly with the conundrum of linking global capitalist forces to national histories and local agencies. Our point of departure is the observation that some approaches emphasize difference and unique empirical insights with less regard for a global perspective on post-socialist urban reconstruction. At the same time, other approaches emphasize structural dimensions and seek meta-narratives that can link post-socialist urban change to broader, global processes (Collier 2012; Büdenbender and Zupan 2017; Golubchikov 2016; Collier 2011, 26). Our aim is to intervene in this debate by conceptualizing multiscale entanglements as a means to address the interconnection of global and local scales, emphasizing that they are shaped and constituted relationally (Tsing 2005; Çağlar and Schiller 2018; Tsing 2000, 2015).² Empirically our analysis is focused on monotown restructuring in Russia and we identify logics of spatial re-ordering and discuss effects on urban inequality and insecurity.

The concept of multiscale entanglements draws attention to scalar practices that we argue are significant in bringing forth a more holistic and reflective understanding of contemporary urban reconstruction in monotowns. We present and discuss the concept of the monotown more below, but what is important to emphasize here is that, in our view, urban reconstruction in monotowns is a particularly interesting object of analysis for elaborating how multiscale entanglements expand the dominant national framework typically employed in analyses of Russian monotowns. The 2007–8 global financial crisis initiated a federal policy to address socio-economic risks in Russian monotowns. In the first step of our analysis, we identify how the federal policy measures introduced in response to the crisis, shifted the governance of monotowns in Russia. These policy measures redefined monotowns from being territories of “crisis” and “risk” into those that offered the development of mutual benefits for

political and business elites. The shift included an increased focus on investment strategies and the adoption of measures to make monotowns more conducive to global capital investments.

Our analysis found that the representation of monotowns in the government agenda illustrates how multiple agencies are involved in designing this particular spatial approach to urban reconstruction. The spatial ordering effect of this agenda is seen in how it locates some monotowns “off the map”, that is, outside of the designated territories for priority development (*territoriya operezhayushchego sotsial’no-ekonomicheskogo razvitiya*, in short TOR). The representation of monotowns as spaces of development induces competition, yet simultaneously it has exposed some monotowns as uncompetitive, not conducive to development and thus as unattractive to global capital.

In the second part of our analysis, we deepen the understanding of monotown restructuring by focusing on a particular study site, the city of Zapolyarny – a monotown located on the periphery of northwest Russia, approximately 50 kilometers from the border with Norway. For nearly three decades, this border-region has been host to a unique people-to-people exchange, the Barents-collaboration, but in recent years, particularly after the annexation of Crimea in 2014, the region has experienced militarization and increasing geopolitical tension. Zapolyarny hosts the company Nornickel, which inherited the nickel-production enterprise that motivated the founding of the city in the 1950s. In the 1990s, this city-forming enterprise (*gradoobrazuiushchee predpriyatie*) was privatized and soon emerged as a globally competitive nickel producer (Humphreys 2011). In recent years – and especially since 2015 – Nornickel has addressed Zapolyarny’s post-soviet state of degradation by funding various initiatives to revive the city, renew urban infrastructure, and expand services and well-being. A program called the “World of New Opportunities” – a company-based funding mechanism – was initiated to mobilize local initiatives and support entrepreneurship, with the aim of developing the urban economy.

Our analysis of urban reconstruction in Zapolyarny is based on field research conducted in 2019 and 2020, encompassing interviews and participation in seminars and events. To learn about city–industry relations and their effects on the city we conducted interviews with people in various relationships to the company (Nornickel). We also interviewed urban residents involved in the World of New Opportunities-program who self-identify as urban activists. The term “urban activism” was used by the participants in our research to describe their own practices, including a wide range of activities with multiple motives, personal interests and ideas, all informing the notion of “activism”. Some of the activists are current or former employees of the *kombinat*, which is the term used locally to refer to the enterprise. In addition to activists, our informants included employees – both men and women – who work in various technical and administrative professions in the company; in the mines and connected

workshops; city administrators, and urban residents who run informal business, e.g. garage-based auto mechanics; and street vendors. A total of 32 interviews were conducted, seven of which were group interviews.³

Protecting the privacy of research participants is particularly sensitive in such a small-town setting, and therefore all interviewees are anonymous, referred to by pseudonyms and with only some contextualization provided about the participants' roles and activities. Interviews were also conducted in Nickel, the neighboring town, and in Monchegorsk, which are both cities that belong to Nor Nickel's production system and are included in the urban restructuring program. Although the focus of the study is on Zapolyarny, we find that the relations between the cities are important in understanding the city's history and the ongoing urban restructuring.

Combining analyses of the federal monotown-policy and the "urban everyday" in our study site, we conclude that the company has reemerged as an urban governing body under the auspices of a new state-led development agenda that reiterates practices focused on global market integration. In the particular study site, we observed how urban everyday dynamics and local subjectivities are shaped as the city is re-coded as an entrepreneurial city, and labor is associated with individual initiative and risk-taking. As part of this urban reconstruction, we observed emerging trends in urban inequality and insecurity which constitute a form of spatial reordering.

Global urban transitions and multiscale entanglements: Broadening and deepening the approach to Russian monotowns

The monotown is a type of company town and draws attention to the role of the industrial enterprise in city life. Historically, the socialist monotown represented a particular way of thinking about social order, implemented through industrialized urbanization and the socialist planning economy. These societal structures unfolded in a range of local varieties in company control that defined the dynamics of the social order in particular socialist cities (Domanski 1997). Analyses of post-socialist restructuring of monotowns have emphasized that the decay of the centralized structures changed the extent of maneuvering space for companies in monotowns (Shomina 1992; Domanski 1997).

During the 1990s, monotowns were known as struggling cities, but it was the global financial crisis in 2007–8 that turned decay and insecurity into tropes for urban development in monotowns and attracted attention from academic and political actors. Several studies highlighted monotowns as posing a threat to the regime priorities of domestic stability and control (Crowley 2016; Zubarevich 2010; Fortescue and Rautio 2011). We depart from such a national framing of Russian social, economic, and political developments in monotowns, and introduce the concept of multiscale entanglements as approach to study global transitions with a spatial lens, focusing on reconstruction in monotowns.

The concept of multiscalar entanglements enables us to expand the perspective on reconstruction in monotowns by releasing it from the narrow framework of methodological nationalism that considers political and social processes within the domestic borders to be sufficient analytical tools (Çaglar and Schiller 2018). We follow Çaglar and Schiller (2018), who in their approach to urban restructuring aim “to address and capture aspects of social relations through which broader social forces enable, shape, constrain, and are acted upon by individuals”. This approach accentuates ways of seeing the city as a place of globalist projects, unfolding in the form of privatization, marketization and democratization (Chari and Verdery 2009). It links furthermore to Golubchikov’s (2016) explication of the centrality of the urban in “the spectacular post-socialist experience” as the stage where ideology mixes with the everyday. With the notion of urbanization of transition, he elaborates a global perspective on this experience in order to move away from the focus on implementation of area-based reforms to achieve transformation of the domestic social order.

The post-socialist experience, Golubchikov explains (2016, 608), is a totalizing project in which urban space is appropriated by capitalism. This unfolds in many ways, through privatization and commodification, investment practices, relocation and displacement, exclusion, segregation, and new ways of seeing space (Golubchikov 2016, 620). Approaching the post-socialist experience from a global perspective draws attention to how these various mechanisms appropriate urban space. These processes are complex and different agencies take shape and define global urban transitions. For example, Çaglar and Schiller (2018, 610) identify particular “city-makers”, including citizens, state and market institutions, as agencies “operating within unequal networks of multiscalar power.” In our approach to the study of contemporary urban reconstruction in Russian monotowns, the concept of multiscalar entanglements can interconnect global and local scales with multiple agencies and structures, including various “city-makers” and national policies.

We follow Tsing (2005), who explains that seeing global and local scales as dichotomous is not useful, since both are produced through contingencies and disruptions. Epistemologically, she draws attention to friction and openness in research, explaining that “we can investigate globalist projects and dreams without assuming that they remake the world just as they want” (Tsing 2000, 330). This point underscores the uncertainty involved in the unfolding of globalist projects and requires us to investigate how scale is constructed and constituted in social processes (Tsing 2005, 58–59; Çaglar and Schiller 2018, 7–8).

In regard to the post-socialist experience, Golubchikov, Badyina, and Makhrova (2014) have elaborated on spatial logics through which capitalism appropriates space. They refute the idea of socialist legacy as a hindrance to the transformation to so-called “proper capitalism”. Instead they explain that legacy

provided the infrastructure for capitalist practices to unfold. Absorbed by capitalism and alienated from “socialist ideological and institutional history” (Golubchikov, Badyina, and Makhrova 2014, 626), socialist legacy functions as an agency for the expansion of (neoliberal) capitalism in the post-socialist city. It reflects the operation of a form of spatial agency and is essential to how capitalist transition manifests itself and becomes visible in contextually specific entanglements in particular post-socialist cities. What enters into the purview of analysis is the notion of “multiscalar entanglements” that shape appearances and rhythms of the post-socialist city in various ways (Golubchikov and Phelps 2011, 428). Thus, the conceptualization of multiscalar entanglements allows us to focus analytical attention on spatial ordering logics and the ways in which they define the dynamics of urban reconstruction in monotowns.

We see multiscalar entanglements as a conceptual means to study practices of spatial ordering and to compare these experiences in monotowns with other locations (cf. Robinson 2016b).⁴ With this comparative framing, we situate our approach to the post-socialist city epistemologically within “theories from elsewhere” and highlight the problematic nature of contemporary knowledge production that reproduces the binaries of the Cold War (Chari and Verdery 2009, 9). For example, the conceptualization of the post-socialist city as being deviant from the “normal” city in the West is sometimes viewed as a way of perpetuating it in a “durable state of exception” (Gentile 2018, 1148). The post-socialist experience is often constructed to be compared against the “supposed normality of the ‘Western’ city” (Gentile 2018, 1140). Müller (2019, 538–544) explains that research, in which the post-socialist city is used as a testing ground for Western theories and concepts contributes to production of difference. One example is the study of suburbanization, in which the Western city is used as the norm against which developments in the post-socialist city are held up and assessed regarding their backlog or deviation (Wiest 2012, 834). Such emphasis on deviation or the need to “catch up” is counterproductive to the ambition of drawing on post-socialist experiences to design new frameworks and concepts and contribute to innovative urban theory (Ferenčuhová 2016; Sjöberg 2014, 310, 313). It reflects an extractivist view of knowledge production, in which the post-socialist city provides an empirical setting for theories produced elsewhere.

These concerns about representation and hierarchies in knowledge production draw on debates in postcolonial theory that reflect critically on Eurocentrism and the binaries employed in ordering the world and making it intelligible (Chakrabarty 2000; Chari and Verdery 2009, 11). By encouraging “thinking between the posts”, Chari and Verdery (2009, 12) explain that post-colonial and postsocialist studies together provide an impetus to study “geopolitical peripheries”. They provide insights into global power relations and transitions – e.g. market and democratic transitions. Exploring cities “off the map” is a means to facilitate “theorization through elsewhere” and this point of view enables experimentation with where and how to conduct studies of global

urban transitions (Robinson 2006, 2002, 2016b, 2016a). A main rationale for such an approach is that grounded, context sensitive analyses are attentive to difference, reflect on a multiplicity of experiences, and constitute a reflexive critique on generalized descriptions (cf. Roy 2011; Simone 2019). Fieldwork makes it possible to explore the heterogeneity, flexibility and dynamics of a place or an urban phenomenon and draw attention to particularities and stories that deviate from dominant narratives. Furthermore, recognizing the struggles that unfold in the “everyday” is a way to disrupt how we see the city and thus provides a basis on which to reflect on representation and the reproduction of dominant narratives.

The question is how to attend to particularities exposed through fieldwork and simultaneously identify structural factors. With regard to this conundrum, Çaglar and Schiller (2018, 11) explain that highlighting the uniqueness of each city’s everyday life is a typical – yet unsatisfactory – response to the critique against an exaggerated focus on structural explanations and neoliberalism. Golubchikov (2016, 609–610) also cautions against the tendency to pay too much attention to particularities in the form of idiosyncrasies of change. He argues that what is needed is to reflect critically on transition as a totality, as an “ideological hegemony”, and discuss what kind of meta-change becomes visible when studying urban reconstruction in post-socialist space.

Our conceptualization of multiscale entanglements is situated within these debates on the interconnection of particularities and generalizations, on how to understand local urban change in the context of global processes; and on reflections about what empirical analyses of particular urban developments expose about the ongoing meta-change. The concept of multiscale entanglements prove a base on which to combine analytical attention to experiences and subjective narratives of the urban everyday with an interest in (global) structuring forces and intersecting social relations. As we now move on with our analysis, we present first an empirical examination of the spatial ordering logic of the Russian government agenda on monotowns, followed in a second step by the case study of the “urban everyday” in Zapolyarny, where we draw attention to maneuvering spaces for local actors – city-makers – and the power relations in which they are embedded.

Spatial representation of monotowns in the government agenda

The global financial crisis in 2007–8 was an important trigger for the regulation and governance of monotowns in Russia. As industries struggled, people in monotowns came out to protest – in Pikalyevo and Tolyatti, among others – demanding that the city-forming enterprises respond to their demands to pay salaries that had been withheld (Crowley 2016, 400; Clément 2019, 159–160). It was as a result of the federal government’s direct involvement in calming some of these disruptive events, that policies targeting monotowns were introduced.

Notably, the problems experienced in monotowns were not new. They had emerged in Russia soon after the demise of the Soviet Union, as city-forming enterprises were closed in many places or withdrew from the provision of social services (Shomina 1992, 229, 231; Zubarevich 2010, 82). However, wide media coverage and state recognition of monotowns as problem areas – as “risk areas” and “dying” – appeared only after the global financial crisis (Didyk and Rjabova 2014). At that time, the domestic political context was showing signs of a looming legitimacy crisis. It is therefore understandable that monotowns were assessed in terms of how they might have constituted a threat to the regime priorities of domestic stability and control (Crowley 2016; Didyk and Rjabova 2014; Fortescue and Rautio 2011). Yet, instead of viewing monotowns within a domestic political lens, we emphasize the spatially productive power of the policies that were subsequently adopted toward monotowns. Our approach enables the identification of global trends within the particularities of this economic development policy on monotowns in Russia.

The crisis in monotowns in 2008 caused immediate reactions from then Prime Minister Vladimir Putin (2008–2012) as well as regional authorities, and state anti-crisis measures were soon adopted (Russian Government 2013). The Ministry of Regional Development was responsible for the measures, but from 2013 the responsibility switched to the Ministry of Economic Development. In 2014, a state program for the development of monotowns – the Monotown Development Fund – was established with the Ministry of Economic Development in charge, embarking on a more systematic approach to diversification of the economy. The shift of ministries signaled that the problem of monotowns had been scaled up from a regional level to the federal level, in order to address ongoing problems. The government made a list of 319 monotowns and divided them into three categories of socio-economic risk: “red” (high risk), “yellow” and “green” zones (Russian Government 2011; 2014). Among the criteria for measuring risk were economic growth rates, employment indicators, retail trade, turnover of small and medium-sized enterprises, the size of the housing stock, i.e. measured as the number of square meters per inhabitant, and the level of support received from the federal budget. Ninety-nine out of 319 monotowns were classified as “red”.⁵ In 2014, the criteria assessing risk levels were expanded to include assessment of the performance of the city-forming enterprise as well as residents’ estimation of the situation in the city (Russian Government 2011; 2014). This expansion of criteria demonstrates attentiveness to public sentiments of socio-economic development as an important vector in this policy landscape.

The Monotown Development Fund became the core instrument for the regulation and development of monotowns in subsequent years. To become recipients of the fund, municipal authorities in monotowns had to write comprehensive investment plans, known as CIPs (kompleksnyye investitsionnyye plany). Based on an analysis of socio-economic problems and risks, the CIP

was required to outline a plan to increase the attractiveness of the town for investment. The main conditions for successfully obtaining support from the fund were to identify at least one large investment project worth more than two billion rubles, and present plans to create industrial parks within the monotown territory (Russian Government 2013). In reality, only the more “prosperous” and attractive monotowns – which already had agreements with investors for specific business projects – had any chance of receiving funding. Crisis cities or remote towns could not compete for such investors, nor could their investment plans meet the criteria of attracting projects worth over two billion rubles (Vilegshanina 2011). The policy thus disfavored cities that were struggling more than others. In 2016, the Council for Strategic Development initiated a program called “Integrated Development of Monotowns” – under the president of the Russian Federation – to define targeted policy toward the 99 “red” monotowns experiencing the most difficult socio-economic situations. The implementation of the program was accompanied by multiple adjustments and changes that eliminated the emphasis on the most socio-economically disadvantaged towns. Instead, a broad eligibility criterion was applied on the basis of which all cities were included as being eligible to apply for funding (Accounts Chamber 2018).

The competition amongst monotowns for federal funds was thus broadened. This opened up space for local lobby groups to position themselves vis-à-vis the federal funding mechanism. It also meant that particularly struggling monotowns, which now had to face increased competition for funds, continued to struggle to meet the criterion of diversifying the economy. In other words, support for the main enterprise continued to be lacking. It was, however, recognized that this was particularly problematic for some cities, and the Ministry of Economic Development therefore made a list identifying 11 monotowns as being extremely marginalized (Kusznetsova 2019). These cities were classified as outside of the main government approach of designating “territories for priority development” – the so-called TOR approach that was introduced in the monotown policy in 2016.

The cities that were included in the TOR approach were expected to introduce tax breaks and simplify conditions for the entry of large and foreign capital into their urban territories. Since the state collects most taxes for redistribution, the tax breaks implied that the cities were left with less money. Even so, the TOR approach began to be called a “second breath for dying monotowns” (Levitan 2016) because it made cities more eligible for funding. However, there were some protests, as funding was funneled to cities with plans to open industries that are harmful to the environment or health (Dubin 2019; Isakova 2019). While the adjustments and differentiation according to needs showed a willingness to adapt and consider nuances in the program, the exclusion of the 11 marginal cities underscored the focus on competition and attraction of investor capital as being core to this spatial development strategy.

With TOR, the system of classifying monotowns also changed, and the traffic light system characterizing the degree of crisis was replaced with a filter. The filter is applied to a map, displayed on the fund's website, showing the existence of agreements on joint development between the fund and municipalities, co-financing of infrastructure development, and financing of investment projects. The map also illustrates the status of the territories included, with regard to the criterion of developing industrial parks. The change in policy priorities – from identifying risks to introducing financial instruments for urban development – thereby defined the new classification filter. In essence, it demonstrated a specific way of diversifying the economy through financial instruments. The TOR approach was, however, criticized by the federal Russian Accounts Chamber, which is tasked with monitoring the implementation of the government program for the integrated development of monotowns. The chamber reported that the program was ineffective, did not meet its goals and objectives, and failed to address the diversity of socio-economic aspects relevant to the objective of avoiding dependency on one industry (Accounts Chamber 2019).

Therefore, in 2019 a new program – “Development of monotowns 2020–2024” – was introduced that aims to diversify the economy through attracting investors and providing them with tax benefits as well as infrastructural support. Projects are required to ensure more than 30 jobs and financial investment amounting to at least 20 million rubles. For the period 2019–2024, this program provides funding from the state budget at the level of 57.3 billion rubles, supplemented by 143.8 billion rubles of private investment (Russian Government. 2020). This change further strengthens the emphasis on making monotowns attractive to (global) capital.

In these developments, we observe a turn from the image of “problem” and “dying” monotowns to territories for advanced economic development. The strategy focuses on creating a favorable investment climate that aims to transform monotowns into spaces of opportunity, with mutual benefits for political and business elites. The key state governing instruments – the comprehensive investment plans (KIP) and territories for priority development (TOR) – target institutional restructuring (such as tax breaks) and uses competition to mobilize cities to develop local projects aimed to attract (global) capital. Monotowns are encouraged to reform their local economies through fostering a culture of entrepreneurialism and developing flexibility in local governance systems (cf. Brenner and Theodore 2002). The spatial representation of monotowns interlinks global ideas about city restructuring through attraction of (global) capital, institutions for governing competition for federal funds and incentives for local activities. It shows that multiple agencies and scales are interconnected and create a powerful discourse of urban reconstruction in contemporary Russia.

In turning next to our study site Zapolyarny, we observe the emergence of the new spatial order that occurred after the crisis of 2008, which has advanced and been shaped more structurally since 2015 through implementation of the

World of New Opportunities entrepreneurship program. This project, as we explain, mobilizes multiple agencies in restructuring the urban economy, and reinforces how large-scale capital investment continues to hold a dominant position. To develop this argument analytically, we first address the making of Zapolyarny as a city, in order to historically contextualize the contemporary urban reconstruction, which we attend to in subsequent steps.

Zapolyarny and the unraveling of the socio-spatial order of a socialist monotown

The city of Zapolyarny was established in the mid-1950s and its name reveals its location: behind (*za-*) the polar circle (*polyarny*). Zapolyarny is located in the northwest corner of Russia, constituting a confined urban space in the midst of the surrounding landscape on a plateau of low forest, lakes, moss and heather. The nearest settlement is Nikel, which is approximately 30 kilometers away, to the west and toward the border with Norway. The distance from Zapolyarny to the Norwegian border is about 50 kilometers, and a visa-free regime eases cross-border travel for those living close to the border. In this border region, the Barents Euro-Arctic collaboration (BEAC) has (since its establishment in 1993) facilitated sport and cultural exchanges which have included, amongst other, the music school, youth and sports clubs in Zapolyarny. The region-building activities are viewed as an instrument for creating shared identity and trust (Hønneland 1998) and include also local authorities in exchanges aimed at mutual learning. Increasing geo-political and geo-economic attention is currently being paid to the Arctic region (Bruun and Medby 2014). For Zapolyarny, the “race to the Arctic” has showed itself in recent years in the form of improvements to regional infrastructure, in particular an upgraded federal highway, and as we shall see, the city itself is also undergoing fundamental change.

The establishment of Zapolyarny was part of the historical state-led expansion of industrialization of the Soviet Union. Rich deposits of nickel ore had been discovered in the area in 1921 by the Finns, who at that time controlled the Pechenga region in which Zapolyarny is situated. The Finns established a nickel factory in Nikel (called Kolosjoki in Finnish), but this production was interrupted by the Second World War. After the war, the area came under the sovereignty of the Soviet Union, and the plant was rebuilt and production restarted (Rowe 2020b).⁶ Production was soon expanded, due to the vast occurrence of nickel and other metals in the region (cobalt, gold, palladium), and thus the construction of the city of Zapolyarny was initiated in the mid-1950s.

In local narratives, the heroes of the city construction were, for many, the Komsomol – the youth organization of the communist party in the Soviet Union. The soldiers who were stationed in the area after the war contributed to the construction of the city. Amongst the many different settlers who arrived to build cities in the postwar period, some came to earn money, some escaped

from poverty in villages around the country, and others came for the adventure. In the climatic conditions of the north, it was urgent to build houses and move people and workers out of tents and into barracks, as well as for the nickel *kombinat* to restart its production. The result is visible to this day in Zapolyarny's housing structure which comprises various five-story and nine-story buildings that are typical of different phases of socialist city building. While expressive of social redistribution ideals, this construction created a monotonous urban landscape and remains a material symbol of the socialist socio-spatial order which today is undergoing considerable changes.

When Zapolyarny was established, the city became intertwined in the socialist state production system through the city-forming enterprise, Pechenganikel. The enterprise was set up in 1945 to run operations in Nickel and became part of the Soviet state system of metallurgy governance – the Mintsvetmet system (Ministry of Ferrous Metallurgy).⁷ Subordinated to a ministry, enterprises in monotowns were integrated into the centralized administration of the Soviet Union (Shomina 1992, 223). Such creation of new cities around industrial enterprises transformed collective life in the Soviet Union. With control of the social and physical urban environment, either of the entire city or of the city district connected to its facilities, the enterprise operated as landlord (Shomina 1992, 228). The cornerstone of this transformation was planning. As Collier (2011, 65) explains: “the entirety of collective life must be part of a plan: not just industrial production, but the people who work in industrial enterprises along with the apparatus required to meet their daily needs.” Key governing instruments in this planning approach were a focus on infrastructure and budgets (Collier 2011, 40). A city was required to fulfil the needs of its citizens and these needs were coded into “complexes” that were plugged into plans and budgets (Collier 2011, 83). The needs encompassed housing, communal services (heating, electricity, etc.), urban transportation, communication, trade, cafés, education, health facilities, culture, and social protection (Collier 2011, 95).

In Zapolyarny, there was in addition a northern compensation scheme, which included paid vacations to company resorts, longer vacation periods, earlier retirement, and relocation support when retiring. As a northern monotown, Zapolyarny became attractive in this way, in spite of its remote location – even though it was typically perceived as a place for working, not for living.⁸ The planning system and its intertwinement of industrial production and urban life represented “a socialist conception of space” (Morris 2016, 16) and defined the monotown as a regionally specific form of the global phenomenon of company town (Borges and Torres 2012).

With the demise of the Soviet Union, a disentanglement of connections between the city-forming enterprise and the socialist community unfolded and was a source of great contention (Shomina 1992, 229; Domanski 1997). In Zapolyarny, the leadership of the city-forming enterprise changed, and the company was later renamed Nornickel. As part of a loans-for-shares deal –

a financial instrument through which oligarchs could obtain assets during the 1990s,⁹ Vladimir Potanin of the Oneximbank established control of Nor Nickel (Fortescue and Rautio 2011, 841).¹⁰ The company was thus relieved of responsibility for providing public services, as municipal and oblast institutions took over these tasks (Rowe 2020b, 110). In effect, the relations between the company, the oblast and municipal administration changed as part of market reforms.¹¹ The intertwining of the urban everyday and industrial production changed, implementing new ways of governing with effects on the subjectivity of urban residents.

Recalling memories of the crisis years of the 1990s, an interviewee remembered the lack of support from the *kombinat* at the time:

[D]uring the crisis [in the 1990s] there were wage delays. And only in the region, from the state, the administration, not the *kombinat*, were salaries paid regularly. It got smaller, but it was paid regularly. Since my husband worked in the *kombinat*, I did not experience it personally. (...) Well, they were paid irregularly, their salaries were delayed, and I had to work three jobs. (Valentina, Zapolyarny, 11 February 2020)

In the above quotation, Valentina – to whom we return to later in her role as a city activist – describes the typical experience of wage arrears and how people responded by taking on more jobs. The *kombinat* did however develop an emergency measure, by inventing a local currency called Peschenjushki. This involved vouchers that could be traded for food and other goods. The vouchers could also be used for travel to company resorts in southern Russia. The dissolution of the socialist socio-spatial order was thus responded to in creative ways, and this happened not only in Zapolyarny but was typical in other monotowns as well. The ways in which the spatial order in monotowns was revamped, we argue, was defined by multiscale entanglements that shaped the logics of local orders.

A significantly changed entanglement came with the privatization and market reforms of the 1990s, through which city-forming enterprises disentangled themselves from nonprofit(able) activities in the cities as they integrated into global market relations. In the Soviet period, the city-forming enterprise in Zapolyarny had primarily supplied the domestic market, in particular the Soviet defense industry (Fortescue and Rautio 2011, 837). During the following decade, the export orientation of the industry became an important source of income, but also of vulnerability to price fluctuations in its main asset, nickel.¹² While in 2008 the price of nickel peaked at 75,000 USD per ton, in February 2009 it was 9,000 USD per ton (Rowe 2020b, 140). In March 2020, as the global covid-19 pandemic developed, the price again plummeted to that level, and has risen as of March 2021 to around 15,000 USD per ton (tradingeconomics.com).

The city-forming enterprise Nor Nickel is today one of the world's largest nickel producers and with increasing profits during the 2000s, expectations emerged with regard to modernization of the company, particularly

pertaining to environmental damage to the areas surrounding its production sites. As early as the 1980s, the proximity of northwest Russia to the Norwegian border had stirred environmental concerns amongst activists in Norway, who criticized the “death clouds” coming from the nickel plants across the border. Describing the landscape around the nickel-producing cities as a “sulphurous desert” and life in the cities as “human suffering under a toxic spell” (Rowe 2020b, 49), the nickel industry in northwest Russia became part of Norway’s political agenda and a joint environmental commission was set up in 1988. As the Soviet Union dissolved, Norway developed a strategy to subsidize improvement and clean-up of the nickel production process, in effect, including the company Pechenga Nickel in the Norwegian state budget (Rowe 2020b, 80). The aim was to modernize nickel production and release the region of its environmental hazards, but this became difficult to implement. Due to the lack of progress, calls were made to stop Norway’s financial commitment to support the company’s modernization, but it was not until 2010 that Norway withdrew its commitment and demanded repayment.¹³ Nornickel subsequently repaid almost 47 out of the 48 million NOK that Norway had provided in the form of subsidies for modernization (Rowe 2020b, 142). The ecological problem was not solved, yet it was clear that Nornickel had the financial strength to fund its own reconstruction.

In recent years, Nornickel’s supply of nickel for the production of batteries for electric vehicles has increasingly exposed the company to global ecological concerns about mining, thus questioning the “green credentials” of the business (Njaa 2018, 8). In this context of growing green consciousness, environmental depletion is a potential threat to the company’s global competitiveness. Since 2016, Nornickel has spoken out about its environmental responsibility, including the availability of know-how to solve problems of heavy metal waste and sulfate emissions (Njaa 2018). The company leadership is addressing technological change to clean up the industry. The government has also put pressure on the company to meet environmental standards, by for example linking production licenses to the company’s commitment to environmental protection of its places of production – places in which they are also expected to take responsibility for social development (Fortescue and Rautio 2011, 843, 845). Thus, expectations on the company to take social responsibility in the urban communities in which it is present have emerged in parallel with the government reinvention of monotowns as spaces for development and investment, as discussed in the previous section. These expectations, which bring back memories of the socialist past, unfold in context of new global market entanglements for the enterprise.

In Zapolyarny, residents have expressed appreciation for the new role of the company in urban reconstruction. The renewed involvement of the city-forming enterprise is tangible and visible in upgrades to urban infrastructure. For

example, new playgrounds, workout spaces and benches are upgrades that are the result of collaboration between municipal authorities, with Nornickel funding. The company's efforts have also included participatory techniques to incorporate the views of urban residents. Speaking to *kombinat* workers, urban activists and others, we heard how residents have observed changes in how the company is involved in the city, focusing on how in the past, everything was dependent on the city-forming enterprise. Today the city is more independent and relations with the *kombinat* are evolving:

"Now we are turning out like this: the city has more independence, and the *kombinat* provides targeted support to the initiative of citizens. And probably, in my opinion, this is correct" (Viktoriya, Zapolyarny, 10 February 2020).

The above quotation illustrates how local residents reflect on contemporary urban changes and how their opinions are shaped by new forms of entanglements between the company and the city. This makes empirical investigation of monotowns from the viewpoint of everyday urban experiences attractive, as the views of residents incorporate reflections on past experiences, contemporary urban reconstruction, political, economic and social dynamics in the city and regional and global influences. In essence, societal change is mediated and given meaning in the everyday. Our next step therefore is to analyze the company's changing approach to urban governance and to investigate more subtle changes in relations between the enterprise and urban residents.

The project economy: defining a new urban rhythm

The "project economy" emerged during the last decade as Nornickel announced calls for projects in Russian cities in which the company has production plants. After an introductory testing period, such calls have been announced under the program name "World of New Opportunities". This name signals an optimistic, future-oriented perspective and represents a developmental gaze that is comparable to the socialist city's ambition for a new collective life. Amongst its unintended effects, the project economy also exposes trends in urban inequality. As we shall see, a mixture of market ideology and ideas about individual entrepreneurship as core strategies for community building, shape the spatial practices that define this program as an urban governance instrument. In the following we present the findings of our study in the form of interviews conducted with project administrators and urban activists. A caveat at this stage is that the Nornickel-funded development program we analyze emerged gradually throughout the last decade. It is not to be understood as an implementation of the monotown development policy we analyzed above. Our analysis demonstrates however how a company-based program unfolds along similar principled ideas and logics as those we identified in the state development agenda for monotowns.

The core ambition of the World of New Opportunities-program is to develop local community across the cities in which the company focuses its activities, including Zapolyarny, Nickel, Monchegorsk, Chita and Norilsk. Urban residents are encouraged to bring their ideas and contribute to building “a shared responsibility for quality of life”, explains Inga, a Nornickel representative of the project administration (Interview 24 February 2020). The project administration, located in Monchegorsk, provides information and consultation on selection criteria and project design. Urban activists prepare proposals within various categories – such as one-year projects on social entrepreneurship, for which they can receive grants, or three-year social-oriented business initiatives, for which they can receive an interest-free loan from the company. Civil society organizations and “budget organizations” (i.e. municipal entities funded through the state budget) are both eligible for program funding. The enterprise organizes an annual call (announced in October¹⁴) and provides a support structure for potential applicants; the applications are assessed by review boards before a final decision is reached by the company leadership in Moscow (Inga, 24 February 2020). These practices operate as structuring forces that ensure self-governing processes for the urban activists.

In addition to providing support for specific projects, the project administration has created a network amongst the activists and organizes various outreach events, seminars and training opportunities to support interaction and exchange. In this way, Nornickel’s project economy nurtures a particular culture of entrepreneurship and mobility, focused on urban development across the territories in which the program operates. In Zapolyarny, the funding has supported a variety of urban initiatives, including activities for children and youth, support to families with many children, and establishing a children’s equipment store, a café, a private health clinic, and more. Urban activists involved with projects and applications express an identity of active citizenry focused on developing their ideas, contributing to community building and being personally willing to take on responsibilities and associated risks. For some activists, the possibility of making economic profit from running a social business also provides motivation. Such entrepreneurship makes them stand out as being original, as risk takers, and representatives of an identity distinguished from the security of a job at the *kombinat*. For some, involvement in an urban project is a supplement that they engage in during their spare time, thus providing a break from their work at the *kombinat*. In this sense, the project economy fosters urban activism widely across the citizenry in Zapolyarny. However, the loan-granting practice appears also as a dependence-producing practice and exposes the governmentality built into the project economy.

Since activists apply for projects not as individuals but as representatives of an organization, it is necessary to register as a juridical entity to be eligible for funding. In response to this requirement of the project economy, Zapolyarny

has experienced the emergence of new, formalized civil society organizations. Civil society has become a key target group for the company, since this group facilitates interaction with the urban community through various outreach events. Local residents in Zapolyarny can expand their social capital by participating in such events organized by the World of New Opportunities-program. In seminars for grant recipients, urban activists present their own work and are brought into contact with those from other cities which also belong to Nornickel's production system. In various project-related activities, including seminars and training sessions (master classes), activists build their own competence as well as their peer networks. They explain that these activities provide knowledge, experience and new friends, thus constituting attractive practices through which they can experience personal satisfaction and self-development. In these events, the city is seen as a developmental space, a participatory and inclusive space in which activists celebrate project successes. It is also a competitive space, as explained by a company representative who describes competition as being the core principle for a societal order aiming to achieve (urban) development and change in monotowns:

In order to change the system that has been built over the years, it was decided [by the company] to encourage competition. This is because competition is the mechanism that creates the opportunity to gather resources from a high number of possible fund recipients according to certain conditions. There are transparent rules and a clear understanding of what the company is ready to support, and if the interests of the company and the wishes and interests of the local community representatives coincide, then we can [provide funding]. (...) In general, the economy is the engine of progress. At the same time, we emphasize that we do not support all entrepreneurs, but only those who work on social problems (Inga, 24 February 2020).

The funding mechanism expands the urban economy by investing capital and furthering mutual interests between the company and the local (urban) community, thereby also shaping particular urban identities formed by new ways of interacting with the company. Some activists are aware of the competitive and market-oriented nature of the program and argue that Nornickel produces activists who are "grant-eaters". Others describe themselves as new pioneers, or as new Komsomol members, reflecting the Soviet legacy of city building and collective responsibility for urban space.

The particular emphasis on social needs in the project economy is understood by activists as a broad and flexible category. For them, it encompasses the provision of support to any "social business that develops the city". With this focus on social issues, Nornickel situates itself within the same realm as socially oriented civil society organizations (e.g. nonpolitical NGOs) that conduct state-supportive activities in Russia (e.g. Cook and Vinogradova 2006; Gilbert 2016; Tarasenko 2018). One activist reflects on these links:

The *kombinat* has this grant competition – ‘World of New Opportunities’ [for] about ten years. Well, firstly, the state reacts very adequately and positively to all these social [initiatives], the charitable activities of large enterprises. It is beneficial for them from the point of view that the state notices, and the enterprise receives some bonuses. Plus, it is also beneficial because the money that is allocated through grants is not taxed. That is, this is also a plus (Bogdan, Zapolyarny, 8 February 2020).

The above quotation underscores how mutual interests between business and state are a basis of the project economy, providing it with legitimacy in both arenas. The project economy also expands into domains that were previously state domains and blurs public – private boundaries. This is illustrated by project economy investments in social services – for example, in Zapolyarny a private health clinic was established with support from the World of New Opportunities program. In addition to funding the project of setting up this clinic, the company pays for its workers to use the clinic, thereby adding to the benefits associated with a job at the *kombinat*. Others have to continue to rely on the public health service if they are not able to afford the fees of private health institutions.

The links between the project economy and the municipality are carefully observed and reflected on by urban activists. For example, as one activist explains:

Social projects probably don’t directly influence the [urban] economy. They perhaps influence it indirectly in the way that the municipality can pay less attention to this sphere because it is being replaced by projects, and it [the municipality] supports all projects because it is in their interest too (Bogdan, Zapolyarny, 8 February 2020).

Pointing to the mutual interest between the municipality and the city-forming enterprise within the social sphere, the above quotation draws attention to marketization and privatization within the welfare sphere. These broader processes unfold in the Zapolyarny context through a formal entanglement between the *kombinat* and municipal politics – the position as mayor is a voluntary one and the mayor is an employee at the *kombinat*. The monotown thereby emerges as a depoliticized space for the city-forming enterprise to define and expand its role.

True to its social approach, the project economy funds initiatives that address urban inequalities. Investigating various project activities, one discovers how the project economy also exposes existing inequalities, including the role of the company in producing them. For example, in Zapolyarny, support has been granted to a humanitarian center that provides material support to families with many children, including clothing, sports gear and medical equipment. When analyzing those in need of such support, it becomes clear that these are not families with employment at the *kombinat* (since the *kombinat* workers are safe and secure):

Families that are in crisis and who turn to us [have] parents [who] do not work at the kombinat. These are parents, who are somewhere in military units or do not work at all. Because at the kombinat workers receive a decent salary, and they do not need such help (Valentina, Zapolyarny, 11 February 2020).

Thus, the *kombinat* workers have a societal position of economic security compared to many other urban residents.

The project economy deals with such disparities through charity, which typically provides situational support, not focused on long-term or structural change. Charity work is dominated by women, which leads us to consider how the project economy draws attention to gender dynamics in the labor market. Entrepreneurship is a rather precarious possibility in the urban economy, and in Zapolyarny, women experience a structural powerlessness in this regard. The reflections of two women – who both have an employment history at the *kombinat* – illustrate such gender dynamics. Dina, who quit her job at the kombinat when she had a child and now has a new job, explains her struggle to find a new job:

The creation of new jobs is quite problematic in our city, and it is quite difficult at the moment to acquire a job at the factory, in particular for women. Because in the factory most of the jobs are somehow male professions, and women in the city ... can for example, work in the municipal organs, and if you can get a job there you don't move anywhere (else), the positions are not vacated. You can get a job in a shop, but some don't want that, and then there is a shift schedule, which is difficult with children (Valentina, Zapolyarny, 11 February 2020).

Inessa explains the gender dynamics in the workplace:

Mostly men work for us now. We have seventy-two people at our site, only twelve of them are women. The rest are all men. This work is very hard. Not for women. We are, of course, coping with this. Where else can we go? But the bosses, of course, say this job is not for women. And they are trying to remove the women. They need men's hands (Inessa, Zapolyarny, 9 February 2020).

Sharing such experiences, women expose the structural discrimination in the labor market, and also reflect on another significant trend in the urban economy – the compartmentalization of Nornickel into subsidiary companies. This affects both men and women, who may then have to seek alternative opportunities within the urban economy. Men seek opportunities in the informal economy, such as refurbishing garages, fixing cars or conducting other mechanical tasks. The informal economy also offers opportunities for women, such as in the (home-based) beauty industry (e.g. hair, nail and eyebrow treatments). Overall, compartmentalization of the company causes the safe and secure *kombinat* jobs in the city to be more precarious, reducing compensation and benefits associated with employment.

For urban activists, the project economy offers a relational and entangled existence, one in which new ideas, new collaborators and new opportunities (as expressed in the program name) become part of the urban everyday. The

environmental ruin of the city's surroundings can even be addressed and co-opted by the project agenda, for example, by including projects that aim to convert Zapolyarny into an eco-city. The electric car chargers in front of the hotel – funded by the Norwegian environmental foundation Bellona – symbolize this move toward the green economy, which also undergirds Nornickel's ongoing restructuring. The project economy is associated with a future-oriented gaze, as activists strive to develop and improve urban life, creating more opportunities through self-activation. The enterprise, whose ambitions are to optimize and green its production in context of global market forces, exerts its power in subtle ways alongside the closure of production facilities, such as in the town of Nikel, and in the modernization of production in Zapolyarny.

For the *kombinat* workers, the concern about living in environmental disturbance is eased by earning high salaries. Furthermore, the Arctic environment offers opportunities for an active outdoor life, for berry and mushroom picking, fishing and recreation. The links to the *kombinat* extend from monetary support to the project activities that create a network of urban activists that help to shape the new collective agenda of improving quality of (urban) life. The company representative explains:

It is important to us, we understand, the *kombinat* understands, that in monotowns – there is a kind of dependence on an enterprise around which everything exists. At the same time, company employees are urban residents (*zhiteli goroda*) after 17:00. And the quality of life they receive when leaving the enterprise, influences their morale, their satisfaction with the quality of life, how diverse their leisure time is, and the kind of medical services they receive. We understand that these are links to the same chain (Inga, 24 February 2020).

The project economy changes the city into an exposition window for the company, one that exposes the effects of the enterprise on urban reconstruction. While in the past, entanglements between the *kombinat* and the city were the norm, today the project economy is making visible to residents the influence of the *kombinat* on urban reconstruction. The influence is exposed through the frequent posters of the company logo around the city, but as we have shown, the project economy also, albeit unintentionally, exposes emerging inequalities in the urban economy.

Conclusion: Rethinking monotowns in terms of multiscalar entanglements

This paper has conceptualized multiscalar entanglements and employed this approach to empirically deepen the understanding of monotown restructuring in post-socialist Russia, whilst simultaneously broadening our understanding of global urban transitions. We have argued that monotowns in Russia are approached too narrowly with an analytical focus that is restricted to domestic

concerns with political stability. To move beyond this perspective, we have engaged with debates on the post-socialist city and within post-colonial theory pertaining to grounded, empirical analysis in cities and theorization “from elsewhere”. The concept of multiscale entanglements has provided a means to engage analytically with broader, global processes that are at play in urban reconstruction, becoming visible in the form of spatial representation and ordering.

We exposed spatial practices of reordering in two steps. In the first step, we analyzed the federal response to the global financial crisis in 2007–8 and its effects on the socio-economic conditions in monotowns. We highlighted the discursive effects of these policies in the spatial reconfiguration of monotowns from spaces of “risk” and “crisis” into those fostering development that is conducive to global capital accumulation. We illustrated that multiple agencies are involved in shaping this spatial reordering and found that the state-business interlinkages enforce a powerful effect on spatial ordering. Furthermore, we argued that the contemporary development approach to Russian monotowns has consequences in the form of marginalizing cities that are struggling the most. Those cities that are not expected to be able to attract sufficient funding that would lead to state support, become in effect marginalized – and we would argue that they are in danger of becoming new “extreme urban margins” in Russia. Attending to such “off the map” places, we draw attention to outcomes of geopolitical peripheralization processes and further analysis seems to us a necessary step in the study of ongoing transition processes and global-local reordering. The multiscale entanglements-approach that we utilize in this paper is especially relevant for studying such processes both within Russia as well as pertaining to other “places from elsewhere” that experience similar trends.

In the second step, our analysis focused on the monotown of Zapolyarny and was grounded in the “urban everyday”. We revealed that the urban project economy reflects global ideas of development enshrined in the federal policy of the monotown development fund, emphasizing competition, entrepreneurialism and attractiveness to capital. We found that the World of New Opportunities program is reconstructing the urban agency of the city-forming enterprise. Fostering links to new parts of the urban community, Nornickel is building a new civil society that they themselves have mobilized. By offering training sessions, seminars and other educational services, the project economy introduces new opportunities that are there for people to grasp by harnessing their personal talents (cf. Tsing 2015, 280). In this “world of new opportunities”, the logic of competition and the encouragement of citizens’ creativity and entrepreneurial spirit nurtures a particular kind of subjectivity. By providing opportunities such as networking with like-minded people elsewhere, activists are mobilized to pursue the opportunities offered by the project-format. The dominant ideals in the project economy focus on an entrepreneurial and competitive

subjectivity – what Golubchikov (2016, 609) describes as key characteristics in the experience of (global) societal change in the post-socialist city. In the coming years, these transformations will further define developments and change the company's agency vis-à-vis urban residents.

Focusing on the urban everyday, our analysis addressed local views and perspectives on the effects that materialize from these transformative processes. Empirically this appeared in how citizens situated themselves in relation to the power exerted by the enterprise by experimenting with various activities in civil society. We explained how trends of informalization, e.g. the garage economy, illustrate that local agencies may become disenfranchised. The tendency toward compartmentalization of the company into subsidiaries affects hiring practices, salaries, social benefits, and gendered employment structures in Zapolyarny. Our analysis thus exposed trends in urban marginality, such as disparities between *kombinat* workers and the rest of the workers, and how gendered power structures inform urban inequalities. These changes induce uncertainty – an uncertainty that has become naturalized as part of contemporary neoliberal capitalism.

We conclude that the ongoing urban reconfiguration in Russia is contributing to new forms of marginality through a complex set of entanglements that simultaneously alter state-citizen relations. This raises critical questions for research and policy with regard to the materialization of contemporary urban reconstruction in post-socialist monotowns. Our analysis has shown how spatial ordering practices are intrinsic to government strategies and that global urban transitions shape socio-spatial re-ordering in the everyday dynamics of monotown development. The issue of restructuring in Russian monotowns is therefore not a narrow domestic issue, but one that interlinks with broader debates on urban reconstruction, inequality and global development.

Notes

1. We use the term “monotown”, a calque of the Russian term *mono-gorod*. In the Russian government's technical definition, a monotown is a city which hosts a company responsible for 50% of the municipality's industrial production, or in which 25% or more of the population is employed by one company (Zubarevich 2010, 467). While it is typically noted that the term monotown lacks a common definition (Strange 2019: 15), our point is that the term is a policy instrument, which is elaborated upon in this paper.
2. We acknowledge extended debates on scalar politics (Smith, 1984, 1992) as relevant.
3. We interviewed a total of 40 people, of which 23 were conducted with women and 17 with men. Interviews were conducted in Russian by the authors and subsequently transcribed verbatim in Russian. Data analysis was conducted using MaxQDA. All translations into English are by the authors. The majority of the interviews were conducted in Zapolyarny, with a smaller number in Nikel, Murmansk and Monchegorsk.
4. Although not a main objective, this study of monotown development can contribute to placing the post-socialist experience in a comparative context with the global

phenomenon of company towns and changing relations between state institutions and the market across such urban contexts (Borges and Torres 2012, 3–4).

5. The number of monotowns has fluctuated. This list included 319 cities and deviated from previous reports that varied between 467 and 335 cities (Zubarevich 2010, 84–85). This variation should be read in a political sense, in that certain municipalities were denied access to policy instruments and funding. As we shall see, company restructuring is unfolding in Zapolyarny with a growing number of subsidiary companies in the city. The restructuring has an impact on the criteria for classifying monotowns because it reduces the number of municipal residents working in one company.
6. Finnish and Soviet claims to control of the area are explained and discussed by Rowe (2020b, 18ff.). In 1944, Finland signed an agreement with the Soviet Union (Ibid., 47).
7. Pechenganikel became an enterprise in the Mintsvetmet system on 22 June 1945 and was recognized by official decree in 1947 as one of nine enterprises in the Soviet metallurgical industry that provided the socialist state with nickel (Rowe 2020b, 82).
8. The number of inhabitants in Zapolyarny grew steadily . After its establishment in 1955–57, Zapolyarny had 3791 inhabitants in 1959; 21,172 in 1979; and 23,564 in 1989. In the post-socialist period, there has been a steady decline in the population, with recorded numbers of inhabitants at 18,640 in 2002 and 15,825 in 2010 (Rosstat). The number of inhabitants in Zapolyarny has been stable in recent years at approximately 15,000, and most importantly, many residents note, it is not a “dying city”. Many consider the neighboring town of Nikel to be a “dying city” since Nornickel is in the process of shutting down part of its production there and people are moving out.
9. With the loans-for-shares system, commercial banks loaned money to the state, which was struggling with budget deficits that could not be covered by merely printing money. The loans-for-shares system provided the state with sought after money, but if it defaulted on repaying the loans, the state would lose the shares and thus ownership of the (industrial) asset. Typically, oil, gas and metallurgical companies were used by the state for this type of financing. Oneksimbank was one of the largest receivers of benefits from this system, as they earned ownership of close to 40% of the shares in the nickel company for 170 million USD (Foek 2008).
10. Potanin established company control in a partnership with Mikhail Prokhorov, who left in 2008 after being arrested on bribe allegations. He sold his shares to Oleg Deripaska of Rusal (an aluminum company), who was involved in the debacle around Pikalyovo in 2008. The relationship between Potanin and Deripaska was conflictual (Fortescue and Rautio 2011, 842), and was decided in Potanin’s favor in a London court in 2018 (see also Bond and Levine 2001, 78).
11. As part of this change, the oblast administration bought 10% of the shares in Kolskaja GMK (Rowe 2020b, 110).
12. For example, the financial crisis in Asia from 1997 reduced world demand and prices. When Norilsk Nikel began exporting to the west, prices declined due to increased supply during most of the 1990s (Bond and Levine 2001, 84).
13. Finnish and Swedish consultants were involved in providing Nornickel with suggestions on how to modernize the production and reduce environmental hazards (Rowe 2020b).
14. See, for example, the call announced in fall 2020: <https://www.nornickel.ru/sustainability/society/world-of-new-opportunities/> accessed 19 September 2020.

Acknowledgments

This work was supported by the Norwegian Research Council, project number 287967. The project “*Urban Margins, Global Transitions: Everyday Security and Mobility in Four Russian Cities*” (2019-2023) is a collaborative project between the Department of international environment and development studies, Noragric, at the Norwegian University of Life Sciences in Norway and the Centre for Independent Sociological Research in St. Petersburg, Russia. We wish to thank our project collaborators and the anonymous reviewers for their valuable feedback. We are grateful to all the research participants for giving their time to share experiences and insights with us.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Funding

This work was supported by the Research Council of Norway [287967].

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