



Norwegian University
of Life Sciences

Master's Thesis 2022 30 ECTS

Faculty of Landscape and Society (LANDSAM)

After Nickel: A Multiplicity of Perspectives on the Urban Transformation in Nikel, Russia

Elina Turbina

International Relations

The Department of International Environment and Development Studies, Noragric, is the international gateway for the Norwegian University of Life Sciences (NMBU). Eight departments associated research institutions, and the Norwegian College of Veterinary Medicine in Oslo. Established in 1986, Noragric's contribution to international development lies in the interface between research, education (Bachelor, Master, and PhD programmes), and assignments.

The Noragric Master theses are the final theses submitted by students in order to fulfill the requirements under the Noragric Master programme 'International Environmental Studies', 'International Development Studies' and 'International Relations'.

The findings in this thesis do not necessarily reflect the views of Noragric. Extracts from this publication may only be reproduced after prior consultation with the author and on the condition that the source is indicated. For rights of reproduction or translation contact Noragric.

© Elina Turbina, August 2022

turbinaelina@gmail.com

Noragric, Department of International Environment and Development Studies

P.O. Box 5003 N-1432 Ås, Norway

Tel.: +47 64 96 52 00

Internet: <http://www.nmbu.no/noragric>

Declaration

I, Elina Turbina, declare that this thesis is a result of my research investigations and findings. Sources of information other than my own have been acknowledged and a reference list has been appended. This work has not been previously submitted to any other university for the award of any type of academic degree.

Signature

Date: August 15, 2022

Acknowledgments

I would like to express gratitude towards my supervisor, Associate Professor Kirsti Stuvøy for patiently guiding me through this process, and kindly providing helpful feedback and information that enriched my understanding of the topic of my thesis. I extend my gratitude to Habitat Norway for supporting my research with a master thesis grant.

I would also like to thank the participants of the study for agreeing to share their experiences. Similarly, I would like to express my gratitude towards the Editor-in-Chief of The Barents Observer, Thomas Nielsen, for insights which informed my background research into the study

During the lengthy period of work on this thesis, I have received immense amount of support from my friends, colleagues, family, and even some strangers. I would like to thank everyone who has assured me to keep going, especially my thesis writing group from U402. Your confidence in my abilities and the coffee you have brewed have been deeply appreciated. I would specifically like to thank Ali, Kenisha and Janne for helping me out with proofreading.

I would also like to thank Coop Extra for constantly giving discounts on instant noodles. Globalization has given some benefits to our life after all.

Any errors and shortcomings in this study are mine alone.

Abstract

Globalization processes have had a major impact on the development of the global political economy, and the role cities have in it as actors reshaping the international community. This thesis follows an urban transformation of a monotown called Nikel, Russia, which is undergoing an urban transformation due to the closure of its main production site. I examine the changes Nikel is going through by drawing on the efforts of those actors who are conducting the change and the experiences of those who witness the change firsthand – the inhabitants of Nikel.

The study uses the post-socialist city concept as a theoretical background, arguing that the settlement is developing with an intent to become capitalist through different levels of transitory processes. It uses qualitative content analysis of strategies and policies of different state and non-state actors which decide the development of Nikel, and semi-structured interviews with inhabitants of Nikel about their experiences with the change.

Through an analysis of documents that establish the development processes for Nikel, and the comparison of them to the reflections of inhabitants, I come to the conclusion that the urban transformation of Nikel has had shortcomings, some of which are directly related to covid-19 and the current tense international political climate. The inhabitants support the transformation only partially, finding the developments positive but insufficient and uncomprehensive. The transformation of Nikel adds to the picture of globalization across different contexts, in this case – the post-socialist monotown context.

Keywords: International Relations, Nikel, the post-socialist city, monotown, Russia, Norway, Kirkenes, urban development, Nornickel, covid-19

Abbreviations

CEO – Chief Executive Officer

Covid-19 – Coronavirus disease 2019, SARS-CoV-2

INCO – International Nickel Company of Canada

IR – International Relations

MMC – Metallurgical Mining Company

NOK – Norwegian Krone

NSD – (*Norwegian*) Norsk senter for forskningsdata, Norwegian centre for research data

OY – (*Finnish*) Osakeyhtiö, limited company

RF – Russian Federation

Sovkhoz – (*Russian*) Sovetskoe khozyaistvo, Soviet state-owned farm

TOR – Territory of advanced development

UN – United Nations

USSR – Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

VEB.RF – (*Russian*) Vnesheconombank, or ‘Foreign Economic Affairs Bank’, currently referring to the Russian Federation’s State Development Corporation

VK – (*Russian*) VKontakte, in contact

VPN – Virtual private network

Table of Contents

1. Introduction.....	1
2. Theorizing the global through a post-socialist city lens.....	4
2.1. What is the post-socialist city?.....	4
2.2. The Post-socialist city in a global context – a debate	8
2.3. Post-socialist city as a laboratory	14
3. Methodology and challenges of applying it.....	16
3.1. Employing a reflexive feminist methodology.....	16
3.2. Analyzing strategies and policies of transformation in the city	17
3.3. Learning about change through interviews with local residents	20
3.4. Limitations and Complications	22
3.5. Biases, Transparency, and Research Ethics	23
4. Case study and analysis.....	25
4.1. Nickel – introduction into the monotown.....	25
4.2. Actors involved in Nickel’s development.....	30
4.3. Inhabitants’ experience	42
4.4. What do these findings tell us about the transformation of Nickel?.....	64
5. Conclusions.....	68
Reference list	70
Attachments	79
Attachment 1	79

1. Introduction

The phenomenon of globalization has shifted the way global politics and economy form themselves. The shift of interaction between international organizations, states, and cities has shown that states no longer have as much power as before in deciding the way international relations play out in the global arena. Cities have become particularly interesting to the global political economy as well, as their independent decision- and policymaking has transformed the way states and the international community relate to each other. Thus, studies of cities and their sociopolitical and economic transformations have become more interesting for International Relations scholarship as a means to understand the impact state-city relations can have on global societal, economic, and political relations.

In Russia, there are three hundred so-called *monotowns* – towns that operate because of and with the help of one major industrial enterprise. These companies provide social services for their inhabitants, most of which are the employees of the company, and support infrastructure creation and development. As a Soviet occurrence, monotowns were established by state-owned companies, usually in remote areas with rich natural resource reserves. However, following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the companies that essentially owned the monotowns were privatized, meaning that the existence of these post-socialist settlements would no longer be governed by the state alone. As the governing enterprises now had to compete in an open market full of incoming international companies, it became clear that not many of these towns were able to keep the town running successfully and keep the jobs intact (Crowley, 2020, p.371). The tough socio-economic state alarmed the Russian government, which has led to a comprehensive effort from the state and these city-forming companies to try and get monotowns back to their successful days (Accounts Chamber, 2019, p.225).

This master's thesis follows a story of exactly such an effort. It is centered around a Russian monotown called Nickel and its current development efforts in the light of the closure of its main production site. The thesis observes the way the city-governing nickel extraction company *Nornickel* is trying to “revive” the town with the help of different state actors by introducing programs and grants for urban, cultural, and economic development. By exploring the plans of actors conducting this transformation in Nickel, and then comparing that to the way inhabitants see this change, this study highlights how the urban development of the struggling town ‘back to life’

plays out in an increasingly globalized world. To further illustrate the patterns of development in such a specific context, this thesis uses the concept of the *post-socialist city* and the contention within its scholarship to showcase that cities with a socialist past develop with an intent to transition into a fully capitalist state through ideology, urban domain, and practice (Golubchikov, 2016).

Nikel is interesting as a case study, amongst others, because of the various associations and peculiarities it holds. This Arctic settlement is situated in a unique geostrategic location, bordering the Norwegian town Kirkenes, the relationship with which has a major influence on the town. Aside from being a border town, Nikel is also a small post-socialist monotown that is attempting to transform into a sustainable and attractive settlement. My study into Nikel aims to provide empirical evidence to deepen the understanding of how Russian (mono)towns relate and adapt to global change in the light of the neoliberal tendencies in such settlements. An in-depth exploration of local experiences allows for a robust understanding of the unique processes in the city, which undeniably shape the political landscape. Thus, the research examines such experiences through an examination of two types of actors involved in Nikel's ongoing change: the political and planning actors of change, as well as the residents. These are then discussed in the context of global urban change discussions, specifically in the post-socialist context.

This thesis, therefore, studies the following research questions:

- How do the actors involved in the development of Nikel see its urban transformation?
- How do the inhabitants of Nikel see the urban transformation of their town?
- What does this urban transformation tell us about the tendencies of global change in the case of the post-socialist monotown?

I address these research questions systematically through five chapters. Following this introduction, chapter two situates the research within the framework of the post-socialist city concept and elaborates more on the role of the city as an actor within the patterns of global change. Chapter three introduces the methods used in this research, which are qualitative content analysis and semi-structured interviews. It also explores the use of the feminist methodology in this study, providing reflections and limitations on the choices made for this research. Chapter four opens with the introduction to the case study – Nikel. It describes its history, and the precedent for change, which is the smelter closure. Then, the study turns to an empirical analysis of the federal

and regional policies and strategies of actors involved in the change in Nickel. That is followed by an analysis of the interviews with inhabitants of the town, in which they share their experiences and opinions on the change Nickel has been undergoing. The chapter also addresses the informant's reflections on the relationship of the town to its neighboring countries, as well as the implications of the covid-19 pandemic, border closure, and the ongoing Russo-Ukrainian war on the town's development. These findings are then discussed at the end of chapter four. Chapter five concludes the thesis.

2. Theorizing the global through a post-socialist city lens

This chapter situates the thesis theoretically by explaining the emergence of the post-socialist city concept within the academic field of urban studies (subchapter 2.1.). Then, subchapter 2.2. discusses the debates within the post-socialist city scholarship and connects the concept to the relevant developments in the discipline of International Relations. The chapter's purpose is to place the post-socialist city in its proper context as a relevant actor for the study of global change within International Relations (IR), placing this theoretical background in feminist methodology. The chapter ends with subchapter 2.3., with an explanation of how this theoretical background will be used in this study.

2.1. What is the post-socialist city?

2.1.1. The homogenous socialist city

As the Soviet Union set up its territories and governing structures across Europe and Asia in the 20th century, it became noticeable how the urban planning of the Soviet towns differed from those belonging to a capitalist system. The differences were observable through not only the level of control governing structures had over the city, but also the culture of planning, property, and land ownership which was much different in the Soviet context compared to the capitalist city. Thus, there are valid reasons to consider the *socialist city* to be a separate entity for research, as it is known for its distinctive homogenous structure across the Soviet republics.

Socialist city planning was closely connected to the substantial patterns of industrialization and eradication of private property. Total control over the housing stock and an influx of new jobs appearing with the initial phase of industrialization meant that the planners would utilize and distribute all the housing available in the city to house the employees (Szelenyi, 1996, p.296). With the growth of the socialist city, however, a need for new housing and infrastructure would arise. Then, through central planning, the cities would gain near identical prefabricated districts with features such as centralized infrastructure and compact, monotonous high-rise apartment complexes built in bulk in specific patterns, forming so-called 'microdistricts'. These microdistricts had at least one school, kindergarten, and a postal office; many also had their own culture and sports centers, and health clinics.

State-controlled planning ensured somewhat equal housing distribution, easy large-scale public project development, large industrial areas, and an underdeveloped commercial sector (Szelenyi, 1996). Manifold capitalist cities also had certain trends brought about by industrialization and post-war rebuilding but seemingly carried them out in different ways in symbiosis with the historical parts of the city. Compared to the capitalist cities, the socialist city aimed to disrupt all capitalist practices in the housing sector in order to house larger amounts of people in blossoming industrial areas across the state.

Socialist city planning placed cultural and societal cohesion among the highest priorities in the life of the city, hence the political and cultural organizations that a common Soviet person was required to participate in. These organizations had an intention of strengthening the collective relations in the workplace and school, cultivating a sense of group identity, and belonging through regular social events. By connecting the population in such a way, and having them live in these similar high-rise apartments, the worker society of the Soviet Union was being seemingly systematized into one equal group of people with the same rights and opportunities, at least on a constitutive level.

Nevertheless, the efforts made for the homogenous development of the Soviet Union are subject to nuance. The idea of an equal society ended up being idealistic and unachievable, especially on such a large scale, which meant that homogeneity was bound to fail. Soviet city planning did not consider the mentality, culture, and historic heritage of all these republics belonging to the USSR, or how the assimilation of that heritage through the Soviet order would only be possible to an extent, therefore adding a more complex self-identification for a Soviet person. The imposed equality could not work either, as different labor options opened up different opportunities, and soon enough the marginalization of certain groups and disparity between the Soviet people became more apparent. The drawbacks visible on all levels of the Soviet order became more pronounced as time went on, which made the dissolution of the Soviet Union inevitable.

The way the socialist city was initially theorized had a clear western point of departure. Researchers from outside the Soviet space looked at the differences between the capitalist and socialist city in a rather patronizing way by painting the socialist city as a totalitarian entity and avoiding the similarities between the trends in the development of a capitalist and a socialist city (Chelcea, Ferenčuhová, & Bădescu, 2021, p.71). The theorizing of the socialist city was mostly

done in the context of the Cold War, so the bias in representation of the west and the rest was very specific. This differentiation has seeped into a new concept, which emerged after the dissolution of the Soviet Union. The concept was named the *post-socialist city*, which is one of the central concepts of this research. The core of this concept would be to capture the changes of the regime within a socialist city and the consequences they had on the no-longer socialist cities. Let us define the main interpretations of the concept.

2.1.2. The (homogenous) post-socialist city

The end of the Soviet Union created a set of implications for further development of the post-Soviet states, as the planning economy and socialist order created conditions that could no longer function in a successful manner in a liberal environment (The World Bank, 2018). The outcome of such implications ended up being a multi-layered transition into a new political and socio-economic order. This transition is the central focus of the post-socialist city concept, grounding itself in the notion that the post-socialist city is a city striving to assimilate all its socialist structures and mechanisms in favor of the new capitalist order that it is entering. In other words, the post-socialist city became a marker for the transition from socialism to capitalism.

The concept of the post-socialist city can be characterized by such parameters: the cities are somehow related to the territory of the former socialist world, oftentimes the Soviet Union and large parts of them still consist of microdistricts, with service and social welfare infrastructure characteristic of Soviet planning still present, yet reappropriated through commercialization mechanisms (Collier, 2011, p.26). Despite no longer operating by the logic of the Soviet planning economy, the cities still preserve and mix traits of their Soviet past with capitalist trends. The liberal mechanisms in the post-socialist settlements shift development practices within the city: the introduction of private companies and market internationalization, investment dependency, and negotiations are the immediate outcomes of the neo-liberalization of the city. Cities begin changing their land-use mix, shifting settlement patterns through private housing areas, repurposing green spaces, deindustrializing, and transforming areas into the commercial sector (Hirt, 2013, p.S36). The capitalist aspect of the city actualizes in the form of uncertainty in the success of the city, the ability to adapt to the open market and global political economy, or fail and lag behind. However, remnants of Soviet rule persist in certain aspects of urban maintenance and development, which means that the urban change in the post-socialist city can produce a mismatch of values and

confusion in the directions the city is following (Golubchikov, 2017). Urban sprawl, inequality, and segregation surrounded by Soviet architecture create the general look of the post-socialist city.

The goal of the post-socialist city in the eyes of scholars seems to be the transition into a neoliberal city: a city that operates within the capitalist logic of open markets and global political economy. A successful transition requires the totality of capitalism and abandonment of the socialist past, arguably because capitalist hegemony in the western world dictates the extent to which traits of socialism can or cannot appear in the other states ‘aspiring’ for neoliberalism (Golubchikov, 2016, p.612). Historic opposition of capitalist and socialist orders has had a direct impact on the way these sociopolitical and economic ideologies are perceived in western and non-western contexts. Seeing that neoliberalism became the preferred path of development, there is no surprise socialism is no longer considered a sufficient alternative (Müller, 2019, p.536). Hence the lack of desire to understand and use certain potentially beneficial aspects of socialism in the present-day capitalist states.

The exposure to capitalist structures opened many opportunities for post-socialist cities. Some of the former Soviet states would go on to join international alliances such as European Union in order to participate in international trade and ensure their collective security. Even in such circumstances, one could already see the potential pitfalls of the transformation: the success of each city now relied on the success and variety of industries in the city that could withstand and participate in the global political economy. While this is mostly overlooked in the international context, the internal competition between cities proved to be a more serious issue after the breakup of the Soviet Union (The World Bank, 2018). Adaptation to capitalism turned out to be the main survival tactic of the post-socialist city, and so more academics turned to the analysis of such a process.

2.1.3. Levels of transition

In his work, Oleg Golubchikov (2016, p.607) refers to three levels on which the transition of the post-socialist city into capitalism occurs: ideology, practice, and urban domain. These levels reference Lefebvre’s levels of social reality, which were identified as the macro, mixed and micro levels (Lefebvre, 1970, as cited in Golubchikov, 2016, p.611). Ideology here relates to the overarching set of values and meanings appointed within the governing logic in a given society, practice describes the way this ideology transforms the social behaviors, and the urban domain

combines those to describe the domestic manifestations in people's everyday lives through the transitional levels (Golubchikov, 2016). Essentially, these three levels interact with each other interconnectedly, having both ideology and urban experiences influence and mediate the transition from a socialist city into a neoliberal one. Through the lenses of these three levels, one can observe how global tendencies influence the personal experiences of the inhabitants, and how in turn, these unique experiences help us explain and reflect on the overarching processes of the transition. In the case of the post-socialist city, these changes occur and work simultaneously to challenge the socialist structures, culture, and beliefs within the city, fundamentally shifting them towards capitalist ethics. The goal of such a transitional process is to abandon any leftovers from the socialist period, erasing all traces of socialist history and embracing the all-encompassing absolutism of capitalism (Gowan, 1995, as cited in Golubchikov, 2017, p.270).

Although such is the storyline for the processes of change in a post-socialist city, there is a lot of variety within these settlements that obstructs them from following identical paths. Cities usually develop in a non-linear manner, and there is no universality in the transition from socialism to capitalism. The acknowledgment of specific experiences appears significant to understanding the transition on a global scale. Simultaneously, however, we can recognize processes shaping the post-socialist city to a certain extent: marketization, privatization, investment, deindustrialization, modernization, inequality, resistance, violence, segregation, exclusion, relocation, or displacement are generally present in each of the transitioning cities to a varying extent (Golubchikov, 2017, pp. 272-73). These processes, however, are universal, which means that they also often occur in capitalist cities. If the post-socialist and capitalist cities both aim at being capitalist and are continuously shaped through similar processes, is there a difference between post-socialist and capitalist cities? Do we then still need to call post-socialist cities by that name?

2.2. The Post-socialist city in a global context – a debate

In the 2010s, a debate arose around the usefulness of the post-socialist city concept. Many academics began doubting the future and applicability of the concept because of its basic characteristics and the geography of research. Starting with the name of the concept, which alludes to a specific time and area descriptor for the research, concerns appeared around it being limiting to the integrity of the researched phenomenon (Müller, 2019, p.536). Naming the concept 'post-socialist' produced specific assumptions and limitations regarding what the concept is concerned

with: the subject of research must be a city formerly belonging to a socialist order or possessing socialist traits, that is now no longer politically socialist. This implies that the socialist traits and order within the city are now gone and have been replaced with something else, and such a distinction is bound to limit the use of the concept.

Researchers began to question what constitutes a post-socialist city because the concept was primarily associated with the territories of the former Soviet Union, which is not the only example of socialist rule in the world. Additionally, there is confusion surrounding the limits of socialism within said cities: the concept seems to focus on the cities that are no longer part of the socialist state, yet they undeniably still possess certain socialist mechanisms and landscapes (Chelcea et al., 2021, p.75). Can it then be called a post-socialist city if socialism is still somewhat present in the city? And when it comes to being post-socialist, is it something that is only appropriate for cities that were a part of the socialist order, or is every city experiencing change after the fall of Soviet socialism to a certain degree, regardless of its political and socio-economic structure? All these questions have been subject to lengthy discussions in the urban studies field, leaving many to wonder if these oversights can be dismissed for the future of this concept.

2.2.1. What is to make of the post-socialist city concept?

The debate unfolded in two main camps: one called for the total abolishment of the concept, while the other proposed keeping the concept but adapting it into a less territory-dependent approach to study global urbanism. Among those calling for complete abandonment of the post-socialist city concept, the main arguments were the abundance of historical similarities between the socialist and capitalist city development, the lack of socialist development in the post-socialist cities, as well as cherry-picked events that were used as pillars to explain the main processes shaping the post-socialist city (Hirt, 2013). The identified signifiers of socialist legacy are clearly still present in post-socialist cities but are deteriorating, whereas new developments of a commercializing and de-industrializing nature occur at such a rapid rate that the post-socialist city ends up resembling a capitalist one (Hirt, 2013, S36). Such a resemblance calls into question the use of the post-socialist research category in places that, by such a metric, have completed the transition to capitalism.

Müller (2019) argued that post-socialist city scholars largely use the concept for the sake of arguing on the non-western side of urban studies instead of producing insights into the differences between

these cities and the further developments that make the post-socialist city a category worthy of persistent research. Such behavior would further perpetuate harmful divisiveness between the west and the rest (Müller, 2019, p.543; Gentile, 2018, p.1148). Having a separate concept for the processes within the area with a name that marks the place as one shackled to its history creates stigmatization for the research subject. Thus, where socialism is the past - capitalism is the present (and the future), and having certain places be not capitalist enough makes them less modern, and less developed. To escape stigmatization, the concept would have to reestablish itself, which is not an easy feat in the neoliberal world order.

The other side of the debate also subscribed to the conclusion that the concept's initial definition has a lot of pitfalls and contradictions that had to be addressed for the concept to keep its relevance and have potential in urban studies. Instead of proposing the total abolishment of the concept, however, they proposed trying to integrate the post-socialist city into global contexts and viewing it in relation to them, instead of as a separate phenomenon (Golubchikov, 2016, p.620; Chelcea et al., 2021, p.76). This would keep the concept clearly outlined and validated in the field, while also being relevant to the larger field of urban studies. By researching a post-socialist city and the peculiar processes occurring in it, one could learn how that given city utilizes and contributes to processes of global change.

This debate, as it is still ongoing, uncovers contention between the study of cities and global processes. While I am not capable of solving this contention, I can use such a development in the debate as framing for my analysis of a specific case as a way to show why the post-socialist city is relevant for studying global change.

The framing of such a contention, however, is presented in different ways according to different researchers within urban studies. For instance, the post-socialist city concept has been reimagined as a relational, comparative approach, not through establishing a start and an end to a firmly defined route of the post-socialist city becoming capitalist, but rather through explaining the influence of Soviet socialism on the present-day processes (Tuvikene, 2016, p. 12). In this sense, the post-socialist city is a title that can be given to any city impacted by socialism, regardless of its geography and relations to the socialist states of the past. This would then 'de-territorialize' the post-socialist city, making it a tentative concept with different opportunities for use in comparative studies of global change (Tuvikene, 2016, p.12).

Although Tuvikene (2017) proposes a way of understanding post-socialism through larger patterns and trends in the world, it must be noted that these comparisons must be made with caution to the researched contexts. If neglected, such a ‘de-territorialized approach’ could contribute to an unfair assessment and even equalization of a diversity of experiences simultaneously occurring in different spaces, which would harm the specificity of the post-socialist city concept and the contexts it is being compared (Golubchikov, 2017). Regardless, a comparative approach can be an interesting way to utilize the concept for analysis under the condition that there is a nuanced understanding of the specific contexts that are being studied. So, instead of looking at the post-socialist city as a universalized tool for every place on the map, the debate within the concept can be a study of things that the diversity of post-socialist cities can tell us about the global processes leading the change. Through this perspective, the global relevance of the post-socialist city is a useful concept for this study, as it could relate the urban change to social, economic, and political processes interesting for the field of International Relations. I would now like to expand on that idea.

2.2.2. International Relations and the city

The academic field of International Relations in its traditional form is a study of the international political system, in which the main units of research are nation states and their behavior. Through its main theoretical viewpoints – realism, liberalism, and constructivism - as well as the various other theories and sub-theories, the International Relations scholarship argues about the actions and processes leading to the choices made by states. Subjects of war and peace, and ways to keep the global political landscape peaceful for as long as possible are the main concern of traditional International Relations. Regardless of the angles of analysis, the main vantage point for these theories has been a top-bottom approach to politics, one in which individual actors are not seen as influential in the international environment.

Going beyond the state

Because of such a set belief in the hierarchy of power within the system, the field of IR has seen a variety of critical theories enter the conversation, essentially trying to provide different optics of understanding the processes of international relations. Critical theories are designed to question and challenge the perceived order, institutions, and power relations, essentially offering alternatives to seeing the status quo (Cox, 1981, p.129). One of such theoretical branches,

feminism, calls for attention to the experiences of those actors that do not have power or a voice in the traditional understanding of global politics (Tickner, 2006, p.21). If the actors of interest in traditional International Relations are nation states, international organizations, and their alliances, it may well be argued that any other categories of actors are marginalized in the field. Through a feminist approach to IR, scholars then attend to these excluded or marginalized groups and individuals and their experiences in the everyday life. These experiences are then seen as a subjective reflection of the reciprocal process between large-scale decisions and individual experiences of such decisions, which helps challenge universally accepted knowledge production (Tickner, 2006, p.22).

Researching the neglected parts of international politics as a field of study makes it possible to create a more comprehensive description of the global change experience. The influence of feminist scholarship on the field of International Relations came into the field much later than in other social sciences, so it is still fighting for its place in mainstream IR. However, through various influential contributions of feminist scholars, topics of gendering in security, violence, war, and peace in relation to women and/or marginalized groups prompted IR to widen its thematic interest beyond state-centrism through tools such as discourse analysis and in-depth interviews. Examples of such works include Tickner's writing about feminist perspectives on International Relations (1992), Cynthia Enloe's (2014) "Bananas, Beaches, and Bases", Laura Sjoberg's work on gender, violence, and war (2013; Sjoberg & Gentry, 2007), Carol Cohn's (1987) research on gendered discourse within defense establishments, as well as a multitude of other feminist scholars. As I am using the feminist methodology in this study, the next chapter of this thesis shall expand on feminist methodology in IR.

Similarly, as the scope of IR research expanded, it began to address topics beyond international policy and security, becoming more concerned with human security. Cases such as urban (in)security and structural violence in specific localities have all become interesting for IR as they could deepen the security debate from different scales and show links between personal processes and ideas and global trends. Human security within IR is usually concerned with security as more of a threat than a combination of experiences that amplify (in)security (Lemanski, 2012). But by looking at human security through a feminist perspective, using experiences as opposed to

perceived global risks, International Relations become increasingly more concerned with actors on various scales, thus broadening the understanding of processes that shape the modern world.

The Global City

So where does the city come in as a research entity in IR? For a long time, the city has not been on the agenda as a unit of research in International Relations, but this has changed in recent years. The outcome of the globalizing processes driven by capitalism began to shift the nature of the national and international systems. The relevance of the city in such a process was highlighted by Saskia Sassen (2001), who coined the term ‘global city’. In its essence, the global city is a powerful hub housing global networks of major businesses, people, and products. It is a platform on which the global economy flows are realized. As a new formation triggered by the global urban transformation, the global city was now changing the nature of cities, states, state systems, multiscale institutions, global political economy, and the relationship between them (Curtis, 2016, p.1).

The deterritorialization of the social, economic, and political fabric of the main actors of the international system and the profound change it has on their entanglements became relevant for the International Relations scholarship. Simon Curtis (2016) brought the debate into the field with his book “Global Cities and Global Order”, in which he described how the emergence of global cities was a direct result of changes in the global political order. The powerful and complex nature of the global city was now just as valuable to studies of the global order. Apart from the economic significance, global cities also highlighted the increasing inequality and violence alongside the growth. This opened a discussion on human security in a bottom-up context, as the city became the point in which the global processes of violence, poverty, and exclusion get displayed on the local canvas.

Although the field of International Relations has become increasingly saturated with scholars who have an alternative way of looking at the processes of change within international politics, the bottom-up approach to global change is yet to be widely described and applied to the IR context. Therefore, it is important to address global transformations through the lens of a city as a source of access to the unaddressed side of the change.

Mixing Urban Studies and International Relations

Both urban studies and International Relations scholars have been focusing their attention on the study of global change, although they approached it in different ways. While urban studies academics have been proposing several ways of looking at the global processes through the lens of a city, in the present example – the post-socialist city, the IR approach has worked more with reflections from elsewhere as opposed to producing one's own toolbox for researching these dynamics. Therefore, I believe that incorporating these practical tools used in urban studies, which allow for a review of local and global processes, is very beneficial for discussing topics such as a global change in IR. Essentially, using the practicalities of urban studies in highly theoretical International Relations can be a good combination for a comprehensive view of the global change in the city.

2.3. Post-socialist city as a laboratory

The post-socialist city concept, with its various forms, sizes, and transformations connects the feminist interest in researching the diversity of experiences with topics of human security and globalization. International Relations can thus benefit from focusing on human experience in the city as a toolbox which helps to see the co-production of knowledge on what it is like to be on the receiving end of global politics.

Therefore, I stand by the idea that the post-socialist city concept must not be abolished, but instead, it should be used to investigate global change. I intend to use the post-socialist city concept as a lens through which I will describe the change experienced by a specific city, which will then help me reflect on the global change patterns seen in this example. Using a concept that observes experiences that differ from the well-documented and normalized western development not only validates but also contributes to a diversity of experiences. It is a way to challenge the universality of urbanization and globalization trends by seeing how it affects different parts of the world.

Consequently, in my research, I turn to the post-socialist lens, specifically using Golubchikov's approach to the post-socialist city as a reflection on the planetary, multilevel shift to the capitalist order.

Chelcea et al. (2021, p.76) refer to the post-socialist city concept as a *laboratory*, an emancipatory way of viewing the diversity of experiences that are entangled globally. If one considers the post-

socialist city concept as a laboratory through which we can study how a flexible capitalist system creates change on different levels through various profit logics, one can empirically follow the way these seemingly unrelated workings of the society influence the capitalist expressions in different parts of the map. Since the influence of capitalism can be spotted much easier through the post-socialist contexts, analyzing a post-socialist city can provide an insight into the shifts in various structures, cultures, and social relations, as well as the outcomes of such shifts, both positive and negative. Analyzing the process of transitioning from socialism into capitalism to achieve globally set standards of success would be especially demonstrative in the chosen case study of this research, as its establishment and sustenance were successful precisely because of the accommodated conditions of the Soviet planning economy. This means that inspecting the way it is being sustained in a modern, globalized world through these capitalist logics can be a valuable contribution to the study of global change and provide insights into the effects of less mainstream actors on the international arena and vice versa.

3. Methodology and challenges of applying it

Since I aim at studying change in the post-socialist city in this thesis, I must identify methodology and methods which have guided me in the process of finding these interpretations of change. This chapter, therefore, introduces the methodology, methods, and materials used in this study. It justifies the uses of such, provides an outline of the research design, and reflects on the limitations and challenges encountered in the process of writing this thesis. In subchapter 3.1. I discuss feminist methodology in International Relations and qualitative interpretive methods. I argue that the interpretive nature of the feminist methodology and its approach to studying marginal experiences is a relevant way of studying transformations in the city. Then, in section 3.2. I expand on the qualitative methods chosen – qualitative content analysis and semi-structured interviews, as well as their relevance in this research. I explain the relevance of the case and data collection choices for carrying out these methods. What follows is the section discussing reflections on the impact of covid-19 on the research, as well as the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine in subchapter 3.3. The feminist methodology also presupposes continuous self-reflexivity on the researcher's own research and their role in it (Ackerly, Stern & True, 2006, p.4). I reflect on my study and my role in this research after discussing the limitations, in point 3.4.

3.1. Employing a reflexive feminist methodology

The importance of feminist scholarship in the academic field of International Relations has already been briefly introduced in the previous chapter when discussing the appearance of critical theories in IR (section 2.2.2.). Feminist methodology, since its emergence in a field traditionally preoccupied with a static understanding of the international system, has added a level of self-awareness to the conducted research. Feminist methods can be vast, but the methodology with which it is applied to the research subject has specific intentions. At its core, the feminist methodology is aware and critical of the influences of power relations concerning race, class, and gender on the way knowledge on states, security, cooperation, and global economies is being reproduced and used in IR (Tickner, 2006, p.20). It is concerned with shedding light on the diversity of experiences by focusing on marginal experiences. By attuning to human experiences from the margins, feminists connect them with the way power relations form and get reinforced in society. In her writing on feminist methodology in IR, Tickner mentions Nielsen's (1990, p.26, as cited in Tickner, 2006, p.21) description of feminist research as a "dialectical process" in which

the main objective is to listen to the study subjects, women or representatives of other marginalized communities and groups, and to look at the way their experiences and meanings reflect on the accepted ‘truths’ about society. The feminist methodology aims at going beyond the state, or other grand structures of global politics to seek answers about how the prosperity of the international system is maintained by the insecurity of subaltern groups (Tickner, 2006, p.27). In this sense, the methodology has an interpretative approach to the study, as human experiences are vast and subjective, and so is the researcher’s understanding of them.

International Relations scholarship benefits from the feminist methodology as it introduces unconventional ways of producing knowledge, mixing interdisciplinary feminist studies with traditional IR methodologies and topics (Ackerly, Stern & True, 2006, p.4). In this study, the topics of foreign policy, security, and globalization are angled through the experiences of certain inhabitants of a remote post-socialist settlement. The acquisition of such experiences has been done by looking at a case study of the recent changes in a northern Russian settlement called Nikel. A case study is a qualitative research design that thoroughly investigates a program, event, activity, process, or individuals over a set period of time (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). I shall expand on the choice of case study in the next chapter.

Since my aim is to access the experiences of change, I am using several qualitative methods such as qualitative content analysis and semi-structured interviews as a way to understand the way transformations manifest themselves in this remote community from multiple perspectives. I will now sketch out how I utilize such methods in more detail.

3.2. Analyzing strategies and policies of transformation in the city

I began my study with a qualitative content analysis of the documents by actors responsible for the change in Nikel in October 2022. To decide on the actors, which I would identify as influential in the transformations in Nikel, I first made a simple search inquiry in Google search engine with the keywords “Nikel, Russia” separately in English and Russian languages. This led me to sources like Wikipedia, which described the basic information about the town and its history, a website of Nikel’s city-forming enterprise Nornickel, as well as several articles about the town, its history of pollution, and the shutdown of its smelter. After looking over this material, I learned about the actors which kept coming up as relevant for Nikel. These actors were: Nornickel and its projects World of New Possibilities and the Second School, Nornickel’s subsidiary in the Pechenga region

was Kola Metallurgical Mining Company (KMMC), and its production plant in Nikel, called the Pechenganikel combine. Nornickel's Concept of Socioeconomic Development of Nikel and the Pechenga Region which addressed the aftermath of the closure of the smelter ended up being my main source of information on the transformation plans for Nikel (Nornickel, n.d.). This document explicitly mentioned several other participants directly involved in the transformation of Nikel: The Administration of the Pechenga Municipal District, the Government of the Murmansk region, and the federal subject working with monotowns – the Foundation of Monotown Development and the Far East Development Corporation. I decided to stick with the actors outlined in the strategy and look into the information about their activity in Nikel since the smelter closure in 2020, or, in the case of federal documents, strategies and projects before 2020 designed for the time period from 2020 to 2022 or further.

As already mentioned, the Concept of Socioeconomic Development of Nikel and the Pechenga Region ended up being the starting point of my choice of content for the analysis. I also investigated Nornickel's website Nornickel.ru, as well as the Kola MMC website regarding the Pechenganikel combine to find documentation on the plant's maintenance or development. The websites did not have any other relevant documentation.

The two main actors directly working with the developments in Nikel are Nornickel's development agency in the Pechenga municipality – the Second School, and Nornickel's grant charity project – the World of New Possibilities. I looked at the information available on the Second School's website the2school.com about their projects regarding business, tourism, urban and social development. The main parts I analyzed were the urban development section of the website (Second School, n.d.b), where I learned about the master plan development for Nikel and its neighboring town Zapolyarny, which was developed by an agency in collaboration with a consultancy URBANpro (Second School, n.d.a; URBANpro, n.d.). As for the World of New Possibilities, I looked at the Regulations on the Competition of Social Projects as well as the other information and statements about the grant contests on their webpage nncharity.ru (World of New Possibilities, n.d.).

As for the regional actors, I chose to look at the Socioeconomic Strategy for the Murmansk region before 2020 and further until 2025 (Murmansk regional government, 2017) and looked at the information on documents referring to the work of the Pechenga municipal government in Nikel

on their current website pechengamr.gov-murman.ru (Pechenga municipal government, n.d.). It was also necessary to investigate the federal actors of change in monotowns, as monotowns are considered to be a subject of special importance for the Russian Federation. The main facilitator of the development of monotowns in Russia is the Foundation of Monotown Development, so I looked at the information about the project on its website to find any relation to Nickel (Foundation of Monotown Development, n.d.) as well as two large-scale programs that were created by the Ministry of Economic Development and different authorities of various scales which focused on monotown development. These programs are the Complex Development of Monotowns program, which ended in 2019 (Accounts Chamber, 2019), and the ongoing Development of Monotowns program for 2020-2024 (Ministry of Economic Development, n.d.; Federal Portal of Draft Regulatory Legal Acts, n.d.; “Correct Decision” PLC, n.d.). The other subject mentioned in Nornickel’s concept, the Far East Development Corporation, did not have relevant information about concrete developments in Nickel available publicly, so it was not mentioned in the analysis chapter. The list of these references is outlined separately in the *Reference list* section at the end of this paper.

The chosen actors were expected to be involved in the transformation of Nickel in some way, and, thus, have the data on projects which they work on in the area. In these documents, I was looking for information on the development of Nickel. At first, I took notes about each of the documents or information on the actors on their websites. After that, I proceeded to highlight the information relevant to my content analysis. I compiled these highlights in my notebook and proceeded to formulate my analysis, trying to find similarities and differences in presenting the recent development of Nickel in the data.

Some of my expectations were not met. For example, the federal actors lacked information on their direct involvement in the development operations in the studied area. The Foundation of Monotown Development, as the main federal institution working with monotown development, seemed to have little to no direct financing in Nickel either. Some of the actors, although formally involved in the change, did not have digitally traceable documentation of their participation. Similarly, the presentation file of the master plan of the Second School and URBANpro was found online only after a substantial amount of search inquiry attempts. These challenges are a reflection of the lack of transparency from both the governmental and non-governmental actors. It has to be

said that my personal limitations or the information architecture of the reviewed sources could have impacted the relevant content I found for this analysis.

The chosen data provided a background for me as an outsider to the situation and showed the plans and hopes for the area of development. It also helped me craft the interview guide for the inhabitants of the study. It is important to reflect on the fact that documents are “namely, texts written with distinctive purposes in mind, and not as simply reflecting reality” (Bryman, 2016, p.561). Since reviewed documents vary in authorship, purpose, and influence over the processes in Nickel, the way they present information could have different aims and uses, which I consider when discussing the analyzed data. I also discuss some of my findings through the qualitative content analysis during my interviews with the inhabitants to dispel misconceptions I had come through during the analysis.

3.3. Learning about change through interviews with local residents

For this study I have drawn on interviews conducted in two phases: three interviews conducted in January of 2022 by the “Urban Margins, Global Transitions: Everyday Security and Mobility in Four Russian Cities” project¹, as well as four digital, semi-structured interviews I have conducted myself in June of 2022 with inhabitants of Nickel.

Before I began my data collection, I had received some interview data from the aforementioned project done in 2020 to deepen my knowledge of the situation in the area, as the interviews dealt with similar themes and a case study similar to mine. These interviews were open, narrative interviews that focused on people’s life trajectories. These interviews were done in the neighboring town of Zapolyarny, and they touched on the informants’ reflections on urban, social, political, and economic change in the area. As well as this data, I have quoted three interviews conducted in Nickel in January 2022 for the Urban Margins project as an additional layer to the analysis of the June interviews, providing more context and information related to the case study that is Nickel. This data was also anonymized, coded, and incorporated into the analysis and data interpretation that is to follow with such aliases: *a Second School representative, nature-loving woman and three informants.*

¹ Project is conducted by the Norwegian University of Life Sciences and the Centre of Independent Sociological Research in St. Petersburg, Russia, project number 287967.

The semi-structured interviews were chosen primarily because of their flexibility and the ability to ask more open-ended questions to hear the informant's detailed point of view (Bryman, 2016, p.466). As online communication added a certain level of discomfort for both me and the informants, I created a comprehensive interview guide to keep the informants comfortable in the conversation. The initial interview guide can be viewed in detail in *Attachment 1*, however, it was altered for some of the participants during the conversation, with one of the interviews turning into an unstructured interview, as the informant followed the topics outlined in the interview guide only loosely and had a lot to say about the themes of the study. The interview guide was informed by the qualitative content analysis that I have just described in the previous chapter, the information provided by the Editor-In-Chief of The Barents Observer, as well as the various social media groups related to Nickel, Pechenga area and Nor Nickel in VK².

The June interviews were accumulated through the snowball sampling method, as it was the easiest way to reach more inhabitants without having to be present in the field. The only prerequisite for the choice of informants was for them to have lived in Nickel and experienced the changes it is going through at the moment. I got in contact with the first informant through a Facebook post I left in a group for the locals of the researched area. From this participant onwards, I would ask each informant if they had contacts of other inhabitants I could interview. I received many suggestions, however, in the end, I only conducted four interviews. These four interviews are the core of the analysis of the inhabitants' experiences in and of Nickel. These interviews have been conducted via online video and audio platforms such as Zoom, Facebook Messenger, and Telegram. Three out of four have been audio-recorded, one was instead only recorded through the notes I wrote down during the conversation. The questions I asked in the interviews addressed four different themes: the inhabitants' life in Nickel, the shutdown of the smelter, the relationship between Nickel and Kirkenes/Norway, and the life in Nickel during covid-19 and the war.

After all the interviews were completed, they had to be transcribed. Since the interviews were conducted in the Russian language, the transcripts are also in Russian. In order to save time on transcription, the June interview recordings were put into the Microsoft Word transcription feature available in the Microsoft Office web version. After the software created the transcript with identified speakers, I went through the transcripts and compared them to the audio, correcting

² VK, also known as VKontakte, is a Russian social media website.

grammatical mistakes and wrong punctuation marks. After that, I have begun to code the transcripts using the thematic content of the interviews, as some of them leaned into specific topics more than others. Thus, I came up with a set of code labels and created text files for each code. Then I pasted the coded quotes from each interview, thus creating an overview of the subject in each of the documents. The created codes had the following topics: Nickel in the past, Life in Nickel now, the smelter, Nor Nickel, and its projects, Norway and borders, jobs, administration, and politics, covid-19, and the war. All data regarding the participants of the thesis, including the voice recordings or notes from the interviews, as well as raw transcripts, coded data, and consent forms were safely stored on a password-protected university cloud server that only I had access to.

Each of the four core informants I have interviewed has incidentally labeled their personality type throughout our conversations. This was not something I asked of them, but I thought it was an interesting pattern. That is why I decided to use their self-description as their aliases for this study. The informants, therefore, have acquired such names: The Optimist, The Realist, The Idealist, and The Romantic. These names implicitly tell us about the kind of philosophy they operate by. These people present different age groups, genders, backgrounds, statuses, and experiences in Nickel. The quotes and data presented in the interviews will be identifiable in the thesis via references such as this: (The Romantic, Interview 27 June 2022). Since my participant pool is not big enough, I made sure to have as little description about the informants as I could to protect their identity.

3.4. Limitations and Complications

There have been several complications during the work on this thesis. The main one is the covid-19 pandemic. Because of the restrictions on traveling, the fieldwork was first considered in early 2022, as shortly before that Norway opened its borders to travel to Russia. Russia, on the other hand, still had its borders closed for traveling by land transportation, which meant that traveling would have been complicated by lengthy travels to get to Nickel. Regardless, I tried to obtain a visa permit but got declined for unspecified reasons. The plan was then to rework the visa application and try again around March 2022. This was already a major setback in the planned schedule of the thesis, but it was still possible to work around, which is why the secondary interviews were decided to be used in the analysis.

The Russian invasion of Ukraine on February 24th became a separate complication for the thesis. This time, it was clear that the fieldwork would no longer be possible. As well as that, the general

event of the war created a major disruption in the way the world, and me personally, operated up to that point. As a person from a post-Soviet country with friends and relatives in both Ukraine and Russia, the invasion has impacted my mental health and the vision of the thesis. I was contemplating how to address the war in my interviews, and if it is something I am supposed to discuss at all. It took around a month since the invasion to begin working on the thesis again, at which point a decision was made to limit the number of informants I would interview personally to only a handful of people. The small sample and the digital nature of the interviews may have influenced the kind of findings this study has come to. Interviewing people with a more varied socio-economic backgrounds, political stances, and degrees of participation in the urban transformation could have added nuance to the discussion.

Because there are different restrictions, rules, and prohibitions set by the Russian government, the subject of war was approached with caution. Some of the informants chose not to speak on the impact of war on the life in Nikel, and I did not push the discussion further. Some, however, had more to say in regard to that topic, which I appreciated and did not obstruct. While the war is still ongoing, it is hard to make any conclusions on the long-term impacts it will have on the processes of change, which is why I do not present any firm conclusions on the matter in my conclusions section.

Some of the Russian websites I used during the analysis were not accessible when I checked them in July 2022. The websites concerning federal government institutions, the Pechenga municipality website, and the Murmansk Region website (they both are technically the same website) are now “forbidden”. I have tried using different VPNs to access it, but it is not possible at the time of writing this.

3.5. Biases, Transparency, and Research Ethics

Feminists insist on approaching the role of a researcher with continuous reflexivity, as well as equalizing the researcher and the researched to make sure that the process is dialogic and self-aware (Cook & Fonow, 1990, p.76, as quoted in Tickner, 2006, p.27). Biases towards subjects in power, claims of objectivity or universality, and over-generalization of results are all the kinds of procedures feminist researchers are aware of and steer from as much as possible (Jayaratne & Stewart, 1991, p.93, as quoted in Tickner, 2006, p.40). Therefore, I approach my study with reflexivity and acknowledgment of my preconceived notions regarding this research, to address

how my involvement impacts the practical outcomes of this study. I do not intend to claim objectivity over the way I interpret the collected data, however, as I did with the informants I have spoken to, I would like to explain my positionality within this topic of research.

My relationship with the topic is informed by my personal background. I am Latvian, and I speak both Russian and Latvian fluently. Latvia used to be a part of the Soviet Union, which means that it shares a lot of history with the post-socialist space, including Russia. My cultural knowledge and previous personal experiences in Russia construct the way I react to the processes of change in the study I am conducting. For instance, I am aware of the corruption usually associated with projects conducted in collaboration with municipal authorities, which means that I may be more inclined to agree with those who find a project to be corrupt. In a similar manner, I relate to the distrust the inhabitants express towards those appointed into the administration of the municipal district, or the regional authorities. Therefore, I am more likely to agree with the criticisms the informants expressed toward the authorities and the developments related to the urban transformations in the case study.

I held back on inserting my personal opinions on the matters such as the war or the actions of the Russian government because I did not want to accidentally end up in a debate about the subject. Instead, I allowed the informants to present their points of view freely during the interviews and would express agreement if I found that fitting. I did not push the discussions on the truths and lies of the Russian and Ukrainian actions in the war, as I believe that it was irrelevant to my topic of research. I am also aware that I could have a judgment of the way certain informants view the political situation in their country, however, the informants mostly expressed their disapproval of the actions of their state. I aim to present the findings of the thesis systematically, on the basis of the findings I have gathered, and regardless of my personal biases and prejudice.

To ensure ethical handling of the research process from data acquisition to data interpretation, I informed each informant about the nature of their participation and their rights regarding privacy. I obtained each informant's informed consent for being interviewed, voice recorded, and having parts of the interview quoted in the research and its publication. The informants were also informed that they can withdraw their contribution at any point during the study. To ensure that every informant is comfortable with their contribution to this research, every participant is anonymized and presented in this paper according to the aliases which I have come up with after the interviews.

4. Case study and analysis

In this chapter, I introduce my case study, a Russian town called Nickel, describe its history, development, and importance as an industrial project, as well as outline the changes it has been facing recently, which have made it into a site of urban transformation. In subchapter 4.2. I look at the actors that are involved in the transformation of the town and analyze the main documents which they use to organize such transformation. In subchapter 4.3. the focus shifts to the analysis of interviews with four informants: The Idealist, The Optimist, The Romantic, and The Realist. I interpret their opinions on Nickel, its past, present, and future, and compare their outlooks on the established strategies of those, who drive the changes in the town. After addressing the case study from two sides of the transformation, I discuss my findings in subchapter 4.4.

4.1. Nickel – introduction into the monotown

Nickel is an urban-type settlement in the Pechenga municipality of the Murmansk region in the Kola Peninsula, Russian Federation. It holds an administrative status of a monotown, a type of settlement widely known as a *company town* – a settlement that is created, owned, and maintained by a particular company (i.e., a city-forming enterprise) (Allen, 1966, p.17, as quoted in Porteous, 1970, p.130). Monotowns were a popular and unique urban pattern dispersed along the territory of the Soviet Union, with their purpose being to include remote parts of land with difficult geographic and climate characteristics and utilize their natural resources for the economic growth of the state (Collier, 2011, p.5).

In modern Russia, a monotown is being used as an administrative formation, which must adhere to certain characteristics: having a status of an urban-type settlement or a town with a permanent population of at least 3000 people and having a city-forming enterprise with a workforce of at least 20% of the population of the town (Russian Federation, N 709, 2014). According to the latest data, Russian Federation outlines 321 monotowns (Sapozhkov, 2021). Despite that, the Ministry of Economy wants to change the characteristics which make a town eligible for the monotown status by revoking this status from those towns which are less than 50 kilometers away from the capital cities of their regions. This would make the number of monotowns shrink to 163 (Sapozhkov, 2021). It is unclear if this proposition is being implemented any time soon. At the moment, Nickel still technically counts as a monotown. But how did it become one?

The beginning: Finnish Petsamo, nickel ore, and Kolosjoki

The Kola Peninsula has a rich and extensive history. Long before the state formations of modern Russia or Finland, multiple centuries Before the Common Era, this area was home to various settler communities. One of them, the Sámi community, has stayed in the region to this day. The composition of the peninsula began changing with the appearance of several different communities of Russian settlers, who would appropriate parts of the peninsula for their principalities. Consequently, the Kola Peninsula territory ended up in the Russian Empire around the 16th century, where it stayed under the control of the Empire until the 20th century.

In 1917, the year of the Russian Revolution, The Grand Duchy of Finland, which had been under the rule of the Russian Empire, decided to separate from the Empire and form its own independent state. The decision was met with a lot of conflict within the Finnish territories and led to a civil war and multiple changes in the political system. At the same time, the Russian Empire collapsed, and the history of Soviet Russia began. After a tumultuous period of unrest, Finland became a republic, and it was now interested to obtain the territories with the Finnish communities that were under the newly created Soviet rule. The area included a region on the Kola Peninsula. Through several military expeditions and various negotiations with the Soviet government the Tartu Peace Treaty was signed in 1920 (Rowe, 2020, p.20). The treaty allowed Finland to obtain Petsamo (now – Pechenga), with demilitarization of the region and free transit for Russians.

Through the time of Finnish rule, Petsamo became economically and industrially significant as a convenient part of the world trade with its port of Liinahamari, as well as fisheries and Arctic tourism, but things changed when large resources of nickel ore were discovered in the area (p.4-5). This prompted the start of large developments in the area and attracted the interest of several parties apart from the Finnish government: French, Canadian, and German industrial companies, as well as Nazi Germany's armed forces and the Soviet state (p.24-25). The largest nickel company in the world – INCO (International Nickel Company of Canada) and its British subsidiary Mond ended up as developers of the Petsamon Nikkeli OY (Petsamo Nickel Company) in a collaboration with the Finnish government, thus beginning the history of Kolosjoki in 1936, which is now known as Nikel (p.29).

Post-war Soviet Kolosjoki: reviving the monotown

The development of a new company town, as well as the company itself, got to the point where the company was ready to begin the mining operations, yet it was also the point of the war between Finland and the Soviet Union escalating again, three times from 1939 to 1945 (p.35). In the autumn of 1944, Kolosjoki, as well as the whole region of Petsamo, became a part of the Soviet Union (p.58). The area, partially damaged by the battles in the region, was now to be rebuilt, partially by Soviet soldiers, civilians already living in Pechenga, as well as captured Soviet soldiers and prisoners found in the German camp found in Kirkenes, just 50 kilometers away from Nikel (p.73). Due to harsh conditions, lack of proper housing, unsatisfactory infrastructure, and remoteness of the area, many people were forcibly relocated to the monotown, and to keep them interested in staying, they were offered much higher salaries in the Pechenganikel Mining Combine (previously known as Petsamo Nickel Company) than in similar jobs in other parts of the Soviet Union. And so, after slowly developing the rest of the town, with entirely new infrastructure and logistics, Nikel became one of the most valuable industrial plants in the Soviet Union.

The pollution on an international scale

Under Soviet rule, nickel became increasingly important to the state as the Cold War set its course, so the activity of the combine under the Soviet planning economy was significantly intensified (p.97). Although the living conditions and salaries improved, it was soon discovered that the bigger the combine became, the worse the sulfur dioxide emissions from the smelters, which led to illness and destruction of both the forests surrounding Nikel and the climate of neighboring Norway and Finland (p.158). But, without pressure from the Soviet state to stop the immense pollution, Pechenganikel ignored the emissions, as the industrial production carried much more weight for the planning economy of the state rather than its by-product (Rowe, 2022, p.7). The concerns from the Norwegian and Finnish sides were voiced already in the 1970s, but the official response of the Soviet state was that of false promises and agreements to reduce their industrial pollution (p.29).

These concerns only grew, so the USSR and Norway signed the Soviet-Norwegian Environmental Agreement in 1988, which established a joint commission that would work on controlling the severe industrial pollution coming from the Pechenga municipality, however, it changed little in the activity of Pechenganikel combine (p.13-14). The domestic environmental and political activism were not strong enough either, as the influence of Pechenganikel and similar enterprises

along the Union were too strong to speak up against (p.36). Norwegian activists began a series of protests and acts of civil disobedience about the ‘death clouds’ to bring attention from wider society and urge the Soviet and Norwegian officials to work on stopping the pollution from Pechenganikel’s production (p.51). To no avail, Finland and Norway tried to convince the enterprise to let them finance the modernization of the nickel smelter in Nikel. Despite multiple modernization projects developed by Nordic companies and authorities over multiple decades, the Russian side did not budge.

The dissolution of the Soviet Union brought a multitude of developments into the area. The role of the Arctic region became more prominent, which encouraged Russia and its Arctic neighbors to work on strengthening their relations, lower securitization and participate in common projects related to oil, gas, and shipping industries (Joenniemi & Sergunin, 2013, p.7). This would also slowly lead to strengthening of relations between the Kirkenes and Nikel specifically. The bordering municipalities realized the potential within the inter-border relations, and in 2008 the towns introduced a twin city arrangement in economic, cultural, social, and political cooperation, as well as a visa-free regime for the inhabitants of the area (Joenniemi & Sergunin, 2013, p.8, 16).

Nornickel goes green, and so does Nikel

The environmental struggle, however, did not resolve itself with the warming of border relations. After the dissolution of the USSR, Pechenganikel became a part of the Kola Mining and Metallurgical Company (KMMC), a daughter company of Norilsk Nickel (now called Nornickel), thus merging with a giant metal-producing company. However, the acquisition did not lead to the modernization of the plants. Norway even granted NOK 300 million to Nornickel for modernization procedures to reduce the emissions, yet the money was returned without any progress (Nilsen, 2020). At some point, the desire to hold Russia and Nornickel accountable for its large-scale international pollution became futile, as the pollution levels were continuously breached and falsely reported to be smaller than in reality (Njaa, 2018, p.17). The head of the Norwegian Barents Secretariat in 2010, Rune Rafaelsen, called this tension at the border “the greatest political division in Europe” (Lindahl, 2010).

The turnaround in Nornickel’s policy came in 2016, when the company’s CEO, Vladimir Potanin, declared environmental pollution to be the company’s biggest problem (RIA Novosti, 2016; as quoted in Njaa, 2018, p.8). To solve this problem, Nornickel announced a \$14 billion strategy to

reduce its emissions in Norilsk, its main and most polluting plant, by 75%, while cutting the KMMC emissions by 50 percent (Razinkova, 2019, p.21). This plan sounded surprising and ambitious to the international community that had spent decades trying to come to an agreement with the Russian government. The sudden change in strategy was attributed to Nornickel's aspirations to make its products attractive for the electrical vehicle and energy storage industry, which is a quickly expanding market characterized by environmental consciousness and sustainability (Njaa, 2018, p.8).

The decisions made by Nornickel started rumors of the potential shutdown of Nikel's smelter. In autumn of 2019, the rumors proved to be true, and the smelter shop of Nikel officially closed on December 23rd, 2020, thus ending the history of the near-century-long pollution in the area (Nilsen, 2019; Nilsen, 2020).

The aftermath of the shutdown has been documented by various Russian and Norwegian media outlets. The Barents Observer called the shutdown of the smelter a 'serious crisis' in the town (Staalesen, 2022). Novaya Gazeta wrote numerous stories on the difficult conditions post-shutdown (Britskaya, 2021; Britskaya, 2022). Due to a lack of not just the modernization of the smelter plant, but also the town itself, the shutdown of the smelter left an outdated infrastructure and crumbling housing stock for the inhabitants. Now began the time of Nikel's revival, in which many actors, including Nornickel itself, promised multiple large projects that would tackle the living conditions of those staying in Nikel.

Nikel in academia

Nikel has been studied in a variety of research fields prior to this study. Whether it is research on Nikel's pollution and the consequences it has on the surrounding ecosystems, the industrial sector of Kola peninsula, or the sustainability efforts Nornickel has tried to implement to carry out international environmental obligations (Nøst et al., 1997), Nikel has been mostly seen in the scientific terms as a mono-industrial site with severe consequences for the environment. It has also attracted research because of its geographical position. Nikel's relations with Kirkenes have been investigated as a lens into the practice of decentralization of foreign affairs and cooperation (Haugseth, 2018; Hønneland & Jørgensen, 2002; Mikhailova, 2014; Wråkberg, 2014; Rossvaer, 2019; Schimanski, 2015). There is also some work on the local identification of the inhabitants of

Nikel (Zhigaltsova, 2017; Nedoseka & Zhigunova, 2019), as well as work on the everyday experience and life-making in industrial Arctic towns by Alla Bolotova (2018; 2021).

These works put focus onto either environmental challenges of the nickel extraction industry or the border relations and practices between Norway and Russia, however, there is little to no exploration of the town of Nikel by itself, especially during the time of big transformations because of the smelter shop closure. Stuvøy and Shirobokova (2021), for instance, have been studying these “places off the map” to understand the layers in which the urban and socioeconomic development have been trying to coexist, using Zapolyarny area as an example. The thesis, therefore, continues in the footsteps of this idea by focusing on Nikel specifically.

Let us now come back to the current state of Nikel and examine the plans that have been made for its future development and how these plans have manifested in Nikel's daily life.

4.2. Actors involved in Nikel’s development

To better understand the discourse around Nikel after the smelter closure and the urban transformations surrounding it, let me sketch out the in-depth overview of plans for the town through different actors of change. The described actors have all been named as the main actors of Nikel’s development by its city-forming enterprise Nor Nickel, which is why this is the scope of analysis I have chosen for the content analysis. The data I shall present to you further in this subsection is gathered based on its relevance to Nikel’s development after the production shutdown in 2020, or its operation during that event and onwards.

There are several companies, organizations and governing authorities that are investing in the urban and industrial development of the monotown in question. Nikel gets major financing from the city-governing company Nor Nickel and its subsidiaries, as well as some level of funding from the Ministry of Economic Development, Murmansk regional government, private investors, federal budget, and funds from the Pechenga municipal government (Nor Nickel, n.d.; TV-21, 2020).

At the first glance, most governing actors seem to view the town as being in “great conditions for the development through tourism and new production facilities” (TV-21, 2020). Tourism seems to be on the agenda of most actors mentioned in the investment of Nikel. Eco-tourism is specifically considered, as it would fall in line with the sustainable development plans of the city-governing

company. Moreover, in their concept vision for Nickel and Pechenga region, Nor Nickel mentions wanting to soften the foreigner residence regime and facilitate the infrastructure for international tourism (Nor Nickel, n.d.). What else is on the agenda of the main facilitators of urban transformation in Nickel?

Nor Nickel's involvement

As the biggest driver of the urban transformation in Nickel, it is vital to view the way Nor Nickel and its establishments work with the town's development. The documents which present the work of Nor Nickel in the area include the concept of Nickel's development and documents related to the work of the charity project *Мир Новых Возможностей* (World of New Possibilities) and the project descriptions of the regional development agency *Вторая Школа* (The Second School).

KMMC and its Pechenganikel combine, which have been operating under Nor Nickel since fall of the USSR, had been the main source of employment for the monotown, which is why the closure was followed by immediate planning for the protection of Nickel's economy. Right after the official closure of the smelter shop, the employees of the former plant received social benefit plans and guaranteed reemployment opportunities to other parts of the company divisions (Nilsen, 2020). For those employees who chose not to continue working at the company and relocate to other locations of the production chain, Nor Nickel established mechanisms to support projects for entrepreneurial facilitation and diversification of the economy, which are discussed further in this chapter.

The review of the official documentation of Nor Nickel's Concept of Socioeconomic Development of Nickel and the Pechenga Region paints a picture of a diversity of possibilities for urban development in Nickel. As mentioned in the previous section, tourism has been a big part of the development strategy. Before the official shutdown, the company considered making the smelter into an object of industrial tourism, which is a trend in the regions of old industrial legacy in Russia (TASS, 2020a). In the same time period, the company considered giving the factory's territory to a new metallurgical plant for grinding ball production and an abrasive plant for Uralgrit's non-ferrous metal slags from Kola Metallurgical Company's waste (Popov, 2020). It does not seem like these projects are still being considered or implemented at the time of writing this thesis.

Other forms of tourism support mentioned by Nornickel are related to travelers from Norway or Russia, primarily for eco-tourism and sea fishing (Popov, 2020). Although this has been discussed, the covid-19 pandemic and a relative distance from Nickel to the Barents Sea do not indicate much development in this aspect of economic diversification.

Alongside tourism, Nornickel aims at developing four other categories of urban life in the town: ecology, culture, and sports and business interaction. These categories of development would be realized by making Nickel and the Pechenga region into an “international ecological experiment on recultivation of the industrial territory” via bringing new, sustainable technology into the industry, holding international and cultural events (in collaboration with Kirkenes), as well as establishing a platform for negotiations and networking with international investors (Nornickel, n.d.). For example, the company spoke on the plans to support projects on building a data center and establishing commercial fish farming in the area (Popov, 2020). Although there is little information available about the data center, commercial fish farming appears to have been established, despite the fact that it is quite far from Nickel, being located around 60 kilometers away at the Alla-Akkayarvi Lake (Second School, 2022).

Sustainable development is mentioned in multiple Nornickel documents, and it is then promoted through projects/workshops such as the Second School’s “Urbanist Laboratory”, the development of a shopping and pedestrian zone in Nickel, and the creation of a master plan for the future Nickel and Zapolyarny, which will be discussed in more detail further down in this section (Second School, n.d.b).

These categories are used as pointers toward the stabilization and strengthening of the socioeconomic situation in the town. Recultivating the industrial arena, promoting business opportunities amongst investors, and attracting new investors and businesses are also mentioned in the strategy (Nornickel, n.d.). These ideas are present in the projects Nornickel carries out too, from the charity grant project World of New Possibilities to its non-profit organization the Second School.

World of New Possibilities

The charity grant project “World of New Possibilities” was created by Nornickel in 2014 to support and stimulate regional social initiatives and sustainable socio-economic development in the areas

of Nornickel's presence (Nornickel, 2014). Framing this as an example of 'social investment', Nornickel established this program in order to fulfill its social policy, which is closely linked to the aims to reach a multitude of the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals within Nornickel's areas of influence (World of New Possibilities, n.d.). The essence of the project is in Nornickel giving out grants to projects, which help create an environment for sustainable societal growth within the areas, whether it is through the stimulation of community initiatives and development of collaborative partnership between the regions or to strengthen the closeness of the community (World of New Possibilities, n.d.).

The project continuously runs diverse contests in four different directions: public initiatives and collaborative development of the territory, development, and popularization of scientific-technical creative projects, development of the service economy, and developing of TORs – *Территория Опережающего Развития*, or Territory of advanced development, outside the scope of the charity's work (World of New Possibilities, n.d.). These contests gather urban activists, volunteers, new entrepreneurs, established civil society organizations, and state-funded organizations in the area to present their ideas and develop them through seminars and workshops run by the charity project. The projects put forward for these contests get evaluated by the contest's jury, and the winning initiatives get funding and support to carry them out.

The contests are not the only mechanism of influence of the World of New Possibilities. The project hosts its own courses, forums, and festivals for the population interested in self-development and the development of their community. These events platform different actors relevant to social development and local activists and engage people in a network of active change initiators. Overall, World of New Possibilities aims at supporting local community initiatives, and at developing social partnerships, technologies, and competencies (World of New Possibilities, n.d.).

Since the World of New Possibilities has been present in Nickel even before the smelter closure, its role in the changes is persistent. The charity awards grants for initiatives relevant to business, urban development, tourism, and socio-cultural projects (World of New Possibilities, n.d.). Some of the projects the charity finances are developed by the next actor I shall present, The Second School.

The Second School

The Second School started in 2017 as a local activist initiative, which got the support of the World of New Possibilities through one of its contests (Second School, 2020). The abandoned building of an old school nr.2 became a renovated gathering space for art-related workshops, courses, and events. The space essentially became a platform for the community to engage in different cultural and artistic endeavors, attracting both children and adults to quiz and theatre clubs among other niches of artistic engagement.

The fate of the Second School changed with the announcement of the smelter closure in 2019. The need for a specific institution that would focus on Nickel's development after the closure led Nor Nickel and the local activists to form a center of social projects and regional development of the Pechenga region on the basis of the Second School's social platform (Second School, 2020). The primary idea of the Second School as a development agency was now to maintain the diversification of the economy: to develop a positive cultural and business environment via events, projects, and grant contests (Second School, n.d.b). Currently, the Second School is holding monthly grant contests on the local social initiatives, but it is still the primary creative and artistic meeting place for volunteers, activists, and experts. The institution also works with the branding of Nickel, the building of the tourist information center, creating an 'ecoitinerary', social videos, master classes, and workshops (Second School, 2020; Britskaya, 2021). Essentially, it acts as a developer of the social, educational, and cultural spheres of the town, bringing in activists and cultivating the grant economics environment.

Under Nor Nickel's direction, the Second School also puts a lot of emphasis on urban development. Among the smaller initiatives this organization works with, there are bigger projects carried out under their supervision, such as the previously mentioned master plan of Nickel and Zapolyarny. A master plan is a tentative planning document that acts as a conceptual and strategic framework for the urban development of the site, bringing in proposals and recommendations for the infrastructure, land use, as well as economic, environmental, and social aspects of the area (The World Bank, n.d.). The framework is informed by a feasibility study to ensure a well-informed and tailored approach to the site, and it usually involves the local community through surveying during different stages of the master plan development.

The creation of the master plan for Nickel was carried out from 2020 to 2021 through a collaboration of the Second School and a consultant agency URBANpro based in Saint-Petersburg, as well as the participation of the local residents (Second School, n.d.a). Despite information presented on the Second School's website stating that the project is done and is now being implemented at the municipal level, the actual master plan was nowhere to be found. This lack of clarity on the development of the master plan is confusing to observe, as the information on the degree of participation of the inhabitants, and the results of this master plan creation are inaccessible to the general public. Instead, the website of the Second School refers to a news report about the meeting of the Pechenga municipal authorities and the representatives of URBANpro and the Second School, and, as of the summer of 2022, offers to look into the documents related to the master plan physically by paying a visit to the Second School (Second School, n.d.a).

During my initial research into this project, such a large oversight initially made me think that the master plan was shelved. If the authors of this large project claimed that local participation is important to this major urban development process, why would the documentation and outcomes of such be inaccessible on their website? I tried looking for the master plan through the Google search engine multiple times since the autumn of 2021, and every time I would hit a dead end. But then, during the preparations for interviews in 2022, I decided to look for the master plan again. After trying a multitude of different keywords, the presentation file for the master plan was found at a file hosting website slide-share.ru. The inspection of the properties of the file showed that it was created in March of 2021. That is also when it was presented to the deputies of Pechenga municipality, according to the Second School's website (Second School, n.d.a). It is still to appear on their website or on URBANpro's website, which is a disappointing way of ensuring transparent facilitation of such a large urban transformation project.

So, what does the master plan of Nickel entail? The master plan intends to focus on two main aims: the formation of a long-term strategic perspective for the inhabitants and authorities, and the composition of the projects for sustainable area development (Afanasova, 2021). The creators of the project highlight the participation of the inhabitants of Nickel in outlining the focal points of the development, having surveyed 300 people in May 2020 (URBANpro, n.d.). Surveyed local inhabitants emphasized the need for the development of spheres such as healthcare, employment, professional education, infrastructure conditions, and the housing stock, stating that their main

concerns include lack of specialists and doctors in the area, bad roads, worsening state of the housing estates and unstable job market (URBANpro, n.d.).

The master plan developers then went on to discuss the potential of Nickel because of its location in a border region with “comfortable transportation access”, being a part of the prioritized Arctic region, as well as having a support system via Nor Nickel (URBANpro, n.d.). By comparing the tourist influx in neighboring Arctic areas in other countries and examples of industrial Arctic town reconstruction in Scandinavia and Canada, URBANpro concluded that tourism should become the strategic focus of the developments in Nickel. Thus, the solutions in the master plan included: the development of the tourist cluster which involved active leisure and extreme sports park, ecotourism, events and festivals, Scandinavian and local tourist routes, and the Kola superdeep borehole and the aforementioned Liinahamari port. The development of this tourism sector also includes the additional commercial infrastructure and job creation in the tourism industry.

Apart from tourism, URBANpro brought forward projects such as the ‘smart densification’ of the Nickel, reconstruction of the housing stock, as well as the development and creation of new social hotspots (Afanasova, 2021). The densification project involves not only the reconstruction of houses and apartment complexes but also the demolition of a section of housing stock in favor of adding new buildings around the houses that are being kept and renovated in the center of the town (URBANpro, n.d.). Additionally, the master plan discusses the reconstruction of cultural, educational, and sports institutions, whether by making over the existing places such as the culture palace “Voshod”, which is already under construction, or by creating new public spaces or attractive pedestrian zones with shopping and service infrastructure (URBANpro, n.d.). There are also recommendations provided for the heating supply system with the according predictions for the master plan’s goals. These include having less housing to heat, making the existing houses and social institutions more ergonomic, as well as reconstructing the heating network, and lowering the cost of energy generation (URBANpro, n.d.).

Just like Nor Nickel’s strategy, the master plan shares the aim to become a leader in the sustainable territorial development in Russia because of the variety of environmentally significant events prompted by the closure of the smelter (URBANpro, n.d.). The master plan, according to its authors, should be up to the UN standards of national leaders in the realization of the Sustainable Development Goals, which would make Nickel known and interesting on the international scale.

As of July 2022, there are yet to be any official updates past March 5th, 2021, in which the plan was said to be discussed and considered for implementation at a presentation meeting between the project developers and the municipality (Afanasova, 2021). However, the people connected to this project have confirmed that there are meetings between the Second School and the municipality where the master plan and the projects are being discussed for further implementation.

Regional authorities' documents about the development of the region

Murmansk region's governing institution does not explicitly mention Nickel in their work, however, after examining their administrative web page and looking through several proposed strategies for socio-economic and security development of the region, many similarities were found in the kind of priorities Nornickel has laid out for the area. In the Socio-economic Strategy for the Murmansk region from before 2020 and until 2025, the Murmansk regional government acknowledges the historical aspects that led to the current struggles in the region. Whether it be the dependence on governmental support for the development of the northern regions, the complicated financial situation after the fall of the Soviet Union and other economic crises faced by Russia in the past three decades, the vulnerability of the heavy natural resource-based production as the main engine for development in the region have all been addressed as pressing issues within the region (Murmansk regional government, 2017). The background of challenges faced by the region after the privatization of the big industrial companies, unsuccessful policies of the federal government, waves of migration out of the region, and increasing structural imbalances were all mentioned as the important factors that are taken into consideration when developing the strategy. Therefore, the strengths of the region and development possibilities are defined for the region in such categories: natural resources, transportation abilities, scientific research, energy production, international cooperation, and tourism (Murmansk regional government, 2017). The government also mentions support and curation of bigger Nornickel projects on the territory of Nickel, as well as general support of investment projects.

Nikel's history is a good example of the challenges Murmansk regional government has described in its strategy. Experiencing all of these issues, as well as having the main natural resource industry close and residents leaving the town in search of new opportunities, has forced Nickel to develop new ways of functioning. Murmansk region is aware of the importance of its border with Norway and Finland and emphasizes economic diversification and mobility development within the area

because of the benefits the tourism sector and international cooperation could provide for the whole Murmansk region. Nickel has a geographically important role in this strategy, which means that its development must take on the role of the major hotspot for international tourism and cooperation in the area. Nor Nickel's continuous presence in the region allows for Murmansk regional authorities to guide the change to benefit not just Nickel, but also the prosperity of the area itself.

Local government

The *местное самоуправление муниципального образования Печенгский район* (local government of the municipal formation Pechenga Region) was terminated in 2020, instead reforming into *муниципальное образование Печенгский муниципальный округ* – municipal formation Pechenga Municipal District (Pechenga municipal government, n.d.). This means that Nickel was stripped of its independent administrative status, and therefore does not have a mayor or any other governing force below the Pechenga region municipal government, although the administration of this government is located in Nickel. Instead, the representative body of the Pechenga municipal district of the Murmansk region consists of an elected group of deputies, who represent all administrative nodes of the municipal district.

On an inactive website of the previous governing body, there are still documents available with outlined development projects in Nickel of different kinds for a period between 2015 to 2020. The previous municipal programs focused on civil society, culture, sports, and public health, as well as the development and support of small and medium-sized businesses (Pechenga regional government, n.d.). The social programs of the government tackled topics such as children's education, social support of vulnerable social groups and socially oriented non-profit organizations, cultural sphere, participation of youth, public order, and entrepreneurship. The issues of infrastructure were also put forward, with programs on the development of transportation systems, smooth functioning of utility infrastructure systems, repair of the housing stock, as well as protection of the environment (Pechenga regional government, n.d.).

Here we can see that the main priorities of development before the official closure of the smelter shop were addressing similar issues as the previously examined documents. The governing body was working on these projects before the formation of the Second School, which seemingly took over many of these programs. Notably, the Pechenga regional government was aware of the issues

with the infrastructure outdatedness, lacking business sector in the area, and the need for a functioning healthcare and housing sector years before the smelter closed down.

When it comes to the documentation of development procedures and the future of these programs after the formation of a new municipal governing structure, I, unfortunately, was not able to locate any data of a similar kind. I acknowledge that this could be my personal oversight, however, after the process of finding the master plan from the Second School, it could be said that the transparency and accessibility of these official documents in a digital format are not prioritized.

Federal documents

Foundation of Monotown Development and Complex Development of Monotowns program failure

Фонд Развития Моногородов (The Foundation of Monotown Development) is the main non-commercial organization in Russia working directly with monotown development. While it technically is still in its own formation, the organization has been operating as a part of VEB.RF - State Development Corporation since 2021 (Monogoroda.rf, 2021). The foundation receives funds from the Ministry of Economic Development to finance and co-finance projects and businesses for the upgrade of the monotown socio-economic situation. According to the normative legal act database, the Ministry works with monotowns strictly through this foundation, mostly regulating the subsidy allocation for investors and the development of Territories of Advanced Development (TORs) (Federal Portal of Draft Regulatory Legal Acts, n.d.). Murmansk region has one relatively new TOR, which is called “The Capital of the Arctic” and refers to Murmansk and close areas (TASS, 2020b). Although it is aimed to be important not only for the city but also for the region, I have not found information that would suggest that the foundation has any ties to Nickel-based businesses, therefore, the major developments of the Foundation of Monotown Development do not directly include Nickel.

The website of the Foundation of Monotown Development моногород.рф states that it works with Nickel as a co-financing actor (Foundation of Monotown Development, n.d.). According to the foundation’s data, Nickel is considered to be a ‘stable’ monotown, which might explain the lack of direct financing from the foundation’s side (“Correct Decision” PLC, n.d.). One of the ways the foundation was related to the cooperation with Nickel, however, is through the priority program called “Complex Development of Monotowns”. In this program, the focus lay on diversification

of the economy and co-financing the infrastructure of development projects (Accounts Chamber, 2019). Giving tax benefits and loans for these projects, building infrastructure, and helping in “non-financial ways” is also something this program worked with (Nornickel, n.d.).

The “Complex Development of Monotowns” program had received a lot of criticism during its running time and was eventually shut down in 2019, before its official ending in 2025. The main aim of the program was to diversify and ensure consistent development in the monotowns, creating teams of professionals in each region to coordinate healthcare, education, infrastructure, and urban development, as well as the small and middle entrepreneurship (Accounts Chamber, 2019, p.242). In their report on the program, the Accounts Chamber of the Russian Federation stated that the program lowered the entrepreneurial activity in monotowns, contributed to more closure of businesses than openings, did not help get the wages to the federal level, did not help with diminishing unemployment rates, and overall, did not make the lives of people in the monotowns easier (Accounts Chamber, 2019).

The federal program of the Russian Federation “Development of monotowns” 2020-2024

After the cancelation of “Complex development of monotowns”, the Ministry of Economic Development proposed a new program that would seemingly work on repairing those parts of the previous program that did not provide sufficient results. In the passport of the program, three subprograms are delineated: “Normative provision of monotown development”, “Provision of sustainable economic development of monotowns” and “Creation of conditions for the realization of national projects in monotowns” (Ministry of Economic Development, n.d.). The program also aims to develop new workplaces and attract new workforce and investors into monotowns, as well as work on the legislation and policies related to monotown development. A close look at the objectives of the subprograms tells us that, alongside structural fixes, and mechanism upgrades within the socioeconomic support of the monotowns, the government wants to continue creating favorable investment conditions, whether it is by introducing subsidies or other privileges when establishing a business in the area.

In the attachments of the program’s passport, there is a lengthy table detailing the financial support to different fields of monotown development in the period from 2019 to 2021. It also includes Nickel, and in it, one can see the way the support is lowered over time, although it is not clear what the numbers in the table really indicate and in which proportions. It is also unclear if these were

real numbers or estimates, however, it makes sense in the light of the covid-19 pandemic to see such a decline in financial support, especially to monotowns that are not considered to be in a critical position, such as Nikel.

Overall, it seems that the new program is trying to touch base and review the cohesiveness of the process in which the support and ‘conditions’ are being distributed amongst monotowns (Ministry of Economic Development, n.d.). Here, the program sets out to rely on specific measurements such as the increase in permanent employment and focuses on the diversification of the economy in order to decrease dependence on the city-forming enterprises. The introduction of another set of subsidies to make it easier for franchises and bigger investors to come into the monotown can therefore supposedly bring the monotowns out of this status, ensuring their sustainable longevity. In the latest news, in March of 2022, the Ministry of Economic Development expanded the financial support for the program and the overall financing of the Foundation of Monotown Development, making the overall financial pool in 2022 reach around 2.9 billion rubles (Russian Government, 2022). It is unclear if any of this money is reaching Nikel.

Reflecting on these findings

The collapse of the Soviet planning economy has made the subject of the development of monotowns into a complex issue that the relevant Russian institutions are yet to find a successful approach to. The reliance on a single enterprise in times of industrial restructuring has led to rising unemployment, outmigration, unstable budget, and worsening living conditions (Gunko, Pivovar, Averkieva & Batunova, 2021, p.220). To address these issues, urban development practices have been focusing on promoting entrepreneurial urban governance, cultivating competitiveness, and a growing, investable economic environment (p.218-19). Much of this change is put in the hands of different non-governmental actors, including the involvement of local activists in entrepreneurial activity, which reflects the capitalist influence on city-making processes (Harvey, 1989, p.3).

Despite the state’s heightened attention to these dwellings and their development, the strategies and agendas employed for urban development address trending concepts that arguably are just as relevant to bigger cities. Although it seems like the federal actors working with monotowns are trying to account for the diversity of monotowns, the results of such attempts are unclear. This is highlighted by the administrative reforms of the Pechenga municipality, the Foundation of Monotown Development, as well as the proposed reform on monotown characterization, and the

evident issues with proposed federal programs on monotown development. The government is continuously implementing changes that would be able to manage development centrally, which is complicated by the dependency on non-state investment.

We observe this in Nikel, where urban development is mainly carried out by Nornickel. Since the settlement is a monotown in better condition than most other administratively defined Russian monotowns, the lack of funding can be understood. All of the introduced institutions stress the importance of investment and business incubation, diversification of the economy, and sustainable development. Additionally, tourism is being promoted as one of the key factors to the growth of the monotown areas. Making monotowns into modern, relevant socioeconomic entities seems to be the main priority for the federal authorities. And, understandably, Murmansk regional government has the same hopes for monotowns in its region.

Nornickel's involvement in Nikel cannot be overlooked: the company has been the main facilitator of the development in the area. However, this poses a question of whether it is helpful to only have Nornickel seriously carrying out the transformation in a monotown already so dependent on its city-forming enterprise. According to the data from the previous Pechenga region government, they worked on things that are now also carried out by Nornickel-funded projects. Moreover, the lack of traceable formal documentation about the programs and projects carried out since the closure of the smelter shop by these actors of influence makes it hard to understand, to which extent these actors actually participate in Nikel's transformation.

Now that the identified actors of change in Nikel and their involvement in the transformation have been examined, it is time to look at the implementation of such changes (or the lack of thereof), and the consequences they have had on the life of Nikel's residents.

4.3. Inhabitants' experience

This section shall focus on the second part of my study – the interviews with the inhabitants of Nikel. This is mostly an analysis of interviews with four informants: The Realist, The Optimist, The Idealist, and The Romantic, although the narrative interviews from January 2022 are also referenced in this analysis to add more context or different opinions on a given subject. Those references can be found in the text. This analysis is divided into subsections that loosely represent the main themes I have identified in the analysis of these interviews. It will begin with some reflections on the past of Nikel, the combine's role in the town, the event of its shutdown, and the

development of urban transformations following the closure. The informants discuss the participation of the identified actors of influence, and then the section moves on to opinions on Nikel's border town and cooperation with Norway, as well as the consequences of the covid-19 pandemic and the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine. At the end of this section, I provide an overview of the interview results.

When it comes to the experience of transformations in Nikel, there has been some documentation of change in the town through the experiences of Nikel's inhabitants. Russian media such as Novaya Gazeta and Radio Liberty's Current Time have been following the situation in the area by interviewing residents about life in Nikel after the smelter closure (Britskaya, 2021; Current Time's Unknown Russia, 2022). These articles paint a hopeless picture of total neglect: Larisa describes the devastating state of the infrastructure, while Oleg notes how inaccessible the local healthcare is (Current Time's Unknown Russia, 2022; Britskaya, 2021). Various projects proposed by the actors of change, according to the interviewed residents, have not been executed, so the people are leaving, and the apartments cost so low that some of them have a "price of an iPhone" (Britskaya, 2021). Valentina expresses disagreement with Nor Nickel's strategy of development, saying that it is not productive to put all the responsibility of economic development on small businesses, and Agaron adds that the tourism industry is far from growing in Nikel, with his hotel getting punished by the municipal authorities instead of receiving support (Britskaya, 2021). People express concern about the lack of change the town has experienced in the past decades overall, finding it confusing that a town that has been so important for the combine and, consequently, Nor Nickel, and has brought a lot of income to the enterprise has not addressed any of the fundamental issues Nikel has been living with.

Such a background seems to paint a completely different picture of the reality of the urban transformation of Nikel compared to the strategies and plans of the actors I have presented in the previous section. Let us now turn our attention to the stories shared with me by the informants I interviewed for this study. Do they relate to the articles written about Nikel? Is Nikel really left to slowly fade away?

4.3.1. The past: Soviet glory and post-Soviet comfort

To ensure that my depressing perception of Nikel is not exaggerated by the articles I have read online, I asked the informants to verbally introduce me to Nikel. The Nikel described to me was

Nikel in which the Pechenganikel combine was almost absent. The informants talk about it as a cozy, clean little town with incredible nature surrounding it, while others indulge in nostalgia about its liveliness during the Soviet period. The liveliness was prompted by buses full of tourists from Scandinavia and China, who would walk around the town, take pictures of the statue of Vladimir Lenin on the main square, get a meal at a local restaurant and then visit the lakes and forests in the area (The Optimist, Interview 15 June 2022). The nostalgia for the Soviet Nikel is especially pronounced amongst the older generation, who remember it as a colorful, beautiful place. Does that mean, however, that they now see it as the opposite of colorful and beautiful?

“Listen, this is probably something that unites the whole post-Soviet space because there are so many people who look back and are nostalgic. [...] They hope that the past will come back, as well as the USSR and the youth! But has anyone thought about how one cannot enter the same river twice?” (The Idealist, Interview 23 June 2022).

This distaste expressed by The Idealist about this romanticized view of Nikel of the past comes as no surprise, as the Soviet period also carries memories of severe, unregulated pollution and consequences of the Iron Curtain.

The informants acknowledge the less attractive things about Nikel. The town is also described as an unhealthy industrial town with destroyed greenery, “blue fog”, slowly crumbling buildings and emergency-state infrastructure. Large garbage dumps and alcoholics everywhere is the alternative description of Nikel, with abandoned areas “that would be a great place to play Stalker” (The Optimist, Interview 15 June 2022). There was a large flow of emigration from Nikel after the dissolution of the Soviet Union when the worsened socio-economic state of Russia led to the financial crisis of 1998. The adaptation to the new open-market society was a challenge for a socialist settlement of such a unique structure. Nikel has been experiencing population outflow ever since, with the demographic situation changing from 21.8 thousand people living in the monotown in 1989 to only 11 thousand in 2020 (URBANpro, n.d.). The prognosis for the town has not been very positive either, which is highlighted by several informants admitting to having contemplated moving away in a near future.

No matter if the inhabitants believe that Nikel is “a trip to the past” that is beyond salvation or not, most of the informants see it as a unique settlement that they love, although that does not cancel

out their dissatisfaction with the deteriorating state of the town. The smelter, however, has undoubtedly been a game-changer for the inhabitants.

4.3.2. The monotown identity: the combine, the smelter, and its shutdown

Because the smelter is the main employer in Nickel, two out of four informants I talked to have had some sort of relation to the enterprise. Those are the people who have been born and raised in Nickel: The Optimist and The Realist. Both have had their direct relatives work at the smelter for the majority of their lives, and while The Realist chose to pursue a career unrelated to the workings of the smelter, The Optimist had spent some years working in the maintenance of the smelter. The awareness of the dangers of such a workplace is well-known for both of them: The Realist explained that his relative had gotten multiple serious injuries, which made him retire early (Interview 22 June 2022). The informant has also experienced loss among his close relatives due to cancer, which The Realist attributes to the cancerogenic fumes coming out of the production of the enterprise. This has made the informant very critical of the actions of Nornickel and has definitely influenced his feelings towards the town.

The Optimist has also expressed that the work for the combine was physically and emotionally damaging, mentioning the ‘simple’ conditions and minimum wage, although having additionally received the northern allowance (Interview 15 June 2022). The salaries of the smelter workers were enough to guarantee comfortable living and education for children, explained The Realist. Despite that, neither of the informants decided to keep working for the plant. Both heavy production and pollution outweighed the desire to earn a smelter worker’s salary.

“...there was such an exhaust from these pipes, that when they [let out the gas], you’re running home, you’re all black, and everything inside is black accordingly... Well, we are used to this gas since birth, and now that [the smelter] is closed, it is sort of unusual to have fresh air” (The Optimist, Interview 15 June 2022).

This quote illustrates the severity of the problem the smelter created for the environment and the daily experience of a local resident. These memories are shared by all informants, which further solidifies the idea that the smelter does not bring up positive connotations in the stories of the inhabitants.

The other two informants, The Idealist, and The Romantic have a different relationship to the combine, as they have had no direct relation to the enterprise, instead moving to the area in their adulthood: The Idealist – for family, and The Romantic – for work. Thus, the role the enterprise had in their perception of Nikel ended up being relatively less pronounced than for The Optimist and The Realist. The opinion on the plant and its role in the town is in solidarity with the other two informants: the enterprise, although being a great financial source for its workers, did not provide enough benefits to the overall livelihood of the town compared to all the negative sides of its production.

“Yes, suppose, I know that there are people, a section of people, who regret the closure. But that is far from being many people. The ones I communicate with more, on the other hand, are happy every day breathing in the fresh air. My memories with the smelter are much more negative. For instance, it was a very heavy ecological situation. [...] In 2008, we had a whole ecological catastrophe. In the month of July, all the trees were as thin as a finger. [...] And if you are also in an international environment, you always feel sort of awkward.” (The Idealist, Interview 23 June 2022).

Here, I would like to highlight the embarrassment The Idealist describes in the encounters with the Norwegians visiting Nikel in the active years of the smelter. Although there does not seem to have been much public protest from the inhabitants of Nikel to modernize or shut down the operations, there certainly is a condemnation of the disinterest of the previous governments to address the concerns of Norway and Finland regarding the pollution coming from Nikel. Just as much as has worsened the lives of the local and close communities, informants like The Idealist have felt shame in front of the international community for a long time for dismissing the issue (Interview 23 June 2022). Keeping an intimate and positive relationship with close neighbors was not an easy task with the decades of fruitless negotiations, despite the awareness Nikel’s residents had about the negative effects of smelting.

Further discussing the smelter plant, the informants described it as an object too outdated, dangerous, and polluting to be modernized, although The Optimist pointed out that there were so-called “capital [renovation] works” done for the plant over the years, yet those were “quite minimal” (Interview 15 June 2022). This matches other respondents’ critique of the lack of proper renovations in favor of profit maximization.

“[The plant] was an object of pride for the people, so to speak, but [the owners] used it only to pump out money, without the modernization. It should have been done in its own time in the 90s and the beginning of the 00s when the company had an excess profit. But now it’s in such a state that naturally it was easier to shut it down.” (The Idealist, Interview 23 June 2022).

This criticism is not the first time someone questions the intentions of Nornickel. In the pieces concerning Nikel’s fate after the shutdown of production, several interviewed inhabitants note that the hard work of miners and engineers and the large income the combine has accumulated must have been more than enough for necessary repairs in the town and the combine (Britskaya, 2021; Current Time’s Unknown Russia, 2022). Despite such assessments, the informants agree that the reemployment programs and financial compensation that Nornickel has provided to the smelter workers were a good initiative by the city-forming enterprise. At the same time, however, the uncertainty created by the event of closure of the smelter initially brought in worries from the employees whose work was not directly at the smelter, as that did not necessarily guarantee them further employment. “In fact: the smelter closed, but nothing new has appeared” (The Realist, Interview 22 June 2022). A similar opinion was shared by The Romantic, who contemplated how the smelter could have been repurposed for industrial tourism or have gotten a new production on the territory that would not be as polluting (Interview 27 June 2022). The lack of systematized job creation after the closure of the smelter is the main point of critique from the informants, although it is not seen as a very critical issue.

Rather than seeing the ex-monotown as having lost its main enterprise, this event has been described by the informants as a “new era”, a “second breath” for the town, as “not an end, but a beginning of something new” (The Idealist, Interview 23 June 2022). With this, it seems like the inhabitants share the same position on the matter as the actors who went through with the shutdown. But what does this new era of Nikel entail?

4.3.3. The diversification of Nikel: project economy, tourism, and self-expression

The closure of the smelter has been announced with a multitude of ideas and plans for the betterment of Nikel's post-smelter. Different actors, whose involvement in the change has been detailed in section 4.2. of this chapter, have worked on creating their own manuals of future Nikel. The main drivers of such change, Nornickel’s Second School and World of New Possibilities are

well-known in the local community. The reactions to the projects launched by these organizations have varied across the informants, yet there are patterns in the general opinion of these institutions.

The Second School

The Second School is praised for developing the cultural and educational sphere of the town, providing creative and business workshops and masterclasses, art residencies, language clubs, volunteering initiatives for children, small business support programs, events, festivals, and public space creation and renovation. The informants see this establishment as the main driver of change in the town, so they put a lot of hope into its projects and initiatives. However, this does not indicate full satisfaction with the work the Second School has done in Nickel so far.

“Second School? Well, I have an ambivalent opinion on it: from one side, they are doing something, but from the other [...] I don’t think that the Second School can fully replace or give everything that the population needs. The population, in fact, maybe 70 percent of it, has a negative opinion of the Second School. But [the Second School] is good in any case, because there is something new happening, they are doing certain things. I cannot say I have a necessarily negative view on them” (The Realist, Interview 22 June 2022).

The negative opinion on the agency that The Realist mentions is related to the initial role of the Second School as a place of art projects and workshops for children and adults, rather than a powerful mechanism of regional development. While the Second School has gone beyond its creative endeavors, the visibility of such compared to the larger projects could be the reason such an opinion is, as The Realist claims, so popular. The other informants express a similar kind of ambivalence over the establishment, as they are happy that the Second School is enriching Nickel’s social and cultural fabric, but there is a general atmosphere of dissatisfaction over the work the Second School does. Some of the mentioned factors included: a lack of job creation and visible progress with the projects they offer, questionable prioritization of projects, and the gap between their financial capabilities and the outcome for the town so far.

While The Optimist’s attitude towards the work of the Second School is open and pragmatic, acknowledging that carrying out larger projects take time, especially because of the pandemic-related drawbacks, The Realist and The Idealist are concerned with the ineffectiveness of the investments. The examples they present to illustrate their concerns involved projects related to the

aforementioned master plan by the Second School and URBANpro, such as the questionable geographical position of the outdoor scenes being built for future events and the lack of investments into more substantial business initiatives. In the words of The Realist, the Second School makes projects “for the soul” of the population, however, with the financial tools they have, he finds the lack of substantial infrastructure and business projects unfavorable for the town (Interview 22 June 2022).

Furthermore, the informants criticize the strategical focus of the development actors on the tourism industry. The general reasoning for that is the fact that most attractions are not close enough to Nikel for it to be a tourist hotspot. Newly created or proposed projects such as the “glamping” spot in Rybachii island instead of the Liinahamari port, Teriberka, and the currently abandoned Kola superdeep borehole are all named as tourist hotspots which would develop tourism in Nikel as well (Britskaya, 2021; URBANpro, n.d.). However, these places are too far from the town, so it is unlikely that the town will get more traffic from those places. By itself, Nikel is viewed as a place with beautiful forests, being surrounded by tundra, yet The Realist does not believe that nature-based tourism would help bring people into Nikel (Interview 22 June 2022). The current tourist situation, according to the informant, shows lackluster volume already, so it is presumptuous to consider it a successful venture, which some blame on the city-forming enterprise.

But not everyone is as skeptical when it comes to tourism ventures, as The Romantic assures multiple times that Nikel’s potential in terms of tourism is “indefinite”, noting that with proper investment priorities the town could build a dedicated section of tourists (Interview 27 June 2022). The idealist also believes that tourism is possible with the right allocation of funds towards tourism-related projects, saying that although the situation has been less optimistic due to the events up until the summer of 2022, the development of this sphere seems possible. The informants share the notion that Nikel has something to offer to tourists, talking about the surrounding nature which is not scarred by the plant, the closeness to the Pasvik reserve and the lakes in the area, and winter sports areas, as well as the experience of Arctic climate.

World of New Possibilities

On the other hand, when it comes to discussing the World of New Possibilities, it seems like the informants see it as a generally more favorable initiative. The Realist, for instance, worked on one

of the projects which won a grant from the organization, and praised the opportunities that these contests provide to activists and businessmen in Nikel:

“If you take the local history museum - it’s very cool. Its specialists constantly apply, and thanks to the World of New Possibilities they have strongly upped the level of the local history museum. I know that our children’s music school also always applies for these contests and wins. [...] Honestly speaking, that is exactly the thing that develops the township, and it is specifically a very positive thing” (Interview 22 June 2022).

Such an example of an opinion on the charity shows two things, the first one being that the inhabitants seem to notice the projects funded by the World of New Possibilities much more than the ones supported or carried out by the Second School. This could be due to the fact that they can see the positive changes because of such projects, or because their visibility is promoted in a much more accessible way to the local residents. Such visibility is also a consequence of the long-term impact of the World of New Possibilities, as it has been operating in the area for almost ten years, and thus has established itself as an attractive and fruitful venture.

Alongside such commentary, there is a certain sense of creativity shared by the informants. When they discuss the changes in the region or the projects which are considered for implementation, they also begin brainstorming ways to make Nikel a more attractive place on the spot. This is something The Romantic mentioned as well: “It is really impressive when people care and cheer for their town” (Interview 27 June 2022). This care is expressed through the activism that many of the informants are concerned with in their own ways, the cheering on for the new establishments and projects being worked on, and so on. It is not a universal feeling shared by the population, warns The Optimist, adding that “people will always find something to be upset about” (Interview 15 June 2022).

And to a certain degree, the critical response can also be a reflection of the general displeasure the inhabitants feel about the type of activity they see going on in the town. Even The Realist, who spoke quite critically about the change in Nikel, has thought of an interactive project that could have unfolded on the premises of the closed smelter which would, in his opinion, be more fascinating to tourists than the usual industrial tours. He refers to a Russian proverb: “The place doesn't honor the man, but the man does the place”, which reflects on the different understandings of what it means to be an engaged inhabitant of Nikel (Interview 22 June 2022).

The role of municipal and regional governing in the urban development

The Nornickel-backed organizations are not the only actors creating change in Nikel. One of the examples of the regionally funded projects is the renovation of the culture palace “Voshod”, which has been allocated 462.9 million rubles (b-port, 2021). Those informants that have used the culture palace as an example condemn the large sum that is being used on the renovation, wondering if it is a fair distribution of resources that could have been gone to the renovation of Nikel’s infrastructure (Nature-loving woman, Interview 22 January 2022). A similar criticism is being extended to the current governor of the Murmansk region Andrey Chibis, who allegedly promised to pay close attention to the processes in the area post-smelter shutdown.

There is a sense of disappointment felt by the informants when they discuss current development sites. And this is understandable, as the sewage network, water³, and heating supply have been breaking down consistently, multiple times a year, leaving many to live in a state of emergency (Britskaya, 2021). The inaccessible healthcare, both in terms of services offered in Nikel and in physical accessibility of the nearest hospital, ironically located on a hill and lacking proper entry points for people with physical disabilities or impairments, seems to be left without much addressing, although just some years ago the town still housed hard, dangerous production (The Optimist, Interview 15 June 2022). Somehow, the projects which end up securing the financial support of Nornickel’s organizations are mostly small businesses rather than immediate infrastructure modernization. Additionally, this reliance on small business development without the basis of good social security, healthcare facilities, infrastructure, and housing stock modernization, makes it far less likely that a truly sustainable “revival” of the monotown can be achieved (Shastitko & Fakhitova, 2015, p.14).

The issue of transportation is also brought up by the informants. The Realist mentions the constant repairing of the roads as their quality is low, which once again reflects on the recurring issues with the basic infrastructure (Interview 22 June 2022). Nikel is also relatively secluded, and because of its small size, it relies on good transportation possibilities to access bigger settlements for more services. The regional transportation services offered in the area, however, have been an issue for

³ On July 27th, 2022, Nikel’s VK public page posted that there is reconstruction work being done for water pipes all over the town. The comments of the locals under the post question the manner in which it is being done, as most of the town is allegedly being dug up, yet the work is progressing quite slowly (Nikel [NI], 2022).

many years: the buses and trains going to Murmansk were at some point canceled by the municipality because of losing the competition to more convenient private microbus routes (The Realist, Interview 22 June 2022). When the minibuses practically got the authority over the market, the prices of transportation went much higher. After years of trying to convince the municipality to return the bus routes, they are reportedly coming back into the region, which is going to make mobility more independent and accessible. This is something multiple informants highlighted positively in the municipality's recent activity.

The local politics of the Pechenga region is also a subject of discussion between the inhabitants. During our conversation, some informants alluded to the local municipal elections being rigged. Novaya Gazeta's story has also covered this situation: the contract soldiers working in the Pechenga region for a limited amount of time were asked to vote for a specific candidate in the latest Pechenga region municipality government elections in the autumn of 2021, which led to that candidate outweighing the previous deputy who was the choice of the actual inhabitants of the region (Britskaya, 2021). In turn, this affects the quality of work done for the region, as the informants do not seem particularly satisfied with the current deputy that represents the area in the Municipal Formation of the Pechenga region. "As a result, now there is a deputy from United Russia, and he does not actually do anything, we have many questions for him", says The Realist (Interview 22 June 2022). But the consensus the informants tend to come to can be described by what The Realist said when discussing the local politics:

"Do the citizens work with the deputies? Hardly, I cannot say that someone somewhere complains about some sort of issue, although maybe something is being solved. But maybe, as Russian people, we just do not have that consciousness that if someone has difficulties or problems they would go to the deputy, the person they chose, to get those fixed. Usually, Facebook is opened, and someone writes: "Ah, nothing is being done again, I will complain!". So, people also do not know what the correct way is to fix problems." (Interview 22 June 2022).

Why is there this lack of civic involvement with the municipal authorities that is described in the quote above? One of the reasons for the lack of interaction between the inhabitants and the local governing structure has to do with the distrust towards the intentions of the latter. This can be observed in a situation Tatiana Britskaya (2021) describes in her article for Novaya Gazeta: when,

in March 2021, Nickel was left without water and, consequently, heating, because of the collapsed water pipes, the head of the Pechenga District's municipal government, Andrey Kuznetsov blamed the freezing temperatures instead of the evident emergency state of the infrastructure. Such a dismissing attitude towards a fundamental issue of the people's livelihood, which has reportedly been put for discussion numerous times over the years, creates apathy in the active members of civil society. Together with the suspicions about the legitimacy of the recent municipal government elections, the decision of inhabitants not to voice their concerns to the local authorities can be understood as reasonable.

The informant further contemplates the idea that political involvement is usually done in the form of online discussions rather than a direct dialogue with the authorities. Although online discussions and complaints are not the most productive way of solving fundamental issues, the biggest issues end up being highlighted in such a public space by those, who do not have the ability to actively participate in project development.

The feedback from the local people for specific projects must also be sought out specifically, as the people "perceive changes through the prism of the routine every day", says a Second School representative (Interview 22 January 2022). The informants consider this passivity to be a cultural trait, as familiarity and predictability, while it can have downsides, seems to be the more desirable outcome for people than the need to reimagine their space. However, the informants do note that younger people are much more involved and vocal about the changes in the town. Thus, with the possibilities provided by, for instance, the Second School volunteering has become a popular way of engaging with the local political and social mechanisms.

"We are working with the population as well; we are working to make sure that this information is not too stressful. Of course, in any case, the town is experiencing stress. These are too big of changes, too fundamental for them. But with the help of specifically creative industries, with the invited artists, we are trying to help people reimagine this from another angle." (Second School representative, Interview 22 January 2022).

This quote above further shows us two things. The changes in Nickel have been hard to comprehend to the population even after a year since the smelter shop stopped working because of the several different priorities actors of influence such as Nor Nickel have proposed for the town. This is understandable, as the town's whole history had been intertwined with nickel. This also explains

why some inhabitants express a longing for Nickel's "glory years" in the Soviet period. The inhabitants find it hard to identify with the ideas and identities the urban transformation implies, which is why there is a pushback from the local population. Therefore, despite the hopeful prognoses of Nor Nickel, people keep moving away from Nickel.

Post-closure migration

The outflow of the population is a topic of much discussion, as it was an inevitable outcome of the smelter shutdown. Interestingly, for *The Realist*, it is one of the main problems facing Nickel at the moment. "Okay, if we abstract ourselves fully now – where are the jobs? I think the decisions made were not very correct", he says, contemplating the decisions of the development actors (Interview 22 June 2022). Alternatively, for the informants of an older generation, this outflow is seen as a natural occurrence. The shrinking of the population is not considered a disaster but rather a philosophical view on the metamorphosis of life. As well as that, some mention the fact that some people have also come back to Nickel or moved here because of temporary work opportunities in the education sector. The main reason for such a hopeful view on the metamorphosis of Nickel is the fact that it is located in a border zone that is militarized (three informants, Interview 22 January 2022). No matter how small the town will keep getting, the informants are convinced that Nickel will not disappear or 'close down' at least for a good while.

There is an undeniable sense of appreciation when it comes to the initiatives and projects surrounding the development of Nickel. However, the doubt around the distribution of resources and quality of such developments is questioned even by those people who actively participate in Nickel's social and political life. This can be explained by the recurring lack of belief in the political mechanisms shared among the post-soviet lands, as well as the lack of follow-through on announced projects after the smelter shutdown (Britskaya, 2022). The history of corruption in Russia, as well as that in Nor Nickel itself (Njaa, 2018) set in this reluctant relationship towards change, and that could explain the hesitance to accept that as a viable option for a town like Nickel.

4.3.4. The border town identity: cooperation with Norway

The fall of the Soviet Union brought new opportunities to Nickel. As the borders opened to places like Norway, Nickel now had an opportunity to easily experience life outside of the Soviet order. The relationship between Nickel and the border municipality of Sør-Varanger in the Troms and Finnmark county proved to be much more significant in the eyes of the informants than I expected.

Border relations and collaboration seem to be significant for the identity the inhabitants of Nikel have crafted for themselves. As *The Idealist* puts it:

“We are, after all, the only municipalities in Norway and Russia which are bordering with each other. We have a 196-kilometer land border that runs through the Pechenga and Sør-Varanger. That is the only land border, so to speak, and it is where people can be directly in contact, communicate, and it was a channel without any big politics” (Interview 23 June 2022).

This quote underscores the importance of the relations between Nikel and Kirkenes. The border communities have tried their best to exercise this channel of communication and cooperation by not only having introduced visa-free permits which allow the inhabitants of these counties to travel within the municipalities freely for up to 15 days without notifying the respective governments (Nikel, 2020), but also organizing a variety of events to engage different groups in common activities and build bridges between them. *The Realist* describes it like this: “You could feel [the cooperation on different levels], and the town was basically boiling with life!” (Interview 22 June 2022). Even those of the inhabitants that were not directly engaged in the creation of these events have felt the importance and presence of such a cooperative mindset between the Norwegian and Russian border municipalities. The informants use the examples of sports competitions between Kirkenes and Nikel sports teams, cultural events in the Second School, Christmas concerts, and events with the music schools of Kirkenes and Nikel (*The Realist*, Interview 22 June 2022; *The Romantic*, Interview 29 June 2022). The events extended not only to the young population but also to adults and seniors (*The Idealist*, Interview 23 June 2022).

As well as the societal and cultural impact of cooperation between the municipalities, business projects and investment initiatives are also named to be significant in the development of Nikel, mentioned in multiple different development actor strategies. A representative from the Second School pointed out that such cooperation became even stronger during the pandemic, as it made it more difficult to travel and put mutual trust and cooperation to the forefront (Interview 22 January 2022). This means carrying out projects on behalf of the foreign companion, “working through each other’s hands” (Interview 22 January 2022). It is not known if any of the investment projects talked about in the interview are still being carried out in the current state of the Russo-Ukrainian war, as the cultural cooperation has been officially paused for an indefinite time.

Outside of the official cooperation between political and economic actors of the two regions, every informant has expressed a longing for the time when borders were open, reminiscing on the frequent trips to see their friends who live in the area, celebrate holidays together, enjoy the nightlife of Kirkenes, and most often – go grocery shopping.

“The relationship [of Nikel inhabitants] to Kirkenes is just splendid. Everyone enjoyed going there. You could meet more acquaintances in Norway than in actual Nikel! You’re walking around Rema 1000 and suddenly: “Hello! Yes, are you getting cheese?”, and then “And you’ve decided to buy brunost? Splendid! We, on the other hand, are getting shrimps!” (The Realist, Interview 22 June 2022).

This shows just how essential the opportunity to travel across the border to Kirkenes was to Nikel. The informants seemed to have felt at home in Kirkenes, which had further brought these border settlements closer together.

The same was said about the inhabitants of Sør-Varanger visiting Nikel and the rest of the Pechenga region: whether it was to see family members and friends living in Russia, to visit events of the Second School, to enjoy the nature surrounding Nikel, to buy Russian groceries or, as mentioned by most of the informants, get cheap petrol. The Romantic and The Realist also pointed out that the beauty industry is popular among Norwegians traveling to the area.

Overall, the relationship between Nikel and Norway (not limited to Kirkenes specifically) seems to be one of the most defining characteristics of the informants. They admit, however, that it is not necessarily how everyone in Nikel relates to Norway, “yet everyone wants to drink Norwegian coffee” (The Optimist, Interview 15 June 2022). So, when it came to the border closure in March of 2020, a significant factor for restricted official cooperation and everyday communal feeling of the two nations, it has significantly impacted the way inhabitants now related to their identity. “Because I have been- was traveling to Kirkenes since 2015, when the border closed it was very painful for me” (The Optimist, Interview 15 June 2022). Keeping in contact became more important than before, and it was proven to me with calls and messages that the informants were receiving from their Norwegian friends during our interviews.

4.3.5. Obstruction to change: covid-19 and the Russo-Ukrainian war

One of the ways through which the inhabitants have recognized the importance of their relations with their Norwegian friends has been the closure of the Russian-Norwegian border at the beginning of the covid-19 pandemic in March of 2020. The sudden inability to see one another has made the cooperation between the Sør-Varanger and Pechenga municipalities rely heavily on online events.

The covid-19 pandemic

The pandemic has been a large factor in the course of Nikel's development. Immobility and restrictions slowed, or outright canceled projects and business ideas were on the course of being conducted in Nikel. For example, out of 11 projects that won business grants from NorNickel contests via the Second School, only three have continued to develop their projects (Britskaya, 2022). Similar examples have been highlighted by The Optimist:

“...We have various projects happening, which people are trying to keep running, like, the support of small businesses, or the restoration of the sovkhov (state farm), but this project got canceled due to a person dying because of the pandemic. And so - everything shut down. [...] We also had a project on establishing an enterprise for processing the [metal] slags, making some sort of balls out of them, as I understand [...] but for some reason right now, at this moment it is all kind of quieted down” (Interview 15 June 2022).

This bleak synopsis of the unsuccessful projects, some of which had been advertised by Nornickel as the focal projects for Nikel, is a disappointing tendency for urban transformation. The disappointment is seemingly shared amongst the informants, as they all hope for a growing business environment in the area. Whether there is skepticism about the initial potential of projects announced by Nornickel and its subsidiaries or not – the informants express understanding regarding the importance of the development and implementation of new establishments or businesses for the town's prosperity.

Nonetheless, it must be noted that the initial uncertainty surrounding the projects has apparently slowly been disappearing with, for example, the master plan of Nikel being further discussed with the Pechenga municipality for implementation (The Idealist, Interview 23 June 2022). Despite covid-19, Nikel has experienced a new gastronomic festival, as well as getting upgraded outdoor

spaces for leisure and a new scene for potential events (a Second School representative, Interview 22 January 2022; The Optimist, Interview 15 June 2022).

The slow return to ‘normal’ conditions for such developments has been complicated by the events of 24th February 2022, which is known as the beginning of Russia’s invasion of Ukrainian territories. The Russo-Ukrainian war, which is ongoing at the time of this study, added an additional layer of complications to most socio-economic processes within not just Nickel but the whole territory of Russia. The border restrictions, which stood firmly under the guise of the covid-19 restrictions up until the 16th of July 2022 added tension and additional obstacles to the everyday life of Nickel.

The Russo-Ukrainian war

The war has worsened the life of Nickel’s inhabitants. The prices have risen exponentially, especially for larger purchases such as vehicles and technology (The Realist, Interview 22 June 2022). The international banking system like Visa and Mastercard are also no longer available for those owning a Russian bank account, which has been an issue for those with parents abroad.

“No, of course, there was a moment when the toilet paper was gone, as well as the female hygiene products, buckwheat, and sugar too. Well, that is human nature, this isn’t only happening in Russia, it also is currently happening in the west, and in the United States. It ended pretty fast here. We don’t have empty shelves, we have everything [...]. Yes, the prices have gone up, as well as the rent. Prices on groceries have gone up, but the gas [price] is standing still, almost 40-50 rubles” (The Optimist, Interview 15 June 2022).

This quote reveals a fascinating pattern among the informants, the explanation for which I am unsure. The socio-economic effects of the war on the informants are presented as barely an issue, even though the changes are evidently stark. For instance, The Realist also notes that he now spends on average twice as much money on his groceries. He has observed also that people have begun “holding on to their money” much more and that their mindset has been changing (The Realist, Interview 22 June 2022). But he states this matter-of-factly as if it is not a big deal for him personally. If the sanctions imposed on Russia have had an influence on the everyday experiences of the inhabitants, why is the attitude of The Optimist and The Realist, apart from their self-defined personality type, almost dismissive of the effects of the invasion of Ukraine has had on their life

in Nikel? Could it be a decision to purposefully underplay the impact of the international community's actions toward Russia? Or is it just a stoic attitude towards the current challenges?

The change in mindset has been impacted not only by socio-economic status but also by political views. The war has had consequences on the way people relate to each other as the opinions on the situations vary amongst Russians. The informants who spoke on the war in our conversations seem to be condemning the actions of their state, as some of them have friends and family in Ukraine. Nikel has also received around 20 Ukrainian refugees from Mariupol and Luhansk since the beginning of the war and this has been accepted just fine by the local community, says The Idealist.

“People just live, or maybe they just don't open up. But for me it is eternal pain. Every morning I just want to wake up- and that's it” (The Idealist, Interview 23 June 2022).

As demonstrated in the above quote, The Idealist was more open to discussing the war than the others. The feelings the informant expressed on the subject showed a lot of compassion towards the people of Ukraine, and condemnation of the actions of the Russian government. Evidently, the war has impacted The Idealist in a profound way, and there was no ambivalence shown when discussing the topic.

Those informants who chose to speak about the war expressed hope for a peaceful resolution. However, the mindset shared by the informants is one of “not everything is black and white”, although its implementation is not the same in practice. The Realist spoke about having that ambivalence regarding the subject of war, because of the different media he monitors from each side of the conflict to get a better picture of what is happening in the warzone (Interview 22 June 2022). The informant does not trust the media and chooses to also follow the social media of correspondents on site. The Idealist, however, chooses to abstain from such media consumption during the war, as she believes that looking for “fairness” in such a case harmfully simplifies the roles of the main actors, essentially othering one and praising the other.

“These are people! These are people! Look into your heart, that is where the real borders lay, not on a map. The borders between good and evil. And when you allow evil to get in, the war to dictate your heart, it means to go and fight [...]. You are losing, losing yourself, your human face, your dignity. [...] I used to be painfully worried about the fate of Nikel,

truly. But now, especially after all this, I am looking at this more philosophically. We don't have anything to cry about yet compared to those who have lost their home" (The Idealist, Interview 23 June 2022).

I have chosen to add this quote to the analysis because I thought it expressed a strong message about the way the topic of war is treated among the Russian community. The war has impacted the self-identification of the people of Nikel, which is showcased by the informants in the examples of misunderstandings of some locals towards things such as the closed borders. Some local inhabitants assumed that the Norwegians were the ones upholding the ban on crossing the Russian-Norwegian border by land transportation after the covid-19 restrictions and that it was done out for political reasons. With the border closure, pause on cooperation with Russia, and Norway supplying weapons to Ukraine, some inhabitants felt offended by such treatment from a neighboring state, feeling like that was an attack on their relationship. The Optimist, for instance, chooses to change the topic with those who ask for her opinion on the matter (Interview 15 June 2022). The Realist has found out quickly that debunking these ideas about the Norwegian opinion on them, whether that means inhabitants of Nikel or Russians in general, does not help (Interview 22 June 2022).

Norwegian friends of the informants have been supportive and understanding of their Russian friends. The informants all keep in touch with their international network, and none of the informants have experienced any sort of arguments with their friends in Norway. Instead, they talk about meeting soon and sending support to those living in Nikel.

"Even when February happened, many Norwegians wrote to me: "Hey, don't you worry, we will keep talking to you. We understand that the system is the system, and you are you." They were supportive, and there were no questions like: "And what do you think about [the war]?" (The Realist, Interview 22 June 2022).

Clearly, the relationship between the informants and their Norwegian friends has not changed because of the war. This made me wonder: why have the informants all had such a good experience? Could it be the close nature of the relationship between these people, or the tendency of people interested in multicultural connections to be in favor of having good relations with the international community? The Optimist has also expressed that there have been no misunderstandings between her and her Norwegian friends, although the people she has met in

Nikel, who were visiting from Kirkenes have sometimes asked her the “what is your opinion [on the war]?” questions (Interview 15 June 2022).

The general attitude seems to be the distance from these topics. During our conversations, I did not use the word “war” when discussing these topics because I did not know what kind of stance the informants have on the situation since the Russian government persecutes those Russians who refer to the war as anything but a “special operation”. Most of the informants, therefore, also abstained from calling it a war. This bleeds into the fact that the informants do not discuss political matters or the war with their international friends. The Idealist says that that is the principle she has as these topics “do not bring people together” (Interview 23 June 2022). Instead of discussing things outside of their control, this cross-border community chooses to work on practical matters which could keep their connection strong.

“The only option, and there is no alternative to it, is dialogue. Where we cannot convince Norwegians of our rightness, Norwegians cannot impose their values on us. But the fact that we are not looking at each other through the barrel of the gun, but instead having a cultural dialogue, sharing our points of view, and listening to each other-- the dialogue has no alternative. And now the current event is the biggest confirmation to me that it is better to have an endless dialogue than war” (The Idealist, Interview 23 June 2022).

This quote sums up the attitude of the informants towards how the war has altered the relations between Nikel and Kirkenes, and, maybe, the rest of the world. Those informants who discussed war, have all expressed a wish for a peaceful dialogue. Unfortunately, their government does not have any windows for such a dialogue at the time of writing this thesis.

Reflecting on these findings

Subchapter 4.3. has discussed themes of the role of the smelter and its closure in the development of Nikel, as well as the potential development in the town. It has also touched on Nikel’s relationship with Norway, the impact of covid-19, and the war on the town. According to the interviews, the informants enjoy living in Nikel, but they are not afraid to criticize things that, in their opinion, are disadvantageous to the town.

The informants unanimously support the closure of the smelter and find it to have improved their health and the nature surrounding Nikel. The surrounding forests, lakes, and fresh air are treasured

by the residents; it is how they connect to the region and what keeps them living there. Although the informants have expressed appreciation for the closure of the smelter, the aftermath of this event has been a definite subject of concern. The informants are ambivalent to the projects carried out by Nor Nickel and the regional government, praising the fact that something is being done, but questioning the priorities put forward by these actors of change.

This can be specifically traced when the informants describe the infrastructure of Nikel. In the interviews, it is described as totally outdated, and the informants express skepticism over the inaction of the authorities regarding such a vital part of the functioning of the town. Informants believe that the systematic modernization of the sewage network, water, and heating supply system is what the development actors should be concerned with first and foremost. At the same time, they express appreciation for the beautification projects such as the demolition of abandoned houses and the appearance of neat outdoor spaces. The participants of the study enjoy the projects that have made their town more attractive to the eye, as that positively affects their everyday experience in Nikel. But some note that regardless of such changes in the town, it might not be entirely appropriate to focus on these projects without addressing constant emergency situations that consistently reappear during the winter.

Since the informants enjoy nature in and around Nikel, the idea of Nor Nickel and the local governing authorities to promote nature-based tourism in the area is supported by the inhabitants. They agree that the potential for such a form of tourism is present, however, the participants also expressed skepticism over the way this idea fits into the current state of transformation in Nikel. For example, The Realist is unconvinced that tourism will provide people with enough jobs to sustain and develop the area into an attractive tourist hotspot. Instead, he wonders if the actors of Nikel's transformation are going to follow through with any major projects that would ensure mass employment. The idea of growing Nikel's economy through small businesses and the tourism sector is seen by the inhabitants as an unrealistic way to develop the town.

Through the interviews, I have observed the affectionate nature of the informants' relationship with Norway. The participants cheerfully recalled their trips to Kirkenes and the rest of Norway and told me about the friends they have gained all over the Nordic country because of this proximity to the border. They seem to treasure Norwegian culture and nature and assured me that the neighboring municipality feels the same way as the Pechenga region. The closed borders for 2.5

years, and now the suspension of Nickel-Kirkenes cross-border relations, have been a source of grief for Nickel residents. Despite the ongoing Russo-Ukrainian war, however, the informants express hope in the restoration of this relationship between Nickel and Kirkenes and are joyous to reunite with their friends now that the border has opened in July of 2022.

The covid-19 pandemic has created complications for Nickel's development, with many large projects announced in the past couple of years being put on hold or shut down. However, the inhabitants note that certain big projects like the master plan are still being carried out. I've also noticed that the only associations the informants made when discussing the pandemic were the complications of Nickel's urban development and the closed borders. This makes me wonder if the impact of the pandemic on the life of the settlement has been overshadowed by the aftermath of the smelter closure and the recent Russian invasion of Ukraine.

As a relatively new occurrence, the Russo-Ukrainian war has certainly complicated the socio-economic position of the inhabitants. The informants describe drastic price climbs and express worry over those inhabitants who are less financially stable. The participants of my research, however, do not complain about their personal situations. Their attitude toward these complications is one of tolerance, regardless of whether they agree with the international community's measures or not.

What the informants have noted, however, is the tension between Russians themselves. This is expressed vividly through the informants' reluctance to indulge in discussions about the war, and instead shifting the conversation topic or speaking in broad terms. Such a response could be related to the personal struggles with understanding their position as Russian people in a scenario such as this. This could be possible because the informants also note that the ceased border relations are interpreted starkly differently amongst Russians in Nickel. The undermining of the worsened socio-economic position of the inhabitants could be both a conscious decision to avoid dealing with the consequences of their government's actions, a sort of disassociation from the reality of the war, and a public display of unaffectedness and ability to persevere. This could also be an honest representation of how the inhabitants feel, as the development of Nickel is still progressing, as Nor Nickel is not sanctioned by the international community.

4.4. What do these findings tell us about the transformation of Nikel?

Following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, there was considerable uncertainty about monotowns, as many of them would not be able to compete in the open market. Instead of closing them and relocating the people to larger cities in the area, the decision was to keep the towns working despite the lack of profit they provided, as that kept the owners and local politicians in places of power (Crowley, 2020, p.372). This sort of strategy around dying monotowns has also been criticized for perpetuating immobility, leaving people in worsening conditions, instead of developing other larger cities, their connectivity, and relocating people there (p.379-81). The main facilitator of monotown development in Russia, the Foundation of Monotown Development, is therefore trying to transform monotowns in critical conditions by lessening their dependence on the city-forming enterprise. In Nikel, where this facilitator does not have direct involvement, the dependence on Nor Nickel, although of a different kind, is arguably just as strong as in the Soviet period. My goal with this study was not to pit the socialist Nikel against the post-socialist Nikel or to determine the effects these policies have had on the development of Nikel. Rather, I want to emphasize the complexity of this settlement and its development.

The Soviet Pechenganikel combine relentlessly utilized large reserves of nickel ore to keep the productivity of the combine as high as possible. The large output of the combine made it possible to pay high salaries to workers, which was used to keep those moving to Nikel from leaving. The pride of working for a successful company that was the Pechenganikel combine, the financial benefits provided to the inhabitants of the Arctic area had done their job to keep its people in Nikel despite the harsh climate, remoteness, issues with the infrastructure, and, of course, the pollution. This is indicative of the way Soviet people would craft their livelihood: by making such sacrifices for family, money, or, possibly, the Soviet Union's industrialized future.

The post-socialist era in monotown brought big changes to this everyday experience. The establishment of the Russian Federation brought a new market to Russia, opened borders, made space for change, and pressured industrial sites like Nikel to regulate the damage their production has to the environment. For many people in Nikel, this was good news, as they were now able to explore life outside of the socialist industrial lifestyle, although the pollution persisted. The optimism of a new capitalist economic order encouraged Nikel residents to embrace the opportunities that had arisen in the monotown. This, however, was not a universal experience.

On the other side of the coin, the fall of the Soviet Union ended up creating more disparities between different settlements by reducing the state support and privileges which made living in remote areas attractive for people. The working class of Nickel was now less secure in their jobs or financial stability. Lacking investment and dependence on the highly competitive private investment made it harder to maintain infrastructures and services which kept the settlement attractive and comfortable for an inhabitant. Bolotova (2021) emphasizes how this influences the identity of the deindustrialized remote city by the media and, by extension, the society, and the inhabitants of said city themselves. We see it with the examples of articles done by Novaya Gazeta and Current Time – although realistic, the portrayal of the settlement crafts a depressing image of the town and its inhabitants. By showing that Nickel is getting the short end of the stick of capitalist transition, the state of the post-socialist settlement is being shown as problematic, burdensome, and lost. Therefore, the inhabitants in that space feel problematic, burdensome losers, who must want an urban transformation to feel needed by the government again (Bolotova, 2021).

The identified actors of change are trying to reshape the town from a mono-industrial settlement toward a sustainable, internationally cooperative space via a myriad of projects. At its core, this shows the role of the private sector in stimulating urban, commercial, and industrial growth in post-socialist cities. The increasing responsibility of non-governmental organizations to mediate and promote the development of the settlement as opposed to the municipal or federal authorities creates dependence on these organizations, as well as vulnerability in the potential of such project-based developments. The projects which are carried out by the private sector might be aimed at fulfilling their ambitions before the wishes of the town.

In the case of Nickel, Nornickel is doing exactly that: since the development of Nickel is important not only for the local community but maybe even more so for the city-forming enterprise, its ambitions are explicitly outlined in the development strategy. Nornickel seems to be heavily invested in reestablishing its image of a heavy polluter into one of the leading environmentally conscious metallurgy companies in the world. The desire for Nickel to become a leader of sustainable development in Russia, and to get that kind of status from the United Nations, could be the reason behind all the projects the enterprise is carrying out or financing. It could, therefore, be argued that Nickel has been turned into a laboratory of reputation reinstatement for a company that has harmed the environment significantly in the past couple of decades.

It is fascinating that the shutdown of the smelter happened only in 2020, despite the countless grants, loans, and projects being offered to Nornickel from the Nordic community to minimize the pollution through the modernization of the plant. Maximizing profit was the priority for Nornickel after the fall of the Soviet Union, as the economic system of the newly established Russian Federation was no longer heavily regulated by the state. Despite longstanding political tensions between Russians and their Nordic neighbors due to pollution, competition and demand were the main reasons for the sort of approach Nornickel operated by for all these years, and, similarly, Pechenganikel had been just as invested in constantly growing their production in the Soviet period.

For a very long time, the state of ecology in the area, as well as the health of the people of the region were not considered important factors for the monotown. As *The Idealist* said, the smelter was a source of pride for the inhabitants, and their loyalty to the city-forming enterprise had a large influence on the political and civil environment in Nikel. The inability to understand the Nordic approach to the environmental issues as imperial compared to industrial production success created, added awkwardness between those living in the Pechenga and Sør-Varanger municipalities. Before the shutdown of the smelter, Nikel was described by the Nordic side as “everything that is negative about Russia” (Lindahl, 2010). So, the sudden turn to social responsibility from Nornickel, and intense restructuring and modernization of the production facilities in the border region is possibly an attempt to appease the Norwegian side, which in the past decade has become one of the most environmentally conscious nations in the world.

The closeness and progressiveness of the Nordic countries have paid a big role in the way Nikel chooses to live, basically intertwining places like Kirkenes into the fabric of their everyday. The relationship between these two border towns had a large impact on Norway-Russia relations, with the predictions of the local Russian authorities for even closer cooperation and easier border crossing in the area. This, however, is no longer a consideration.

The identified actors of change imagine Nikel as a hub of eco-tourism, business diversification, as well as international cooperation, and investment. Due to a strain of unforeseen circumstances, many of the projects announced in Nornickel’s strategies ended up falling through. Despite that, Nornickel and the municipality are staying positive regarding the plans they have put forward. The interviewed inhabitants, however, are of a different opinion. Not only have they criticized the

tourism-related projects and the finance pool for those, but the informants also did not shy away from questioning the priorities put forward by the main driver of change in Nickel, which is the city-forming enterprise. In the inhabitants' view, for a town to successfully reestablish itself after the closure of the smelter, it must be able to provide basic services like water, heating, and electricity, before starting projects that add leisure, entertainment, artistic self-expression, and aesthetic pleasure to their lives. It does not seem like the level to which this is being worked on is sufficient in the eyes of the informants.

This insecurity regarding Nickel's continuous development and the provided space for active participation in urban initiatives have made inhabitants more creative and engaged in trying to facilitate change in the town. The inhabitants seem to be very aware of the state of their town, as well as the insecurities of their everyday lives in it, which is why they seem to have a very clear idea about what is lacking. As well as that, the shape in which the town, its infrastructure, and housing stock are left after the deindustrialization of a monotown, especially via a globally important company with a lot of funding, adds to a spectrum of reasons why some people do not enjoy their life in Nickel. Those inhabitants who have the opportunity, and do not feel the need to search for a reason to stay in such a predicament, consider moving, thus escaping the stagnation or degradation of their living space.

Through analyzing the plans and reality of the urban transformation in Nickel, I witnessed the way the change is emerging in the settlement. This analysis of a post-socialist settlement provides an example of the processes of capitalist development and the three different levels of capitalist transition, outlined by Golubchikov (2016), in a specific context, which can be useful in further study of other remote locations.

5. Conclusions

This thesis set out to explore the urban transformation of a monotown called Nikel, Russia following the closure of its main production site. By arguing that cities are actors which reshape and are being reshaped by global and local politics, the study set out to look at the processes in Golubchikov's view of the theoretical context of the post-socialist city, a concept used in urban studies to discuss the way former socialist settlements adapt to the globalized world. The monotown is chosen as a case study as it is a dramatic representation of the post-socialist change, involving processes of marketization, deindustrialization, modernization, and, in effect, insecurity. The processes were observed through qualitative methods equipped with a feminist lens that attunes to underrepresented, marginalized experiences as a way to understand power relations. Through the analysis of strategies and policies of transformation by the actors which carry it out in Nikel, and conversations about the reality of such transformations with the inhabitants of Nikel, I showed that Nikel as a post-socialist settlement is experiencing a complete transition from socialism towards capitalism on three levels defined in Golubchikov's work as ideological, urban, and practical.

Ideologically, Nikel is being shaped into a deindustrialized town with a diverse international market. The change is mainly facilitated by and through the development strategies of Nornickel, with the other actors, which are state-funded, contributing mostly through financial investment. Nikel is being developed to become economically and politically significant by its proximity to the Nordic countries, rather than its previous industrial capacity, which has, seemingly, been left and forgotten. The global trend towards addressing the looming climate catastrophe and trying to balance out the environmental damage by facilitating sustainable development are also among things Nikel's actors of change are heavily invested in. In this way, Nikel is participating in globalization practices, which are inherently capitalist.

On the urban level, the transition can be observed in the way locals engage in this change. In this study, I have observed one of the ways business in the town has been developing, which is: project economy through grant contests. There are many local entrepreneurs and active citizens trying to add to the local economy through these new mechanisms. Nikel's economy has been saturated with entrepreneurship and competition, thus cultivating a new capitalist notion of what it means to participate in the change in the post-socialist city. The process of 'urbanization', or urban

beautification of the town also contributes to the quest for the rebranding of the town, which is meant to abstract Nickel from its socialist past. The fact that the significant changes are dependent on the attention and investment from the private sector rather than being implemented by the municipality is also a symptom of the capitalist market society.

These two levels meet in practice, in the way that the interviewed inhabitants of Nickel disassociate themselves from the monotown past, and more so put emphasis on their border town identity. Although the inhabitants are concerned about the ability of Nickel to bounce back after the smelter closure, they have hope that the transformation will end up being successful, making Nickel an attractive, modern, and sustainable town with jobs, tourism, and working infrastructure. Thus, Nickel is on its way to fulfilling the post-socialist city fate, moving towards fully embracing capitalism.

The findings show that the development of Nickel is only partially supported by the inhabitants of Nickel, as it addresses the international tendencies in its change rather than the needs of the inhabitants themselves. The globalized nature of the change in the city favors cosmetic attractiveness, marketability, and economic relevance on the international scale over the systematic provision of human security and good living conditions on the local level. This forces marginal places like Nickel to disassociate from their history in order to be useful in the capitalist world order. For Nickel, leaving the socialist, polluting monotown identity seems to be the desired outcome for everyone. However, the global politics and events such as the ongoing covid-19 pandemic and the Russo-Ukrainian war put the desired identities of a friendly border town and an internationally relevant leader of sustainability practices under a threat. The actions of Russia made the international community, including its Nordic neighbors, cease any cooperation with the Russians, and this directly affects the plans of Nickel to become involved in the interconnected, globalized world.

Reference list

Content analyzed for the qualitative content analysis:

Accounts Chamber (29.03.2019). “*Otchet o rezultatah ekspertno-analyticheskikh meropriyati’ “Monitoring I otsenka hoda realizatsii prioritetnoy programmy “Kompleksnoye razvitiye monogorodov”*” [Report on the results of the expert-analytical events "Monitoring and evaluation of the progress of the implementation of the priority program “Complex development of monotowns”]. Accessed 30.01.2022 at <https://ach.gov.ru/statements/byulleten-schetnoj-palaty-7-iyul-2019-g-964>

Federal Portal of Draft Regulatory Legal Acts (n.d.). Accessed 30.01.2022 at <https://regulation.gov.ru/projects#>

Foundation of Monotown Development (n.d.). *Deyatelnost’ fonda* [Activity of the Foundation]. Accessed 30.01.2022 at http://моногорода.пф/work/regions_and_cities/

Ministry of Economic Development (n.d.). *Pasport gosudarstvennoi programmi Rossiyskoi Federatsii «Razvitiye monogorodov»* [Passport of the Russian Federation’s government programme “Development of monotowns”] [PDF].

Murmansk regional government (10.07.2017). *Strategiya Sotsialno-ekonomicheskogo razvitiya Murmanskoy oblasti do 2020 goda i na period 2025 goda* [Strategy for socioeconomic development of Murmansk region before 2020 and for a period until 2025]. Accessed 30.01.2022 at https://minec.gov-murman.ru/activities/strat_plan/sub02/

Nornickel (n.d.). *Kontseptsia sotsialno-ekonomicheskogo razvitiya ptg Nikel i Pechengskogo rayona* [The concept of socioeconomic development of Nikel and the Pechenga region] [PDF].

Pechenga municipal government (n.d.). “*O munitsipualitete*” [About the municipality]. Accessed 30.01.2022 at <https://pechengamr.gov-murman.ru/about/>

Pechenga regional government (n.d.). *Munitsipualniye programmy Pechengskogo raiona* [Municipal programs of the Pechenga region]. Accessed 10.03.2022 at

http://pechengamr.ru/index/perechen_celevykh_programm_mo_pechengskij_rajon_2018_2020/0-466

Russian Government (04.03.2022). *Pravitelstvo dopolnitelno vydelilo potchti polmilliarda rublei na razvitiye monogorodov* [The government has additionally provided almost half a billion rubles to the monotown development]. Accessed 02.08.2022 at <http://government.ru/news/44713/>

Second School (n.d.a). *Master-plan buduschego* [Master plan of the future]. Accessed 30.01.2022 at <https://the2school.com/urban-environment/master-plan>

Second School (n.d.b). *Stroim mir buduschego* [Building the world of the future]. Accessed 30.01.2022 at <https://the2school.com/urban>

URBANpro (n.d.). *NIKEL. ZAPOLYARNY. Master-plany razvitiya* [Nikel. Zapolyarny. Master plans of development] [PDF File]. Accessed 08.06.2022 at <https://slide-share.ru/nikel-zapolyarnij-master-plani-razvitiya-576664>

World of New Possibilities (n.d). *Polozhenie Blagotvoritelnoy Programmy "Mir Novih Vozmozhnostey"* [Statement of the charity program "World of New Possibilities"] [PDF file]. Accessed 01.08.2022 at <https://nncharity.ru/>

Other references:

Ackerly, B.A., Stern, M. & True, J. (2006). Feminist methodologies for International Relations. In Ackerly, B.A., Stern, M. & True, J. (Eds.), *Feminist Methodologies for International Relations*, pp. 1-15. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Bolotova, A. (2018). Making Home in the Industrialized Russian Arctic. In Williams, J. & Hentschke, F. (Eds.), *To be at Home: House, Work, and Self in the Modern World. 5*, pp. 29-35. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110582765-008>

Bolotova, A. (2021). Leaving or staying? Youth agency and the liveability of industrial towns in the Russian Arctic. In R. Toivanen, & F. Stammeler (Eds.), *Young People, Wellbeing and Placemaking in the Arctic* (pp. 53-74). (Routledge Research in Polar Regions). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003110019-5>

- Bryman, A. (2016). *Social research methods*. 5th ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Chelcea, L., Ferenčuhová, S. & Bădescu, G. (2021). Globalizing Postsocialist Urbanism. In Lancione, M. & McFarlane, C. *Global Urbanism: Knowledge, Power and the City*. Oxon, New York: Routledge.
- Cohn, C. (1987). Sex and death in the rational world of defense intellectuals. *Signs*, 12(4), pp. 687–718. <https://doi.org/10.1086/494362>
- Collier, S. J. (2011). *Post-Soviet social: Neoliberalism, social modernity, biopolitics*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Cox, R.W. (1981). Social Forces, States and World Orders: Beyond International Relations Theory. *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, 10(2), pp. 126-155. DOI: 10.1177/03058298810100020501
- Creswell, J.W. & Creswell, J.D. (2018). *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*. 5th d. Los Angeles: SAGE Publications.
- Crowley, S. (2020). Global Cities versus Rustbelt Realities: The Dilemmas of Urban Development in Russia. *Slavic Review*, 79(2), pp. 365-389. doi:10.1017/slr.2020.88
- Current Time's Unknown Russia (24.01.2022). No Nickel In Nikel? A Russian Mining Town Faces Steep Decline. *Radio Free Europe, Radio Liberty*. Accessed 16.06.2022 at <https://www.rferl.org/a/russia-far-north-mining-town-nikel/31669125.html>
- Curtis, S. (2016). *Global Cities and Global Order*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Enloe, C H. (2014). *Bananas, beaches and bases: making feminist sense of international politics*. 2nd ed. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Gentile, M. (2018). Three metals and the 'post-socialist city': Reclaiming the peripheries of urban knowledge. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 42(6), pp. 1140-1151. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-2427.12552>
- Golubchikov, O. (2016). The urbanization of transition: ideology and the urban experience. *Eurasian Geography and Economics*, 57(4-5), pp. 607-623. DOI: 10.1080/15387216.2016.1248461

- Golubchikov, O. (2017). The post-socialist city: insights from the spaces of radical societal change. In Short, J.R. (ed.) *A Research Agenda for Cities*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar. DOI: 10.4337/9781785363429.00030
- Gunko, M., Kinossian, N., Pivovar, G., Averkieva, K., & Batunova, E. (2021). Exploring agency of change in small industrial towns through urban renewal initiatives, *Geografiska Annaler: Series B, Human Geography*, 103(3), pp. 218-234. DOI: 10.1080/04353684.2020.1868947
- Harvey, D. (1989). From Managerialism to Entrepreneurialism: The Transformation in Urban Governance in Late Capitalism. *Geografiska Annaler: Series B, Human Geography*, 71(1), pp. 3–17. <https://doi.org/10.2307/490503>
- Haugseth, P. (2018). High North scenarios and subnational realities: policies and practices in the Norwegian/Russian border zone. *Арктика и Север*, 33 - [Arctic and North], pp. 116-132. <https://doi.org/10.17238/issn2221-2698.2018.33.137>
- Hirt, S. (2013). Whatever happened to the (post)socialist city? *Cities*, 32, pp. S29-S38. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cities.2013.04.010>
- Hønneland, G., & Jørgensen, A. (2002). Implementing Russia's International Environmental Commitments: Federal Prerogative or Regional Concern? *Europe-Asia Studies*, 54(8), pp. 1223-1240. DOI: 10.1080/0966813022000025862
- Joenniemi, P. & Sergunin, A. (2013). Kirkenes-Nikel: Catching a Second Wind of Twinning? *Arctic Yearbook*. Accessed 27 July 2022 at: <https://arcticyearbook.com/arctic-yearbook/2013/2013-scholarly-papers/38-kirkenes-nikel-catching-a-second-wind-of-twinning>
- Lemanski, C. (2012). Everyday human (in)security: Rescaling for the Southern city. *Security Dialogue*, 43(1), pp. 61–78. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0967010611430435>
- Lindahl, B. (03.11.2010). The changes hidden behind the smokescreen. *Nordic Labor Journal*. Accessed 15.07.2022 at <http://www.nordiclaborjournal.org/i-fokus/in-focus-2010/theme-opening-up-northern-borders/article.2010-11-02.2377347953>

- Mikhailova, E. (2014). *Nikel and Kirkenes: A Twin City Pair over the Polar Circle*. [Conference Paper]. Accessed 26.05.2022 at <https://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/Nikel-and-Kirkenes%3A-a-Twin-City-Pair-over-the-Polar-Mikhailova/e297880148ab60af22ce0dee0d3dbd4778b60441>
- Monogoroda.rf (09.06.2021). *Druz'ya, v zhizni #SemyaMono nastupayet noviy etap* [Friends, a new chapter begins in the life of the #MonoFamily]. Accessed 08.08.2022 at https://vk.com/monogorodarf321?w=wall-115693971_15135
- Müller, M. (2019). Goodbye, Postsocialism! *Europe-Asia Studies*, 71(4), pp. 533-550. DOI: 10.1080/09668136.2019.1578337
- Nedoseka, E., & Zhigunova, V. (2019). Features of local identity of single-industry town residents (the case of the Murmansk Region). *Arctic*, 37, pp. 98-111. DOI: 10.17238/issn2221-2698.2019.37.118
- Nielsen, T. (20.10.2019). Potanin says smelter in Nikel will be closed. *The Barents Observer*. Accessed 08.08.2022 at <https://thebarentsobserver.com/en/ecology/2019/10/potanin-says-smelter-nikel-will-be-closed>
- Nikel [Ni] (26.07.2022). V Pechengskom okruge id'yot rekonstruktsiya vodoprovodov [Reconstruction of water pipelines in the Pechenga district]. VK. Accessed 27.07.2022 at https://vk.com/wall-29913_354860
- Nikel, D. (01.02.2020). Kirkenes: Where Arctic Norway Meets Russia. *Forbes*. Accessed 27.07.2022 at <https://www.forbes.com/sites/davidnikel/2020/02/01/kirkenes-where-arctic-norway-meets-russia/?sh=9fff22e36b88>
- Nilsen, T. (23.12.2020). Potanin: "This is a historic event for Nornickel". *The Barents Observer*. Accessed 30.07.2022 at <https://thebarentsobserver.com/en/industry-and-energy/2020/12/potanin-historic-event-nornickel>
- Njaa, O. (2018). Nornickel and the Kola Peninsula – Environmental Responsibility in the Year of Ecology. *The Bellona Foundation*. Accessed 27 July 2022 at <https://bellona.org/publication/24530>

- Nornickel (16.02.2014). “Norilsky nikel” otkryvaet “Mir novyh vozmozhnostey” [Norilsk Nickel is opening “The World of New Possibilities”]. Accessed 08.08.2022 at https://www.nornickel.ru/news-and-media/press-releases-and-news/norilskiy-nikel-otkryvaet-mir-novykh-vozmozhnostey/?sphrase_id=3467241
- Nøst, T., Yakovlev, V., Berger., H.M., Kashulin, N., Langeland, A., & Lukin, A. (1997). *Impacts of pollution on freshwater communities in the border region between Russia and Norway: Results of the 1990-96 monitoring programme*. Accessed 11.02.2022 at <https://www.nina.no/archive>
- Nygaard, L.P. (2017). *Writing Your Master’s Thesis: From A to Zen*. London, Thousand Oaks, New Delhi, Singapore: SAGE Publications.
- Popov, A. (21.05.2020). Turizm – Strategitsheskiy vektor [Tourism – strategical vector]. *Kislorod.Life*. Accessed 30.01.2022 at https://kislorod.life/analitics/turizm_strategicheskiy_vektor/
- Porteous, J. D. (1970). The Nature of the Company Town. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 51, pp. 127–142. <https://doi.org/10.2307/621766>
- Razinkova, E. (2019). Nornickel – Environmental Ambitions. *The Bellona Foundation*. Accessed 27 July 2022 at <https://bellona.org/publication/nornickel-environmental-ambitions>
- Rossvaer, V. (2019). Nature as Stoic. In *Borderology: Cross-disciplinary Insights from the Border Zone* (pp. 81-92). Springer, Cham. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-99392-8>
- Rowe, L. (2020). *Industry, War and Stalin's Battle for Resources: The Arctic and the Environment*. London, New York: Bloomsbury Publishing.
- Rowe, L. (2022). *Pollution and Atmosphere in Post-Soviet Russia: The Arctic and the Environment*. London, New York: Bloomsbury Publishing.
- Russian Federation, N 709 (29.07.2014). *O Kriteriyah otnesenia munitsipualnih obrazovany Rossiyskoi Federatsii k monopofilnym (monogorodam) i kategoriyah monopofilnyh munitsipualnyh obrazovaniy Rossiyskoi Federatsii (monogorodov) v zavisimosti ot riskov ukhudzheniya ih sotsialno-ekonomicheskogo polozheniya* [On the Criteria for Classifying Municipalities of the Russian Federation as Single-Profile (Monotowns) and Categories of

- Single-Profile Municipal Formations of the Russian Federation (Monotowns) Depending on the Risk of the Determination of Their Social and Economic State]. Accessed 08.08.2022 at <http://моногорода.рф/documents/>
- Sapozhkov, O. (29.11.2021). Monogoroda obvodyat chertoy osedlosty [Monotowns are being surrounded by the Pale of Settlement]. *Kommersant*. Accessed 08.08.2022 at <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/5099062>
- Sassen, S. (2001). *The global city: New York, London, Tokyo*. 2nd ed. Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press.
- Schimanski, J. (2015). Border Aesthetics and Cultural Distancing in the Norwegian-Russian Borderscape, *Geopolitics*, 20(1), pp. 35-55. DOI: [10.1080/14650045.2014.884562](https://doi.org/10.1080/14650045.2014.884562)
- Second School (06.07.2022). *Kompaniya "FishFarm" Sarkhana Mamedbekova zapustila mal'kov v sadki na ozere Alla-Akkayarvi* [FishFarm company of Sarkhan Mammadbekov launched whitebait into cages on Lake Alla-Akkayarvi]. Accessed 27 July 2022 at <https://the2school.com/news/20706-fish-farm>
- Second School (24.03.2020). *Noviy Format* [New Format]. Accessed 08.08.2022 at <https://the2school.com/news/new-2ndschoo>
- Shastitko, A. & Fakhitova, A. (2015). Monotowns: A New Take on the Old Problem. *The Baltic Region*, 1(23), pp. 4-24. DOI: 10.5922/2079-8555-2015-1-1
- Sjoberg, L. & Gentry, C.E. (2007). *Mothers, monsters, whores: women's violence in global politics*. London, New York: Zed Books.
- Sjoberg, L. (2013). *Gendering global conflict: Toward a feminist theory of war*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Staalesen, A. (31.01.2022). Unhappy with shabby towns, Russian Arctic developers present a beautification plan. *The Barents Observer*. Accessed 26 July 2022 at <https://thebarentsobserver.com/en/life-and-public/2022/01/unhappy-shabby-towns-russian-arctic-developers-present-beautification-plan>
- Stuvøy, K. & Shirobokova, I. (2021). Multiscalar Entanglements in the post-socialist city: Monotown restructuring, spatial re-ordering and urban inequality in Russia. *Eurasian*

Geography and Economics, pp.1-28. DOI:
<https://doi.org/10.1080/15387216.2021.1944246>

Szelenyi, I. (1996). Cities under Socialism – and after. In Andrusz, G., Harloe, M. & Szelenyi, I. (Eds.), *Cities After Socialism: Urban and Regional Change and Conflict in Post-Socialist Societies*. Oxford, Cambridge: Blackwell Publishers.

TASS (13.05.2020b). Senator Dolgov: Novaya TOR v Murmanske budet rabotat' na ekonomiku vsej Arktitsheskoy zony [Senator Dolgov: the new TOR in Murmansk will work for the economy of the entire Arctic zone]. TASS. Accessed 30.01.2022 at <https://tass.ru/ekonomika/8465633>

TASS (20.05.2020a). Plavilniy tseh v Nikele posle zakritiya mogut sdelat' ob'ektom promishlennogo turisma [The smelting shop in Nickel may become an object of industrial tourism after the closure]. TASS. Accessed 30.01.2022 at <https://tass.ru/spb-news/8519551>

The World Bank (2018). *Rolling Back Russia's Spatial Disparities: Re-assembling the Soviet Jigsaw Under a Market Economy*. Accessed 30.01.2022 at <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/russia/publication/rolling-back-russias-spatial-disparities>

The World Bank (n.d.). Master Planning. *The World Bank*. Accessed 07.07.2022 at <https://urban-regeneration.worldbank.org/node/51>

Tickner, J. A. (1992). Engendered Insecurities: Feminist Perspectives on International Relations. In Tickner, J.A. *Gender in International Relations. Feminist Perspectives on Achieving Global Security*, pp.ix-25. Columbia: Columbia University Press.

Tickner, J.A. (2006). Feminism meets International Relations: some methodological issues. In Ackerly, B.A., Stern, M. & True, J. (Eds.), *Feminist Methodologies for International Relations*, pp. 19-41. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Tuvikene, T. (2016). Strategies for Comparative Urbanism: Post-socialism as a De-territorialized Concept, *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 40(1), pp. 132-146. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-2427.12333>

- TV-21 (21.05.2020). Sostoyalas' prezentatsiya kontseptsii razvitiya Pechenskogo rayona [Presentation of the development concept of the Pechenga region]. *TV-21*. Accessed 30.01.2022 at <https://www.tv21.ru/news/2020/05/21/sostoyalas-prezentatsiya-koncepcii-razvitiya-pechenskogo-rayona>
- Wråkberg, U. (2014). The geopolitics of northern travels: enactments of adventure and exploration in the Norwegian-Russian borderland. *Nordlit*, 31, pp. 71-89. DOI: 10.7557/13.3057.
- Жигальцова, Т. [Zhigaltsova, T.] (2017). Obrazno-emotsional'noye vospriyatie arkhitekturno-prostranstvennoy sredy malogo arktitscheskogo goroda [Figurative-emotional perception of the architectural and spatial environment of a small Arctic town]. *Urbanistika*, 4, pp. 20-27. DOI: 10.7256/2310-8673.2017.4.24519
- ООО «Верное Решение» [“Correct Decision” PLC] (n.d.). “Lgotniye 0% i 5% godovyh zaimi Fonda razvitiya monogorodov na pokupku oborudovaniya, stroitelstvo, rekonstruktsiyu, vlosheniya v noviy investitsionny projekt v monogorode, gorod Kirovsk, Zapolyarny, Olenegorsk, Monchegorsk, Kovdor, pgt Revda, Nikel, Murmanskaya oblast'” [Preferential 0% and 5% per annum loans from the Foundation of Monotown Development for the purchase of equipment, construction, reconstruction, investments in a new investment project in the monotown, city of Kirovsk, Zapolyarny, Olenegorsk, Monchegorsk, Kovdor, urban-type settlement Revda, Nikel, Murmansk region]. Accessed 30.06.2022 at <https://решение-верное.рф/fund-monotown-monogorod-zaim-murmanskobl>

Attachments

Attachment 1

Example of an interview guide

Interview guide for a local inhabitant:

Thanking the participant for agreeing to the conversation, short introduction into who I am and my thesis topic. Explaining that for the accuracy of the data I would like to record the interview. Introduction to the main sections in the interview. Then – asking the participant to tell me about who they are, their connection to Nickel.

Bloc 1 – life in Nickel

- What is your history with Nickel? i.e. family/work ties.
- Do you have any ties to Nornickel/‘kombinat’?
- Could you give me a little introduction into the town? What did it use to be? What is it now?
- Do you like it in Nickel? What is special about Nickel from your point of view?

Bloc 2 – Urban change in Nickel, smelter shutdown

- When shutting down the smelter, Nornickel stated it was done to better the ecology. What was your reaction to the news of the shutdown? Do you think it was justified?
- NorNickel is trying to rebuild Nickel into this sustainable, green, attractive town. How is Nickel changing? Do you think it says something about the global changes?
- What do you think is the biggest thing Nickel has to change/improve?
- What can you tell me about Mir Novih Vozmozhnostey and Vtoraya Skhola?
 - o Have you taken part in anything related to it?
 - o What is your opinion on this initiative? Do you think these programmes and grants are sufficient help to the town’s development?
- How do you think Nornickel’s place in the global market has influenced the town and the region in general?
- Does the current conflict in Ukraine influence the livelihood in Nickel?
- What do you think of the local government in the area? Do you feel like you have a voice in the life of Nickel?
- What do you think is the future of Nickel?

Bloc 3 – Nickel and Norway

- Have you visited Norway/Kirkenes? How often, why?
- What about Norwegians, have Norwegians come around here? How often?
- Do you know any Norwegians? Or people who moved to Norway? What is your opinion of them?
- Do you think Nickel has benefitted from a relationship with places like Kirkenes?

- Do you think there is a role of Norway in the way Nikel is developing? Is the border closure influencing that?

Bloc 4 – End of interview

- Is there anything you would like to add? Any questions?
- Confirming levels of anonymization.



Norges miljø- og biovitenskapelige universitet
Noregs miljø- og biovitenskapelige universitet
Norwegian University of Life Sciences

Postboks 5003
NO-1432 Ås
Norway