This book draws on a wide range of theoretical perspectives—from Chaney and Bourdieu to Berger, Sontag and Bakhtin—and from ideas about nostalgia to theories of consumption, nation, and ethnicity. The ethnographic detail in each chapter is impressive, and in my view is the real core of the book. It is a resource which will be widely used by Russian, Soviet and postsocialist specialists, by anthropologists, sociologists and geographers, and by anyone interested in cultural studies, material culture and consumption, and place and ethnicity.

—Dr. Frances Pine, Goldsmiths, University of London

Lifestyle in Siberia and the Russian North breaks new ground by exploring the concept of lifestyle from a distinctly anthropological perspective. Showcasing the collective work of ten experienced scholars in the field, the book goes beyond concepts of tradition that have often been the focus of previous research, to explain how political, economic and technological changes in Russia have created a wide range of new possibilities and constraints in the pursuit of different ways of life.

Each contribution is drawn from meticulous first-hand field research, and the authors engage with theoretical questions such as whether and how the concept of lifestyle can be extended beyond its conventionally urban, Euro-American context and employed in a markedly different setting. Lifestyle in Siberia and the Russian North builds on the contributors' clear commitment to diversifying the field and providing a novel and informative insight into this vast and dynamic region.

This book provides inspiring reading for students and teachers of Anthropology, Sociology and Cultural Studies and for anyone interested in Russia and its regions. By providing ethnographic case studies, it is also a useful basis for teaching anthropological methods and concepts, both at graduate and undergraduate level. Rigorous and innovative, it marks an important contribution to the study of Siberia and the Russian North.

As with all Open Book publications, this entire book is available to read for free on the publisher's website. Printed and digital editions, together with supplementary digital material, can also be found at www.openbookpublishers.com.
2. Implications of Infrastructure and Technological Change for Lifestyles in Siberia

Dennis Zuev and Joachim Otto Habeck

This chapter will explore how the changing habits in mobility and use of media technology have contributed to the pluralisation of lifestyles in Siberia, and how these new technologies are being used to express new social disparities.\(^1\) We aim to show how technological changes have directly influenced people’s lives in Siberia.

The chapter has seven sections. After a brief overview of the last three decades’ infrastructural and related social changes, we will provide our own biographical experiences about the role of technical devices in everyday life. In doing so, we use an experiential approach that is usually absent in descriptions of infrastructure\(^2\) and technology in the Soviet Union and the Russian Federation. Next, we portray the linkages between peripherality and lifestyle choices through the prism of infrastructure, mobility, and telecommunication. After that,

\(^1\) We would like to express our gratitude to all our colleagues in the research team who helped compile data on infrastructure in the respective communities where they conducted field work.

\(^2\) Vakhtin (2017: 9–10) expresses some concern about the loose use of the term infrastructure in social sciences, including Anthropology. Our use is limited to “hard” infrastructure (transport routes, lines of communication and supplies) and technical arrangements that provide for telecommunication, including online.
we will briefly characterise the different field sites of the comparative research project, sketching out the infrastructural development of the respective community on the basis of a variety of published material (books, articles, information on the internet), our own memories and those of our interlocutors. These portraits of cities and villages will be followed by an extended overview of changes in transportation, as well as changes in telecommunication, TV and radio, computers and the internet, audio and video equipment, and photography. The chapter will conclude with a general assessment of how people in rural and urban Siberia perceive the symbolic and practical significance of mobility, telecommunication, and “modernity” when thinking about their own biographies and ambitions.

Major infrastructural and related social changes during the last three decades

The most salient trends in post-Soviet infrastructural change are: a shift towards individual means of transportation, notably cars; rapid decrease of aviation to remote settlements, and simultaneously a decrease in railway passenger numbers as airborne transport has become more affordable between major cities; and finally the introduction and rapid expansion of mobile telephony into nearly all parts of Siberia. However, internet access is highly unequal across the region. Along with these trends, the last two decades have seen a rejuvenation of certain infrastructural networks (such as the Baikal-Amur Mainline), increasing cargo transport along the Northern Sea Route, and renewed northward expansion of extractive industries after a period of out-migration from the north in the 1990s.

Owing to state subsidies, traveling from one place to another was comparatively cheap in Soviet times, or at least this is how it is remembered. However, the number of taxis, tickets, seats, fuel, etc. was limited. The scarcity of certain goods and services created peculiar forms of sociability: the ‘community’ of the queue with its mixture of apprehensiveness and hope, and the complicity of semi-public

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3 For an extensive online discussion on the cost of different modes of travelling, see “Tseny na proezd: SSSR vs. RF [Transportation expenses: USSR vs Russian Federation]”, http://germanych.livejournal.com/71959.html
arrangements. In contrast to Soviet times, availability is now less of a problem, but affordability is an issue. In the light of the international economic sanctions imposed on Russia in 2014 and the gradual inflation of the rouble, prices for goods and services have risen, altering the conditions of travel in Russia and in Siberia in particular. This has had a significant impact on social cohesion that is based on visits, communication and travelling.

Social cohesion was felt more intensely in Soviet times because it was largely based on favours and personal ties. Today, money enables access to goods and services that were previously limited, but the perception that money can buy anything (which seems to be the case in Moscow) is not necessarily true for Siberia: kinship ties are of crucial importance, not only in rural settlements but also in cities.4

Many of the criteria that regulate inclusion and exclusion have changed. Privileges that came with belonging to influential political and professional networks have less immediate value now. Positions of informal power (khlebnoe mesto) have shifted: typical gatekeeper functions of previous decades have been replaced by a range of new ones. The mafia-like provision of security by criminal organisations, which was typical in the 1990s, has given way to open and formalised market-economy procedures, though corruption and arbitrary allocation of investments are still widely perceived as a problem.

Along with the monetisation of transportation resources, patterns of communication among passengers have changed, too: now, one observes fewer and/or shorter verbal exchanges between fellow travellers in the immediate physical environment (train carriage, railway ticket counters, shops, etc.). Simultaneously, mobile phone and internet use allow communication with friends, relatives, and colleagues, so that physical distance seems less of a problem than it used to be. In other words, while there is less sociability among strangers travelling together, one can have more conversations on the phone with people one knows. Internet services have become affordable for almost everyone except in very remote communities, so online and mobile phone applications

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4 This is particularly important in the capitals of the ethnically defined republics, notably the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia) and Buryatia (Argounova-Low 2007; Humphrey 2007). On the social importance of informal ties in the socialist planned economy, see Ledeneva (1998) and Verdery (1996).
(Skype, WhatsApp, etc.) now facilitate interpersonal and familial ties. In the following section, we provide vignettes illustrating the changes in infrastructure and related social processes in Siberia since the late Soviet days.

Entering the post-Soviet 1990s: personal experiences

Car, TV, and phone: the material triad of a happy life (Dennis Zuev)

When I started to think about the changes in infrastructure in Siberia over the last thirty years, I could not forget the stories I had heard from my family members and from older people in my home city of Krasnoiarsk, as well as my own experiences of growing up in that city. Here I shall offer a few examples of how various technologies entered our lives before the 1990s. My parents were engineers, one working in civil engineering and the other at the SibTiazhMash factory.\footnote{SibTiazMash is the acronym of Sibirskii Zavod Tiazhelogo Mashinostroeniia (Siberian Plant of Heavy Machinery Construction).} They stood in line and queued for several things: a car, TV set, and landline telephone connection.

It took more than sixteen years from registering their wish to have a phone number at home to actually having it. We also had a problem obtaining the telephone itself — they were not so easy to find in the 1990s. Eventually, we had our phone installed, but after five years it was taken away and we had to share the line with another number. So sometimes, when my parents wanted to make a call, they could not because someone (in the same building) was using the phone. In the early 2000s the internet operated through a modem connection, which meant that whenever somebody wanted to use the internet, nobody else could use the phone. Although nowadays everyone has a mobile phone in our family, the landline phone is still used for “long” talks, while the mobile is essentially used among family members for calls to and from the dacha.

A dacha is a summer house with a vegetable garden outside the city. In the 1980s and 1990s, due to the lack of construction materials and access roads, owners had to build these houses from any
materials they could get hold of, often using scrap or other discarded items (planks, pipes, sheets of metal, etc.). Nearly every factory worker had a *dacha*, yielding some vegetables and crops which then had to be stored — preferably in a *podval* (cellar). For the purpose of storing vegetables, as well as children’s sledges and skis, construction materials for the *dacha* etc., one would build a garage with such a cellar. Across the Soviet Union, this type of building has become a characteristic feature of the urban landscape (Tuvikene 2010) with multiple functions beyond storage, for example acting as a social venue for car owners who shared the same garage space. I remember that our balcony was full of things, and we needed an extra storage area. Having a garage with an inspection pit and a cellar underneath seemed to be the best option for the family’s needs. But it was not so simple to build a proper garage\(^6\) — in order to be entitled to do so, one had to own a vehicle. And it was not so easy to obtain a vehicle.\(^7\) My parents bought an old motorcycle *IZH Yupiter 3* from our friends in Igarka (1,700 kilometres down the Yenisei) and had it transported by ship, so that we would finally be entitled to build a garage. My father never had a driver’s licence and never drove the motorcycle; in the 1980s he would have preferred to have a car — but by the time he was able to acquire a car he was no longer interested. He was already a pensioner and preferred to walk rather than take public transportation, let alone go by car. He explained his lack of enthusiasm for a motor vehicle with two reasons: a desire to save money and a passion for walking.

The television set that we obtained in 1987, the Lithuanian *Silelis* with the innovative remote-control wire, was a real hit and despite its small size it was a high-status possession. There were only two of this kind in the entire yard (which consisted of four large apartment blocks with approximately 700 inhabitants). We were no ordinary family with this TV set! It still stands on one of the refrigerators in the kitchen as an artefact; my parents have no desire to throw it out. It is a reminder of the battle we won and also of the things we never got.

\(^6\) Compare the film *Garazh* [Garage] directed by Eldar Ryzanov, 1979.

\(^7\) See Siegelbaum (2008a, 2008b). Cf. *Krupnyi Vyigrysh*, a film produced by Khoshor Shahum in 1980.
Fig. 2.1. New apartment blocks are rising all over Krasnoiarsk, displacing single-storey timber houses, especially in the central districts. The large Soviet-era garage complexes for private cars occupy considerable parts of the urban space. Garages continue to be used for private storage, often including cellars to store produce grown on the dacha; sometimes they are used for car-repair businesses or workshops. Photograph by Dennis Zuev, 31 March 2018, CC-BY.

Hello, Tura! (Joachim Otto Habeck)

My desire to explore the remoter parts of Eurasia developed in my early years; my first travels to the Soviet Union and Siberia took place in 1990–1995. Parallel to my studies in geography and anthropology, I took up a job as telephone operator for long-distance calls within the reunified Germany, and between Germany and other countries. (I will have to write a separate book on this.) It should be noted that in Germany, there were still a small number of places that could be reached only via operator; this situation only came to an end in November 1993, which is not so long ago. In comparison with Poland, Romania and some other countries in eastern central Europe, the telephone network of the Soviet Union and its successor states was quite well developed. But it seemed that nobody in the west had tried to find out about the area codes that were introduced with the automatisation of telephony in the Soviet Union in the 1980s. With a colleague of mine, I embarked on nightly conversations with operators throughout what had just ceased to be the Soviet Union, harvesting area codes hitherto unknown to
western operators. This helped considerably to accelerate the process of making phone calls between Berlin and the whole of Russia, a development that did not go unnoticed in telecom offices in other parts of Germany. Placing a phone call from Germany to far-flung district centres (raionnye tscopyy) in Siberia remained a real challenge, however; very few customers (actually, they were not called “customers” but “subscribers” back then) would venture to call places below the level of a district centre.

I remember my first phone call from the Berlin office to Tura, the capital of Evenkia, with its 5,000 inhabitants. I mention this place because it soon became important for me in a different context. There was no phone line to Tura in 1992; there was a very scratchy and noisy radio connection from Krasnoiarsk to Tura that I was put onto, and it required a lot of shouting.

In summer 1993, I travelled to Tura for the first time. That journey was comparatively easy. Having obtained a Russian visa and a train ticket to Krasnoiarsk, the most logical and convenient way to reach Tura was by airplane. Air transportation to district centres (such as Tura) was possible, but onward airborne connections to subordinate villages like Yessei, Chirinda and Ekonda, some seven hundred kilometres further in what really is the Far North, had been abandoned because state subsidies for kerosene were no longer sufficient to cover the expenses. Trying to visit taiga settlements, I was lucky to be offered a ride in a small steamer up the Nizhniaia Tunguska with youngsters belonging to a folklore ensemble that was travelling to perform songs and dances for the small communities upstream. Not unlike airplane timetables, boat trips and in fact everything organised by the state had become unreliable and erratic, with the exception of the railway services, which kept functioning.

To be sure, transportation in the remote parts of Siberia, the Far North and the Far East was also irregular throughout Soviet times, owing to sudden changes in the weather — the imponderables of rain, fog, snow, and ice. One had, and still has, to be patient. All of the researchers on this project can tell numerous stories about waiting; they have been waiting for many hours of their lives (though not necessarily wasting those hours, see below). Sometimes, one would have to wait for days or weeks. The

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8 On Ekonda and the sudden immobility, see Campbell (2003).
appearance of helicopters, airplanes, boats, etc. were rare opportunities that one would not want to let go. The difference, then, between earlier and later forms of unpredictable transportation lay in the degree of state control over mobility, of mechanisation and individual dependence, and of being able to resort to alternative modes of travelling (Habeck 2013; cf. Urry 2007: 53–54, 139–40). The things one was waiting for also changed. Earlier — up until the 1960s, before helicopters came into use — one waited for the ice to become stable or, alternatively, to melt, so that one could cross it by sledge or use a boat, whereas later, one would wait for the hovering fog to disperse and for the sound of a helicopter.⁹ The image of Siberia as a vast territory becomes more palpable when one tries to imagine the countless hours of waiting for a lift, for a chance to carry on. Waiting can turn into a habit, a well-developed social convention (cf. Ries 1997: 135). More often than not, people wait together. The *communitas* of expectation and longing brings them together.¹⁰ They sit in airport lounges, *taiga* camps, at the embankment of a road or railway line platform. (The same mode of waiting for the expected thing to happen unexpectedly was also characteristic of the phone call to Siberia, when the telephone operator might call in the middle of the night to say that the other party is now on the line.) What has also changed are the modes of waiting, as new technological devices permit one to keep oneself busy, reading and sending text messages, making phone calls, playing games, or listening to music.

Movement, telecommunication, and lifestyle in peripheral settings

Consumption alone does not suffice to describe lifestyles; rather, lifestyles evolve around specific sensibilities, they constitute a particular

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⁹ Particularly cumbersome are situations when the traveller is dependent on different means of transportation that all require certain weather conditions. For example, in Chukotka, during the winter one has to wait for the ice to become stable to get to the airport, where one would then pray for a clear sky to take off. In this season one can use both road transport (sledge, jeep, military vehicles) and air transport (helicopter). Summer is the season of *podushka* (hovercraft, used between Anadyr’ and its airport on the other side of the bay, at Ugol’nye Kopi).

¹⁰ We are reminded by our colleagues that this *communitas* could occasionally turn into nasty competition, depending on the product or service to be acquired.
mode of identification inasmuch as they are expressive, routinised and stylised (as argued in Chapters 1 and 11). On the basis of these three attributes, lifestyles do influence patterns of consumption. They also entail specific attitudes towards consumption, as does past biographical experience of the availability of goods and services. In the region under study — Siberia and the North of Russia — consumer choices were limited in Soviet times, and at present they continue to be limited by infrastructural constraints, in particular with regard to telecommunication, and patterns of mobility. There are thus manifold ways in which the development and availability of technology and infrastructure both constitute and limit the range of lifestyles.

Peripherality can be understood as the experience of a lack of infrastructure: transportation of goods is more expensive and services are limited (see below). If we accept that the availability of a broad range of consumer goods and services is a precondition for diverse self-stylisation and individual distinction, then we arrive at the conclusion that peripheral places offer fewer lifestyle choices. In some cases, however, limitation itself is a source of pride (“we can do without”, “we are not dependent on such gadgets”, “we are inventive”) and provides the basis for a particular form of distinction. Self-stylisation in peripheral places often employs references to personal inventiveness (for example, see Shaw in Chapter 3 discussing Chavan’ga), vigour and vitality, purity, authentic life, and straightforwardness. These values also play an essential role in urbanites’ ideas about the countryside, and inform and affect tourism. However, it is reasonable to assume that many — if not most — inhabitants of peripheral places would want to move to a more central place, or to be able to travel to the nearest city more easily, or, alternatively, to see improvement in the range of goods and services offered at their place of residence. Mobility is therefore crucial, and so are imagined ideas about distant places (see Long, Chapter 5) and thoughts about a better life elsewhere.

As we have discussed, movement and travel can be unpredictable. In many parts of Siberia, mobility planning is largely dependent on transportation timetables, weather conditions, and the ready availability of money. Here we postulate that the predictability of travel is one factor (among others) that determines the feasibility of life projects. The less a person is able to plan their departures and arrivals, the
more difficult it is to steadily pursue long-term goals. Unpredictability does not necessarily impinge on one’s quality of life or an individual’s feeling of happiness (in some situations, people seek adventures), but it does mean that things are more likely to happen by coincidence or providence rather than intention.

In Siberia in particular, regimes of mobility have changed drastically. Freedom of movement and mobility have become essential resources for self-formation: compared with the Soviet period, the majority of people now have more freedom to plan their movements within the country and abroad, for leisure, for work or for educational purposes. In Soviet society, different forms of mobility were associated with certain professional occupations and privileged positions (for example, party officials, high-rank military, scientists and journalists), whereas in post-Soviet Russia, money has become the most decisive criterion in determining people’s ability to travel: money has an equalising effect in terms of entitlement to services, yet simultaneously the disparity of monetary income creates social inequalities and lifestyle limitations (Lipchinskaia 2012; Zubarevich 2013). It should be noted that incomes are generally higher in urban and suburban than in rural areas, with the result that rural inhabitants are disadvantaged when it comes to long-distance mobility.

Collectivist ideology and Soviet practices of holiday-making (Brož & Habeck, Chapter 4) have not become extinct, but a new generation of young people have appropriated more individualised leisure activities. This goes hand in hand with the adoption of the computer by the urban upper and middle classes. For many elderly rural inhabitants, personal computers are still novel and unusual, and the advent of the internet in rural communities is a very recent phenomenon (see the penultimate section of this chapter).

Mobility in its various forms has particular relevance for young people in Siberia. Mobility itself, or the expressed desire to be able to travel, can be an important ingredient of self-stylisation (as exemplified by the practice of free-travelling, Zuev 2008). Young people are relatively mobile because educational and career opportunities are often connected with relocating to a larger city, but by the same token, they are relatively immobile owing to financial constraints, and these constraints are particularly prominent in rural regions. In autonomous
regions such as Chukotka or Sakha (Yakutia), the administration offers stipends for outstanding students to go elsewhere for higher education. At the same time, the internet and social media enable young people to connect to the world outside Siberia, and virtual mobility is on the list of attainable goals. Here one can see a particular and new aspect of distinction: access to the internet.

Money has to some extent replaced social capital as the main currency — in the big cities more so than in rural areas, where personal ties continue to play a comparatively decisive role. Older (Soviet) constraints on getting things done, and habitual ways of doing so, have thus been partially dislodged by forms of exchange in which money is the only currency. Simultaneously, we can observe that money has partially diminished the value of social ties, of informal networks, of mutual support, and also of public recognition that an individual receives from others. Obviously, the unequal availability of economic capital goes hand in hand with social stratification and it is the main factor that limits individuals’ options for choice and action. Even for those whose lifestyle and self-stylisation do not depend on consumerism (by which we mean consumption as a purpose in itself), money is the factor that enables and restricts all sorts of activities. It also essentially enables and restricts physical movement, and this is now more strongly felt than in Soviet times.

Technically, the means of transportation (railway, airplanes, cars etc.) have not changed fundamentally over the last three decades; it is their availability and the conditions of their use that have changed, particularly with regard to cars. Telecommunication and visual technologies are very different cases. These have changed drastically in technical terms: devices and systems that are commonly used by nearly everybody these days — mobile phones in particular — were simply not available thirty years ago. Photography and television have acquired fundamentally new qualities through their combination with computers, smartphones, and the emergence of the internet, and they have laid the ground for modes and strategies of self-presentation.

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11 The increasing number of cars has also resulted in new priorities in urban planning and new ways of socialising, which will be discussed below (see also Broz & Habeck 2015; Popov 2012).
that were downright unthinkable a few decades ago. There is a general trend away from centralised control over media and a top-down distribution of media content, to networked, rhizomatic forms of media organisation and user-generated content. Visual self-presentation nowadays happens in a digital commons. Photographs and other forms of content can be shared so widely and generally that ownership becomes a questionable category. Obviously, similar trends can be observed all over the world, but what is particular about Russia is the rupture of state control over people’s movements and media content that occurred in the late 1980s and 1990s (Burrell & Hörschelmann 2014); today, however, the state is regaining, to some extent, influence on many types of media (as observed already in the 2000s by Hutchings & Rulyova 2009).

Social distinction is expressed not simply in the purchase of this or that brand of smartphone, tablet, and so forth, but also by the consumption of particular web-based products and services, participation in, and communicative behaviour on, social networking sites and online games, and — generally speaking — individual management of one’s online existence (Athique 2013: 103–05; Boellstorff 2008). All this is relatively new, and in fact pertains only to a part of Siberia’s population. It is clear, however, that in the communities under study, the use of these technologies and the flow of ideas and images give rise to new sensibilities, in Chaney’s sense (1996: 8). In other words, personal judgements and public debates unfold along with new moral issues and aesthetic options, created by the diffusion of new technologies. In subsequent chapters of the book, the authors will pursue these developments in more detail and explore some of the pertinent aesthetic conventions.

Ways of engaging with social norms have changed, and the ethical and aesthetic significance of these methods has changed, too. One of the contradictions in Siberia has been the gap between new sensibilities and material limits — the fact that different technologies usually come to Siberia from Moscow and are initially available to people only in the big urban centres. People in the small towns and rural areas had to order such items through relatives or friends in the big cities. This is still partly the case today, even if the internet now provides improved possibilities for the purchase of goods and services.
Table 2.1. Field sites of the CLLP Project, sorted by number of inhabitants. Abbreviations in the last column: CN for China; FIN for Finland; KZ for Kazakhstan; MN for Mongolia; USA for the United States of America. Population data compiled from Wikipedia, based on the Federal State Statistics Service. Data on distance to the nearest tarmac or federal road/railway station/border-crossing point compiled from http://maps.google.de and http://km-km.ru

| Name of settlement | Administrative status | Population as of 1 Oct 2010 | Population as of 1 Jan 2018 | Nearest tarmac or federal road (overland distance, km) | Nearest railway station (overland distance, km) | Nearest border crossing (overland distance, km) |
|--------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|---------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|
| Novosibirsk        | Centre of Federal Subject | 1,473,754                   | 1,612,833                   | 0                                                 | 0                                             | c. 440km, Karasuk (KZ)                         |
| Krasnoiarsk        | Centre of Federal Subject | 973,826                     | 1,090,811                   | 0                                                 | 0                                             | c. 1,050 km, Erzyn (MN)                        |
| Vladivostok        | Centre of Federal Subject | 592,034                     | 604,901                     | 0                                                 | 0                                             | c. 180 km, Suifenhe (CN)                       |
| Irkutsk            | Centre of Federal Subject | 587,891                     | 623,869                     | 0                                                 | 0                                             | c. 310 km, Mondy (MN)                         |
| Ulan-Ude           | Centre of Federal Subject | 404,426                     | 434,869                     | 0                                                 | 0                                             | c. 230 km, Kiakhta (MN)                        |
| Yakutsk            | Centre of Federal Subject | 269,691                     | 311,760                     | 0                                                 | 35 km, Nizhnii Bestiakh                       | 1,790 km (CN), Blagoveshchensk                 |
| Chemal             | District Centre         | 3,973                       | 4,670                       | 0                                                 | 180 km, Biisk                                 | c. 480 km, Tashanta (MN)                       |
| Saranpaul’         | Village                 | 2,575                       | 2,921                       | c. 400 km, Priob’e                                | c. 400 km, Priob’e                            | c. 1,200 km, Kazakhstan                        |
| Novoe Chaplino     | Part of a larger municipality | 419                         | Data not available          | c.1,550 km, Omsukchan                             | c. 3,400 km, Nizhnii Bestiakh                 | 120 km (sea), St Lawrence Island (USA)         |
| Chavan’ga          | Village                 | officially: 87 seasonal: 170 | Data not available          | 187 km, Umba                                      | 335 km, Apatity-1                             | 610 km, Kuolaiarvi (FIN)                       |
Overview of field sites

In what follows we will give a brief overview of the sites where researchers carried out fieldwork for the CLLP Project. These are: Novosibirsk, Krasnoiarsk, Irkutsk, Ulan-Ude, Vladivostok, Yakutsk; Chemal (in the Altai Republic), Saranpaul’ (in the Khanty-Mansi Autonomous Region — Yugra), Chavan’ga (Murmansk Oblast), and Novoe Chaplino (Chukchi Autonomous Region). Each of these sites will be briefly introduced below (see Table 2.1; information on the number of interviews conducted in specific places is given in the Appendix to this volume). We will discuss their remoteness or accessibility as a function of their administrative status and several other variables. Predictability of travel as a criterion is seldom found in geographic analyses of mobility and access, yet in some of our field sites it is the most important factor because it overrides and shapes people’s plans and hopes.

Administrative status and dendritic infrastructure

The different field sites can be categorised according to their administrative function. Six of our field sites are capitals of large administrative units (Republic, Oblast, or Okrug); each city has a population of several hundreds of thousands of people. Of these, five are cities in the southern part of Siberia, located along the main transport artery, the Trans-Siberian railway; the sixth, Yakutsk, used to be much less privileged in terms of connectedness. Further down on the administrative hierarchy, we find district (raion) centres that nowadays usually also constitute municipal entities, and on the lowest level there are villages and hamlets. Our study includes four villages of different sizes. Two of them (Chavan’ga and Novoe Chaplino) are very remote settlements on the northern coasts; one (Saranpaul’) is a very remote taiga village, and one (Chemal) is a mountain village that can be easily accessed by car.

The administrative status of a settlement is a prime factor when decisions are made about infrastructure development and accessibility. In a centrally planned economy like that of the Soviet Union, the flows of goods, people, and information were structured more hierarchically than in the market-economy countries of western Europe and the USA (cf. Humphrey 2014). We use the term “dendritic infrastructure” as a
shorthand for this territorially arranged hierarchy of transportation and telecommunication. Dendritic infrastructure was also characteristic of other socialist countries, although its effects were more pronounced in Russia because of the country’s low population density and environmental conditions. The socialist state had to invest significantly in the development of infrastructure, and Siberia is an exemplary case. In many respects and for many individuals, it was the Soviet state that facilitated movement and exchange in the first place; however, owing to the enormous costs of transportation development — and also because of the bureaucratic nature of the system — these movements and exchanges occurred up and down the chain of command i.e. the administrative hierarchy, from village to district centre to the regional capital (and further to Moscow). In the Far North and central Siberia, regional borders were drawn in 1926–1930; they were often delineated with respect to ethnic criteria and existing patterns of indigenous economic activity, yet they later came to cement those very patterns. Within a centrally planned

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12 In many countries of western Europe and North America, transportation networks were (and still are) also organised dendritically, but since there were more cross-country connections in these cases, the effect was less drastic.
economy, it became easier to travel to the regional capital — because of the needs of the administrative hierarchy — but more difficult, in many cases, to travel laterally, to a nearby village on the other side of the regional border (Habeck 2013; Kuklina & Holland 2018). The effect of dendritic infrastructure is also felt today; it affects nearly all parts of Siberia, the Far North and the Far East.

Predictability of travel

The position of a settlement in the administrative hierarchy is an important factor, but it is not the only thing that shapes the remoteness or accessibility of a place. The conditions of the natural environment (hydrographic location, landscape and relief, permafrost, etc.) are obviously very decisive. Moreover, many of the Soviet infrastructure development schemes in the Far North and Far East were guided by the needs of geological exploration and extraction; this was the case, for example, in the Autonomous Republic of Sakha (Yakutia), where road planning initially followed the necessities of the diamond-mining industry, with the effect that the western part of Sakha (Yakutia) stands out from other parts of the republic in terms of availability of paved roads. Another example is the north-western part of Siberia, where the transportation network is comparatively dense and dynamic in its development, serving the needs of the gas and oil industries. A further factor is geopolitical strategic relevance. Both Novoe Chaplino and Chavan’ga are located near the outer boundary of the Russian Federation, in proximity with Norway and the United States of America (member states of NATO). Chavan’ga has experienced infrastructural changes due to militarisation and demilitarisation processes. Novoe Chaplino is, like many other settlements along the northern coast, subject to the border-zone entry regulations, which require travellers to obtain a permit before going there.

Much has been written about this multitude of factors in geography, economics, and area-studies publications on Russia (Göler 2007; Hill and Gaddy 2003; Lazhentsev 2015; Pallot 1990; Rodgers 1990). Our point here is not to repeat these in detail, but rather to show how these conditions bear out in the everyday lives of people in different settlements. Comparative studies on this topic from different parts
of the Russian Far North are rare, the exemplary article by Bolotova, Karaseva & Vasilyeva (2017) being a welcome exception. The issue of transportation is in some places the most decisive factor in people’s daily existence, shaping all other plans and considerations, and thus it is also a factor that limits lifestyle choices. This is most apparent in the cases of Chavan’ga (see Chapter 3) and Novoe Chaplino (see Chapter 6) but it also emerges in the case of Saranpaul’, where people say: “We live like on an island: you can’t get here, but once you are in Saranpaul’, you can’t leave again” (see Chapter 9).

These and other examples induce us to discuss remoteness and accessibility in connection with plans and life projects: what becomes crucial, then, is not distance as such, but the predictability of transport and communication. “Average travel time” cannot serve as suitable indicator of remoteness in a situation where each journey depends on many imponderables, as is illustrated by a recent study on roads and remoteness in the Sayan Mountains (Kuklina & Holland 2018). In cities like Novosibirsk and Vladivostok, one can rely on the train and aviation timetables and one can count on the bus service. On the contrary, in remote villages such as Saranpaul’ or Novoe Chaplino, transportation is hard to predict; and all decisions are subordinate to the one question: how and when is travel going to happen? Hence the importance of waiting and of taking chances when they appear on the horizon.

**Urban field sites as transportation hubs**

Krasnoiarsk, Irkutsk, and Ulan-Ude were established in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, as garrison towns by the Cossacks on their mission to conquer Siberia for the Russian empire. In the nineteenth century, the fortress of Vladivostok was built on the site of an old Chinese fishing village; since then it has been the strategic base for the Russian Pacific Fleet. The early twentieth century saw the completion of the Trans-Siberian railway that connected these places and provided the backbone of transportation throughout the whole of Asiatic Russia. The railway triggered a spectacular demographic and economic growth. It is the trunk from which the dendritic infrastructure fans out to the Far North, and thus the cities along the trunk line represent the industrial, cultural and educational urban nodes of Siberia and the Far East.
Later than the aforementioned cities, some 120 years ago the settlement that is now called Novosibirsk came into existence when the first railway bridge across the River Ob’ was constructed. Novosibirsk is Siberia’s largest city, with numerous industrial enterprises; it is an important node of transportation in every respect. It has seen several periods of rapid in-migration, and most of the current migrants arrive from nearby Kazakhstan and other Central Asian countries. Tourists from North America and European countries pass by in large numbers but usually do not stop for a longer period. The brisk growth of the city has not produced many architectural landmarks. Despite the construction of a subway (metro), there are several factors, natural and man-made, that lead to frequent congestion on the city’s main thoroughfares.

Krasnoiarsk is one of the oldest cities in Siberia (founded in 1628) and this makes it quite attractive for tourists. It is the third largest city in Siberia and the administrative centre of Krasnoiarsk Region, which, in terms of its size, occupies second place in Russia after the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia). As is the case with Novosibirsk, Krasnoiarsk has become an attractive destination for migrants from Central Asia (Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan). Krasnoiarsk is known for its industrial base, with the Krasnoiarsk Aluminium factory (KRAZ) currently the biggest enterprise, while the creation of Siberia’s Federal University in 2006 made it one of the educational centres of Siberia. Due to its defence- and space-related industries, in Soviet times it was closed to foreigners (unlike Irkutsk or Novosibirsk, the city centres of which were always open).

Irkutsk was the administrative centre of the whole of East Siberia from 1803 to 1917, and as such it also served as an important hub for trade and exchange, notably with Mongolia and China. However, its position in the administrative hierarchy and its economic importance are no longer as singular as they used to be, for other cities grew in importance and attained similar functions. Nonetheless, of all cities in Siberia, it is still Irkutsk that attracts the largest numbers of visitors from abroad. The influx of both domestic and foreign tourists, which is mostly due to the proximity of Lake Baikal, has exerted a noticeable influence on the city’s infrastructure (more so than in Novosibirsk and Krasnoiarsk). To give
just one example, it fostered the relatively early emergence of free wi-fi hotspots and internet cafés (Zuev 2013a) in this city.

Probably most distinct among the cities mentioned is Vladivostok. It is the terminus of the Trans-Siberian railway and an important contact zone for Russia in the east. From 1958 to 1991, it was a closed city, due to being the Russian Pacific Fleet’s naval base. Now it serves as a symbolic stronghold, and a showcase of Russia’s presence on the Pacific coast. Vladivostok’s proximity to China, the Koreas and Japan has conditioned the growth of trade and cross-border material exchanges, as well as diplomatic representation, which facilitates human cross-border movement. Few cities in Russia can compete with Vladivostok when it comes to the scenery of the surrounding landscape. However, in terms of settlement structure and urban planning, Vladivostok shares many features with most other Siberian cities: a fairly underdeveloped tourism infrastructure and an expanding urban sprawl.

Two of our fieldwork sites, Ulan-Ude and Yakutsk, are capitals of ethnically defined territories, notably the Republic of Buryatia and the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia). Ulan-Ude shares many characteristics of the “Trans-Sib” cities, yet it is distinct in view of its proximity to Mongolia and its function as cultural capital and administrative centre of a region with a Mongol-speaking population. Yakutsk, while of the same status in the administrative hierarchy as Ulan-Ude, has a very different significance. Yakutsk is an example of a transportation hub for an expansive region, remote from the big Siberian cities of the Trans-Siberian belt. The city serves as the base from which to fly to to all the districts of the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia), which is the largest territory of all of Siberia and Russia. Several scholars (Argounova-Low 2012; Ventsel 2011; Vitebsky 2000, 2005: 351–65) have explored different aspects of mobility in Sakha — the driving experience of the truckers, the mobility of the traders, and the groups that venture into the most remote places — the hunters and reindeer herders. Two significant features of Sakha transportation are the river Lena, which is navigable from Ust’-Kut via Yakutsk to the Arctic Ocean port of Tiksi, and the Kolyma Highway, which connects Yakutsk with Magadan on the Okhotsk seacoast. Yakutsk has been awaiting the “arrival” of a railway connection since late Soviet times. By 1985, a railway from the Trans-Siberian and Baikal-Amur Mainline (BAM) to the southernmost
part of Yakutia had been completed (Mote 1990). Construction of the remaining section of 800 kilometers took 25 years, and a passenger station in Nizhnii Bestiakh started fully operating as late as summer 2019, not far from Yakutsk but on the opposite bank of the River Lena. A bridge across that stream is yet to be built (cf. Schweitzer, Povoroznyuk & Schiesser 2017).

Rural field sites: peripherality and the experience of infrastructural shortcomings

In Siberia, more than elsewhere, there is a very steep gradient between centrality and peripherality, and the rural-urban divide has been a continual concern in Soviet and post-Soviet infrastructural planning (Jähnig 1983; Pallot 1990). In very stark contrast to the cities described above, which possess comparatively developed technical infrastructure, the rural field sites of our research project are characterised by infrastructural shortcomings. We suggest that these places represent the remotest branches and twigs of the dendritic infrastructure (see above). What is more, the different components of infrastructure are developed very unevenly — and in some cases they are completely absent — so that each place experiences telecommunication and transportation problems in its own particular way. People develop work-around or “coping” strategies, which become part of the local knowledge. Clearly, such technological shortcomings create limitations in the range of possibilities for the life projects and self-stylisation of individual people, though in some cases it is the very dearth or absence of technology that is seen as a spark for creativity, inventiveness, and pride: namely, the skill to live independently of complicated gadgets and to overcome technical difficulties (cf. Davydov 2017; Mankova 2018). In what follows, we briefly introduce three highly peripheral rural communities — Saranpaul’, Chavan’ga, and Chaplino — and then contrast them with one community — Chemal — which has seen rapid development fuelled by tourism, and thus experiences a seasonal mass influx of people, rather than year-round peripherality.

Saranpaul’, discussed in Chapter 9, is the administrative centre of a municipal unit that includes ten villages with a total population of 4,480 people, about half of them belonging to one of the several indigenous ethnic groups (Mansi, Khanty and Komi). Saranpaul’ itself
has 2,575 inhabitants. As in many other isolated places in the Far North, public-sector jobs and pensions provide a modest monetary income that is distributed among family members; some people have a plot or a greenhouse for growing vegetables; and hunting and fishing are important forms of subsistence. Reindeer husbandry also adds to the local economy. However, the popularity of such work has gradually undergone a decline and appears to be an unattractive occupation for young people because of low salaries and the complex challenges of transportation between the reindeer herders’ camps and the central village. At the same time, reindeer meat is highly valued among local people. In Saranpaul’, money does not have the universal power it has elsewhere: the value of social networks remains more pronounced than in big cities. If there are not enough places in the helicopter, informal ties with the local administration, or with staff of the regional airline UTAir, are instrumental. Social networks are important for travelling and accommodation, for example in order to get a place in a truck on a winter road (i.e., a road seasonally arranged across ice and snow). It is good to have friends in a big city, for example Tiumen’, who can enhance your mobility by hosting you, sending you things, or booking vouchers for you to go on holidays abroad (the same voucher in the nearby, smaller city of Berezovo is more expensive than in Tiumen’).

As in other places, the changes in transportation and telecommunication technology have been accompanied by the gradual development of new skills and the degradation of others. Navigation and orientation skills are still useful for finding one’s way without relying on public transport, while the skills of driving a reindeer sledge or making one’s own boat from the right type of wood are becoming rare. Instead, knowledge regarding the strength of coverage of different mobile phone companies is important when it comes to deciding which operator to choose. In terms of spatial information, there has been a shift in the last fifteen years from maps\textsuperscript{13} to GPS, while the use of the internet as source of information is still limited to public institutions (school, administrative bodies), since it is rarely accessible from private households in Saranpaul’. The system of registering for goods has been

\textsuperscript{13} Detailed (large-scale) maps were classified as secret in Soviet times. Plans of cities were available, but they were based on schematic representations without topographical accuracy. Today, a large number of navigation and cartographic apps are accessed by smartphone users for trail-finding (cf. Popov 2012: 164–65).
replaced by the habit of buying things on credit. In terms of private transportation, snowmobiles and motorboats continue to be essential.

Chavan’ga, the focus of Chapter 3, is a village on the Terskii coast of the White Sea in the region of Murmansk; officially it has 87 permanent inhabitants. The main occupation is fishing for salmon, which has also been one of the local currencies (bartered for all-terrain vehicles, offered as a payment for favours to helicopter pilots, etc.). As in Saranpaul’, one has to rely significantly on personal ties to get a place on a helicopter. There are no proper road connections to other settlements; with an off-road vehicle it is possible to get through to the nearest tarmac road within a few hours. There is also a winter road. People have owned private cars since Soviet times, and they are used for subsistence activities such as fishing or berry picking. Spatial knowledge is not dependent on maps, but rather on word-of-mouth advice and personal experience. Computers appeared only in 2008 and GSM coverage in 2015. In a situation in which infrastructure is incomplete, people use technical devices in vernacular ways: they apply their own makeshift practices (Istomin 2013). People with digital cameras who do not own a computer have to rely on someone else’s device to transfer images. In terms of private transportation, the motorbike is the most widespread, but quadrocycles are becoming popular.

Novoe Chaplino (mentioned in Chapter 6) is located in the extreme east of the Chukchi Autonomous Okrug, which in turn is the north-easternmost part of the Russian Federation. Situated at the shore of the Bering Sea, this settlement, with 419 inhabitants, is the only place in Russia with a majority of Yupik (Eskimo) inhabitants. They used to maintain close connections with their relatives, the Yupik communities on the Alaskan shore of the Bering Sea and on St Lawrence Island, but these connections were cut during the Cold War, when the Chukchi Peninsula became a sensitive border zone. The settlement of Novoe Chaplino itself came into existence in 1958 as the result of the amalgamation (ukrupnenie)\textsuperscript{14} of several small collective farms and pertinent settlements.

\textsuperscript{14} The process of ukrupnenie took place in waves in nearly all of the regions of the Soviet Union. It aimed to reduce the number of collective farms and small rural settlements, which were deemed to be “without prospect” for further development, and to concentrate the population in larger rural settlements, thereby providing better access to infrastructure and facilities (Pallot 1990; Allemann 2013: 79–89 for Murmansk Oblast; Habeck 2013 for Evenkia; Vitebsky 1990 for an example from the Yakut ASSR).
The 1990s saw renewed connections across the Bering Sea: people could travel to St Lawrence Island by boat. However, as a result of some tragic accidents and the newly invigorated border surveillance, boat journeys to the United States are no longer permitted by the Russian border guards. Flights from the nearby airport of Provideniiia to Alaska occur rarely, usually once every summer. Novoe Chaplino is connected with Provideniiia by a gravel road about 25 kilometres long. All transport now goes through Provideniiia, which is the district centre with a port and military base.

The main source of livelihood is whaling and seal-hunting, activities that became especially crucial between 1996–1998, a time of food deprivation that was caused by particularly poor regional governance, aggravated by the country’s overall economic crisis. When Roman Abramovich, a renowned entrepreneur and politician, became governor of the Chukchi Autonomous Okrug in 2002, Novoe Chaplino (along with other settlements) saw a complete overhaul: all of the inhabitants moved into newly built “prefab” houses and a school and local bakery were erected. Under Abramovich, plastic cards were introduced as means of payment for local services (possibly with the side-effect of limiting cash flows and combatting alcohol abuse). Notwithstanding the brand-new buildings and infrastructure, internet use and mobile telecommunication remain difficult. Even though a few individuals owned mobile phones as early as 2005 (and started using smartphones to take photographs), GSM connection arrived in Novoe Chaplino as late as 2012. Landlines are available and a few individuals have used the internet via modem since 2011. The sharing of technological devices — while characteristic of all northern communities — seems to be of particular value in Novoe Chaplino. Devices such as cameras or mobile phones can serve as status markers only if the owner shares them with others.

The community of Chemal is very different from the preceding rural field sites; it features in the chapter on tourism (Chapter 4). It is unusual in several respects. It is located in a relatively peripheral region, south of Siberia’s spinal cord, the Trans-Siberian railway. Previously a rural settlement in one of the valleys of the Altai mountains, Chemal saw the erection of a hydropower station, the construction of a road, and later the emergence of tourism. Thus, in contrast to the remote and hard-to-access places in the Far North, Chemal attracts thousands
of people every summer. Many of them come from Novosibirsk and other Siberian cities for a long weekend. Local inhabitants can predict the advent of the tourists every summer, and benefit economically; the tourists in turn can expect to find places to stay, to eat, or to enjoy the mountain landscape.

The technical infrastructure and availability of public services in all the above-mentioned rural and urban field sites are defined, to a great extent, by severe climatic conditions and the geographic particularities that affected the implementation of modernisation and industrialisation in Soviet times. In the next section, we will discuss the changes that affected mobility and infrastructure in Siberia, the Russian Far East and the Far North.

Means of transportation

This section will focus on different means of transportation, with a focus on our respondents’ and our own experiences. A complete overview of infrastructural changes would have to include: a comprehensive history of industrial development and resource use; general changes in urban and rural planning; the advent of new media facilitating information exchange and mobility; the availability of leisure and sport facilities; communal services; cultural institutions; religious services; restaurants, cafés, and bars; and public spaces in a general sense. Some of these aspects have been researched elsewhere in more detail — see Humphrey (2007) on the effects of privatisation on the infrastructural development of Siberian cities; Hurelbaatar (2007) on changes in religious sites in the case of the Buryatia; and Habeck & Belolyubskaya (2016) on the diverse typology of buildings and problems of urban planning in the city of Yakutsk. What we intend to account for in this chapter is the domain of the physical movement (transportation) of passengers, telecommunication, and media technology.

15 There is still a large number of timber-made houses in Siberian cities. Such areas are scattered throughout the cities, which makes them “splintered” in terms of access to basic utilities. Timber houses usually have no central heating, sewage, waste disposal or water supply. In the winter, the heating of houses with coal and wood adds to higher levels of air-pollution, which is aggravated by the growing use of motor vehicles.
Rail

It is hard to overestimate the influence that the construction and operation of the Trans-Siberian railway line, in combination with later additions to the network, have had on the economic development of Siberia (Lamin 2005; Marks 1991). It is easy, however, to forget that the current network of railways covers only the southern and western part of Siberia, with many villages and cities in the other parts being hundreds or thousands of kilometres away from the nearest railway station. Obviously, railways connect places and people. Yet in many cases, it is the railway itself that has created places and defined their raison d'etre, providing employment and income for hundreds of families (cf. Povoroznyuk 2018; Schweitzer, Povoroznyuk & Schiesser 2017).

The cities along the railway expanded rapidly, and as an extension of the urban sprawl, dacha settlements appeared in Soviet times along the railway corridors, sometimes a hundred kilometres away from the city centre. Since the dacha is such an important ingredient of leisure and perceived by many as a symbol of the good life (Caldwell 2012; Zavisca 2003), one may conceive of short-distance trains as shuttle services between different spheres of individual experience or even domains of reality.

In the following interview (conducted by Joachim Otto Habeck), Vasilii, a pensioner from Novosibirsk, talks about the dacha as a necessity, and about the journey to the dacha on the train being one of the most gruelling experiences of the dacha lifestyle for those without private transportation:

JOH: Am I right to suggest that the dacha plays an important role in your life, in your biography?

Vasilii: Well, it is not important; it is simply a necessity. Necessity to help. I helped Zhenia [his partner] to work on the dacha. I liked to be there during the summer. The only thing I did not like was the journey to the dacha. [You have to take] the suburban train, especially in the summer, it is hot, it takes a lot of your energy, one can’t breathe — there are so many dacha owners […] One and a half hours [by train] one way. And then you have to walk for

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16 This rapid development along the main railway line occurred to the detriment of other, historically important cities, such as Tomsk and Yeniseisk.
twenty minutes from the station [...] But when Zhenia got ill, we abandoned the dacha, there were other [more important] things...

While such journeys to the dacha usually take a few hours and occur on a regular basis, long-distance train journeys may extend over several days and bring about memorable, quite intensive experiences of transitory spaces. They are subject to particular rules and practices to such a degree that we can speak of trains as constituting a social sphere in their own right, complete with “institutionalised” inmates who perceive time, space, and each other in very special ways (Simonova 2007). For some, long-distance train journeys occur on a regular basis, notably for shift workers commuting between the oil and gas fields of the Far North and the more central regions of Russia (Saxinger 2015, 2016: 121–28). For many others, long-distance train trips are exceptional. Comings and goings, arrivals and departures seem to create more anxiety and stress and require more intensive social support than anywhere in Europe or North America. Tourists from abroad visiting Siberia do not simply use the railway to get from one place to another; rather, for the majority, the experience of the Trans-Siberian railway is itself the purpose of their journey (Zuev 2013a).

Fig. 2.3. Long-distance train passengers using a longer stop at Irkutsk railway station for a smoking break or communication by mobile phone (during the train ride, network coverage is often weak or non-existent). Photograph by Joachim Otto Habeck, 17 July 2017, CC-BY.
Certain railway-related professions, such as long-distance conductor (provodnik), are accompanied by such specific everyday conditions that they create particular subcultures. Between the big cities, along the line, smaller villages and their inhabitants live according to the rhythm of the trains that call by. Village dwellers could increase their meagre income by selling food on the platform to train passengers (until about 2009, when this was forbidden, officially because of incidents of food poisoning). In a few cases, railway stations became known for the produce traded there (notably, whitefish locally known as omul’ at Sliudianka, cedar nuts at the station of Taiga, potato pies at Vikhorevka).

Considering the ups and downs in other means of transportation in the “wild” post-Soviet years, the railway fared remarkably well. To be sure, the number of passenger trains were reduced, and ticket prices went up in the 1990s and ever since (about which more below). However, services ran on time throughout that difficult period, almost no lines were abandoned, and employees in transportation enterprises were less severely affected by payment arrears than employees of other branches of the public sector (Lehmann, Wadsworth & Acquisti 1999).

At present, the different territorial branches of the Russian railways are among the biggest employers in the country.

If in terms of overland transportation, the twentieth century in Siberia was the century of the railway and of aviation, the twenty-first century is likely to become the era of the automobile. In Soviet times, the number of people owning cars was rather small, but now the car competes with the train as the most popular means of transportation in many parts of Siberia. This signals an important change in mobility patterns (Popov 2012), habits of travel, and probably also in perceptions of space. When one travels by train (or airplane or helicopter), one confides oneself to a vast machinery; one has no influence on its workings. Among other imponderables, one does not know with whom one will share the cabin or carriage for hours or days. Travelling by car, by contrast, is often associated with a high degree of personal freedom — admittedly for men more than women in rural settings — with the drivers and passengers being able to determine themselves with whom to travel, where to stop,

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17 When in 2013 the sale of omul’ was prohibited in Sliudianka, the local population organised a protest, declaring this business to be a crucial source of income.
and which shortcut to take (Broz & Habeck 2015). In present-day Siberia, we can discern a shift from a nexus system of transportation, in which “The whole is only able to function if every component works”, towards a serial system of transportation, “in which each component is roughly like every other component”, to use John Urry’s distinction (2007: 94).

Long-distance railway journeys in Siberia (and more generally throughout the former Soviet Union) resemble trips by airplane in many respects. Since its beginnings, the railway has been an institution that overrides and shapes individual predilections, and it continues to do so: this is not only the case during the journey itself, but even while preparing the trip, individuals have to accept what the system offers and choose from a limited set of options.

In Soviet and early post-Soviet years, there were significant problems with the lack of availability of tickets. In part, this deficit was artificially created: thus, even if a train was half-empty, it was impossible to buy tickets. Sometimes one had to buy return tickets several months in advance. Travellers were advised at the ticket counter to travel a day earlier or three days later, to travel by third-class sleeper (platskartnyi) rather than second-class (kupe) or first-class (SV). Long queues for tickets were a very widespread phenomenon in the 1990s, whereas nowadays they have become rare, with more customers buying tickets online. The physical and emotional tension connected with the purchase of long-distance railway tickets has disappeared. Train fares have been going up steadily since the early 1990s, not only as a long-term response to monetary inflation but also owing to the reduction of state subsidies. Travelling by train, even third class, is now usually more expensive than travelling by bus on the same route. Still, for some small towns and numerous villages, the railway continues to be the only way out and the only way back.

There are several ethnographic studies that trace the changes in the most elementary aspects of life once the railway “reaches” a place (Povoroznyuk 2011: 94, 136). There are many parallels between the inauguration of a railway track and that of a road, when a village or town becomes connected to the country-wide network. From our own observations we can say that, typically, some members of the

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18 In the early 1990s, some individuals bought tickets in large quantities to resell them informally at a higher price. In 1994, a new regulation was introduced in order to prevent such abuses: to purchase a train ticket, one had to show a passport.
community complain about the uncontrolled influx of strangers and an increase in criminal acts (though we cannot judge if such statements are empirically grounded). On the other hand, becoming connected to the road or railway network usually results in the arrival of cheaper and more diverse food products, consumer goods and technical equipment. This has significance in the light of the discussion of consumption as one of the mechanisms of social distinction and the diversification of lifestyles. Connectedness also enhances the possibility of mobility: leaving the place simply becomes easier, but only for those who can afford the trip. By the same token, the innovation of a new means of transportation (for example, the helicopter) usually also has a detrimental effect on other, older means (such as the reindeer sledge); this in turn transforms skills and spatial perception, as mentioned above.19 The ways in which the existence or absence of infrastructure in a place is perceived by the individuals who live there depends to no small degree on their personal plans for staying in that place or leaving it (Gavrilova 2017).

Returning to the symbolic significance of the railway in contemporary Russia, this section closes with the observation that large-scale plans and projects are still underway. Among these are the extension of the railway line beyond Yakutsk to the shores of the Pacific Ocean, and partial reconstruction of the so-called Transpolar railway line20 to connect the Northern Urals with River Yenisei. The railway network of Siberia is still due to expand, for example, into the Republic of Altai, Tyva, to Sakhalin and towards Magadan (Strategiia 2030). Railway construction is heavily loaded with the symbolic power of the grand modernisation project, which has survived the end of the Soviet Union.

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19 See Campbell 2003 and n.d.; Habeck 2013; see also Aporta (2013) and Aporta & Higgs (2005) for a discussion of how older and newer technological artefacts are integrated into Inuit practices of travelling and wayfinding. Istomin (2013) and Stammler (2013) give similar accounts with regard to Nenets reindeer herders and fishermen.

20 Activities to build this railway peaked in the 1940s and 1950s, when a large contingent of labour camp inmates were forced to build the line across the swamps and forest of north-western Siberia (Haywood 2010: 100–03; Mote 2003). Immediately after Stalin’s death, the line was partially disbanded. Construction was partially resumed in later decades. Forced labour along the Transpolar railway was one of the gloomiest examples of how the Soviet modernisation project held sway over individual bodies, turning civil life into “bare life” (Agamben 1998).
The construction of new railways is still tantamount to hope for a better future (Povoroznyuk 2018).

The tariff policies of the Russian Railway Company (RZhD, Rossiiskie Zheleznye Dorogi) result in the adjustment of ticket prices at particular periods. The lowest prices are usually available around important public holidays, while the summer period has the highest prices. This pricing policy offers advantages for less affluent groups of people who are able to be flexible about when they travel, such as, notably, pensioners, who prefer to choose the low-tariff season for their trips. Moreover, in response to the under-use of kupe (second-class) carriages, for several years the Russian Railway Company has promoted low pricing for upper berth kupe places. During peak seasons and on popular routes (Krasnoiarsk-Moscow, or to anywhere along the BAM in summer) it is difficult to buy platskart (third-class) tickets from the railway station’s counter. An artificial deficit of tickets was at times created locally so that the cashier could receive a small service fee and a share of tickets that were sold informally. With the introduction of the internet, tickets can be bought online by people who have a computer and know how to do it — in many cases children buy the tickets online for their parents. In general, the ticket situation has much improved, although the traditional ticket shortage remains for the summer vacation trains to the Black Sea resorts and the spas in the foothills of the Caucasus.

One of the trends since the 2000s has been the reduction of suburban train services in the outskirts of the large Siberian cities, probably partly in response to the growing number of individually owned automobiles (see below). This trend of scaling-down has also affected local (mid-range) passenger train services, and it is related to the state railway company’s policy of making operations commercially more efficient. The most recent trend, however, has been the growth of affordable air travel, which has significantly reduced railway passenger numbers between Siberian cities.

For instance, in the Krasnoiarsk Region over the last two years, out of three local trains from Khakassia on the route to Saianskaia and Taishet, two have been cancelled. Some routes have simply been shut down, for example, between Krasnoiarsk and Lesosibirsk (Dennis Zuev, interview with a railway officer in Krasnoiarsk, March 2018). At the same time, many big towns and settlements on the Baikal-Amur Mainline depend on this railway much more than those cities on the Trans-Siberian railway depend on that famous line.
2. Infrastructure and Technological Change

Since 2015, there has been renewed interest in studying the social dynamics related to infrastructure changes and new mobilities in Siberia and the Russian North;\(^{22}\) some authors discuss this under the label of “recolonisation” of the Russian North (e.g. Kinossian 2016). However, since the seminal report by Vitebsky (2000) on aviation in Sakha, very little research has been done on transformations in, and indeed reduction of, small-scale aviation (*malaia aviatsiia*) and its effects on the livelihoods and lifestyles of the inhabitants of the North.

At the same time, one of the typical features of Siberian (im)mobility in the last three decades has been that people who moved to the north for work found themselves unable to return to the so-called mainland, or to afford frequent visits to their hometowns in the south. This is related to the fact that airplane tickets to northern destinations became more expensive in comparison to Soviet times. According to the Rosgosstat

\(^{22}\) Among these, Bolotova, Karaseva & Vasilyeva (2017); Gavrilova, Vakhtin & Vasilyeva (2017); Kuklina, Povoroznyuk & Saxinger (2019); Laruelle (2017); Schweitzer, Povoroznyuk & Schiesser (2017).
statistics, the number of people in Russia transported by air in 2008 was almost half of that in 1990 (Federal’naia sluzhba gosudarstvennoi statistiki 2009). In fact, the number of air passengers has always been very small in proportion to that of railway passengers. However, the figures show that railway passenger traffic since 1995 has decreased even more in comparison to previous years, while air passenger turnover increased, although not steadily, from 1995 to 2016. Travel by airplane to the far-flung northern towns and settlements is controlled by a few providers, and is thus expensive. Informal arrangements can help passengers to save money, in particular when travelling within the Far North. Air travel to villages and many district centres in the Far North remains dependent on helicopters; it has to be booked in advance or else it must be “organised” through informal social ties.

Fig. 2.5. Helicopter landing for a brief stop near a Komi reindeer-herders’ camp on the territory of the Nenets Autonomous Okrug. Photograph by Joachim Otto Habeck, 23 October 1998, CC-BY.

23 The number of railway passengers steadily decreased from 1,833 million in 1995 to 1,419 million in 2000 and 1,296 million passengers in 2008; since 2014 it has been relatively stable, amounting to 1,040 million passengers in 2016. The number of air passengers was 32 million in 1995; it decreased to 23 million by 2000, and increased almost twofold by 2008 to 51 million, reaching 91 million in 2016 (Federal’naia sluzhba gosudarstvennoi statistiki 2009, 2017). Apparently, the number of railway passengers comprises travellers on all categories of trains, and the number of air passengers all travellers on airplanes (using domestic and international connections) as well as helicopters. Compare data for the period 1980–2008 on passenger kilometres, specified for different means of transport (Popov 2012: 154).
At the same time, in some locations the air transport market has diversified: when the regional airline monopolists went bankrupt (as Krasnoiarsk-based KrasAir did in 2008), several new airlines appeared, resulting in the availability of cheaper tickets. With the decrease in price, the trajectories of the passengers have changed. During the KrasAir monopoly, Krasnoiarsk residents occasionally went to Novosibirsk by train in order to catch a cheaper flight (operated by S7 Airlines) to Moscow. In some cases, it is not possible to travel by plane from one Siberian city to another without flying through Moscow. Since the mid-2010s, flights between Siberian cities (e.g. from Novosibirsk to Krasnoiarsk or Irkutsk) are regularly on offer. Additionally, in contrast to earlier decades, there is now a greater range of international connections from the airports of Novosibirsk, Irkutsk, and Vladivostok to popular holiday destinations such as Thailand, so that people can now go abroad without necessarily travelling via Moscow. The opening of the borders and visa-free regimes for Russian citizens with an increasing number of countries has facilitated this change in travel trajectories (see below).

One of the current features of air transport is the federal programme that subsidises air travel from and within the Far Eastern regions, as well as travel for residents of the Far East to the central parts of the country during the summer period. This programme has been in effect for almost a decade and corresponds with the strategic and political goals of bringing the Far East closer to Russian citizens (Chemodanova 2018). For instance, in 2011 the airplane ticket from Vladivostok to Plastun, a coastal settlement of approximately 5,000 inhabitants in the north-eastern part of Primor’e, was 1,000 roubles (approx. 35 US dollars at that time), an amount equal to the fare of the coach for the route overland, which takes many hours on dusty and potholed roads. Understandably, travellers preferred the plane, as it took only one hour to get to the destination. The existence of this federal funding scheme was reported by one of our informants in Vladivostok, who used the plane to get to the wild and secluded beaches of the Sea of Japan near Plastun and to the Sikhote-Alin nature reserve. The absence of transport from the airport, with the only cars belonging to locals picking up their relatives, the wooden building of the airport, without any waiting room, and the sandy
airstrip all remind travellers that in peripheral areas like this one, little has changed since Soviet times.\textsuperscript{24}

![New airport terminal at Yemel’ianovo (Krasnoiarsk) under construction for the Universiade 2019. Photograph by Dennis Zuev, 21 September 2017, CC-BY.](image)

At the time of field research, there were discussions in Russian society whether air travel was more affordable in Soviet times, in relation to average salaries.\textsuperscript{25} With the emergence of low-budget airlines operating flights between major Siberian cities, airfares have become competitive with train fares. Regardless of the costs, people in many cases preferred to travel by plane rather than train, as the comment below demonstrates. Nastia, a Buriat woman aged forty-nine at the time of interview (conducted by Joseph Long) reflects on how she travelled in 1991 to visit her relatives in Moscow. Having a relative in Moscow was thought to be an asset, as the quotation indicates:

\begin{quote}
JL: So how [did you travel] to Moscow [from Irkutsk]? By train?
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{24} However, the residents of Plastun can be proud of such connectivity and may ignore the appearance of their airport. At the same time (in 2010) the airport terminal in Krasnoiarsk (with a million inhabitants, after all) did not even have the name of the city on it, the waiting halls until 2016 were equipped only with worn plastic chairs, and after check-in people had to wait in a narrow buffer zone. Only in 2017 was a new airport terminal opened, as Krasnoiarsk was preparing to host the Universiade in 2019 (Fig. 2.6).

\textsuperscript{25} In late Soviet times, the airfare from Krasnoiarsk to Moscow and back was equal to one third of an engineer’s salary. It is about the same now.
Nastia: No! Only by plane. I could not stand going by train. […] Because it would be three days with strangers. Here you get on the plane, then after seven hours you arrive. […] My relative picked me up [at the airport] on the first visit, but all the other times I went to their place on my own. I remember I used to put aside some money. Yes, when I was a student at the university, I worked and my mom gave me some money too, I just packed up and went, I arrived at my sister’s. All my coursemates envied me going so far away to visit my sister. And most importantly, it was fun.

We can see from this that people made their choices about means of travelling not only on the basis of their financial standing, but also the social networks they possessed. This example also shows that mobility could, and did, lead to heightened social status.

Water

The big rivers of Siberia — Ob’, Yenisei, and Lena — generally flow in a northerly direction, and with the opening of the Trans-Siberian railway, transportation of freight and passengers on those rivers became livelier in Soviet times. However, the navigation period on these rivers and their tributaries lasts for only a few months per year. In several of the locations of our study, the waterways play a crucial role in transportation — both during the summer navigation period and during the winter, when frozen rivers serve as winter roads (see the next section).

The river fleet includes cargo boats, large passenger boats and smaller hydrofoil boats. In late Soviet times, passenger boat services were regular, though not cheap, despite the fact that many communities depended heavily on them. Since then, centralised transportation on some of the rivers, such as the Lena, has crumbled. Regular passenger services are now less coordinated or have been completely abandoned. Consequently, many villages along the river are now more difficult to reach. The same is true for coastal traffic (as we know from Chavan’ga and other villages along the shore of the White Sea). As an alternative to passenger boat trips on the big rivers, it is also possible as in the old days to rely on informal arrangements, such as getting a ride with an oil tanker or a barge that carries goods northward or southward.
While public services are in decline, in Vladivostok one can observe an increase in private motorboats and yachts, many of which have been obtained second-hand from Japan. This boat ownership has made previously inaccessible islands open for manifold leisure activities, from *shashlyk* (grilled meat from the skewer) excursions and summer camps to rave discos and live-action role-plays.\footnote{26 Similarly, one can see more yachts on the large rivers and reservoirs in the vicinities of Novosibirsk, Barnaul, and Krasnoiarsk.}

For the rural communities along the coasts and on the shores of the countless rivers and lakes, fishing is a very important source of income, and nearly every household owns a boat and an outboard engine. In the salmon villages of Kola Peninsula, the sturgeon villages of the Yenisei and Ob’, and the *omul’* (whitefish) villages of Lake Baikal, fish has become hard currency and can be exchanged for fuel, off-road vehicles or a seat in the helicopter. Similarly, in the Far East, seafood — sea urchins, trepang and other molluscs — were exchanged in the 1990s in Japanese ports for cars and electronic appliances.

One of key re-emerging routes for waterborne transport is the Northern Sea Route (Gavrilova, Vakhtin & Vasilyeva 2017). The construction of ports and vessels from the 1930s onwards was promoted as a major achievement of Soviet modernisation in the Far North. From 1932 to 1938, the administrators of the Northern Sea Route “managed the human resources, including indigenous population and arriving forced labour working in cooperation with GULAG” (Schweitzer, Povoroznyuk & Schiesser 2017: 76). For communities along the coasts of the Laptev and Bering Sea, supplies by ship were of the utmost importance. Closed for international traffic until the 1990s, the Northern Sea Route has received renewed attention in the 1990s; it is likely to see more traffic as a consequence of climate change in the Arctic Ocean (Khon et al. 2010; Lindstad, Bright & Strømman 2016). However, the enthusiasm about the further development of the Northern Sea Route may be exaggerated to some extent, in view of many technical and jurisdictional challenges (Farre et al. 2014), and the smaller communities along the coast might see few if any benefits from the transportation of crude natural resources between the Far East and Europe.
Roads and automobiles

In the eastern half of Russia’s territory, the few existing tarmac roads do not form a network as of yet. The long-awaited final section of the road between Moscow and the Far East of Russia was ultimately completed in 2010 — many decades after the completion of the Trans-Siberian railway. Regional road building continues to be strongly oriented towards the needs of resource-extraction enterprises, as is the case with the diamond-extracting cities of Mirnyi and Udachnyi in the western part of the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia). However, when contemplating a map of Siberia, non-Russian observers often forget that there is a network of winter roads (zimnik) that complements the few tarmac roads. It is in the winter that many cut-off places in the Far North actually become accessible. Winter roads are established on the ice of big rivers or across frozen swamps or mountain ranges, with heavy machinery preparing the way for subsequent, lighter lorries and cars. As drivers have to travel in caravans and rely on themselves in emergency situations, winter road journeys are considered very adventurous; they are therefore accompanied by many stories and legends (Argounova-Low 2012), and drivers derive a sense of pride, both personal and professional, from this.

Fig. 2.7. Bridge-building for a new road in the Saian Mountains (Kuraginskii Raion). Photograph by Dennis Zuev, 6 May 2009, CC-BY.
One element that obviously very strongly influences people’s everyday existence in many parts of Siberia is the continental climate. A number of places are more easily accessible in the winter than in the summer, but that is precisely when unpredictable weather conditions present serious hurdles to travel, including by car. When temperatures drop to fifty degrees centigrade below zero, or when the winds are intolerably chilly, life slows down and one becomes confined to one’s own home. However, it is not in winter but spring and autumn when mobility is most challenging: the weather is unstable, rivers are swelling, and many of the provincial roads become impassable.

Further in the south, particularly in the cities and in rural West Siberia, road networks do exist, and they are now overwhelmingly used by private cars. The massive increase in individual car ownership is arguably one of the most fundamental changes in the history of transportation in Siberia. Remembering that a private car was a prized commodity in Soviet times (and remembering the difficulties that came along with obtaining and maintaining it — see Zuev’s account at the beginning of this chapter), the rapid increase in private cars brought about tremendous modifications in the spheres of work, leisure, and also settlement patterns.

In the 2000s, many young people who possessed a car also became interested in acquiring a second home in the countryside. People gradually started to realise that, with a car, urban lifestyles could be complemented by a temporary life outside the city. Dying villages suddenly saw a revival, as people from the city started buying cheap houses for summer holidays or weekends. As mentioned above, many of the dacha settlements initially developed along the railways with suburban train services; but many more are now growing along roads and by-ways. Building materials can be more easily acquired and transported than in the past. City dwellers have started to buy land outside the city, close to the roads, in order to spend more time in the forest and fresh air, rather than in anonymous apartment blocks in the polluted inner parts of the city. This “suburbia” tendency is particularly evident in Krasnoiarsk, Irkutsk, Ulan-Ude, and Vladivostok. Also, in smaller cities and towns such as Yakutsk or Novyi Urengoi, a sizeable number of dacha plots are now used for year-round residence (Stammler & Sidorova 2015: 584–86) and attain a more pronounced suburban character, facilitated by individual car ownership.
The second-hand car market in particular has provided opportunities for private entrepreneurs, especially in the 1990s. Siberia has seen second-hand car imports from two directions — western Europe and Japan. Vladivostok served as a major entry port for Japanese cars. Adventurous car-dealers (peregonschiki) drove thousands of kilometres to deliver a car to their customer elsewhere in Siberia. As one driver from Krasnoiarsk reported, the journey to Vladivostok to buy a car for later resale was an exciting trip to the Sea of Japan, conveniently combined with business. So far this part of mobility culture in Russia has received scant attention among researchers.

Notwithstanding the government’s decision to increase the customs duty in January 2009, cars from Japan were still imported in subsequent years, in disassembled mode, with the frame cut into parts, later to be re-welded and furnished with a coat of paint. Needless to say, this was illegal — but it was hard for the police to keep track of such practices. As the second-hand car business used to be an important source of income

27 Vladivostok’s proximity was instrumental in the development of outward tourism to Japan, China and Korea. The presence of several diplomatic missions (not including any country from the European Union) indicates that the city partakes of significant flows of goods and people from and to East Asian countries.
for a section of the male population in Vladivostok, there was great disappointment about the tax increase, which resulted in mass protests and activism. Car drivers participated in civil protest, especially in the wake of the government’s decision to limit the import of cars from abroad (including Japan), and they organised themselves in drivers’ associations, which had both practical and political goals (Lonkila 2011: 292, fn. 3).

In recent years, there seems to be a tendency towards buying new rather than second-hand cars. The increasing number of car sales resulted in more showrooms. Often the owners of a specific make of car would participate in joint activities, for example Subaru-club picnics in the outskirts of a big city or Mercedes-club cocktail events where one can have a free test drive. The owners of the cars also become engaged in “off-road” entertainment, facilitated by the availability of quads, cross-country motorcycles and snow-scooters, all of which now ply long-forgotten logging roads and off-road tracks around big cities.

With the increasing number of cars, there also come new roads, such as the new highway from the Far East westward, mentioned above. Urban sprawl and road construction unavoidably entail negative environmental impacts. These are perceived particularly strongly in cases of large-scale, prestigious construction projects. Notwithstanding the trend towards sub-urbanisation and large-scale infrastructural investments, most rural districts rely on very modest infrastructure, and local residents often complain about the deplorable state of roads and services.

In the small villages of Tyva, Buryatia, Sakha (Yakutia), and others, the motorcycle is still among the most practical vehicles, occasionally with a side-car which can be used for transporting bulky loads, tent poles, etc. In many rural areas of southern and central Siberia, horses continue to be essential for transportation; in Altai, Tyva, and Buryatia

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28 A good example is the bridge from Vladivostok to the nearby island Ostrov Russkii, completed shortly before the 2012 ASEAN summit. The bridge is part of the programme for making Vladivostok a Russian Pacific showcase city. Its cost amounted to 33 billion roubles, which is a steep sum considering that the bridge was primarily to serve a population of 5,000 inhabitants of the island plus the students and staff of the Far-Eastern Federal University. In addition to concerns about cost, there were fears that the island, previously a rather untouched spot, would turn into a place of mass picnics, and consequently suffer pollution by litter and waste.
they are used by shepherds and hunters. The availability of horses has spawned horse-trekking tourism in the Sayan and Altai mountains. In many parts of the tundra and forest tundra belt, reindeer or sledge dogs were widely used for transportation, though the role of these animals in overland transportation of goods, people, and postal deliveries has been declining since the 1960s, with few people still having the skills required.

![Fig. 2.9. Karakatitsa (a light but robust vehicle for transport in roadless areas). Villagers of Chavan’ga (Kola Peninsula) assist in kick-starting the vehicle. Photograph by Masha Shaw, 25 July 2011, with the permission of the individuals depicted, CC-BY.](image)

In many locations in the Far North one can see light off-road vehicles called karakat or karakatitsa, suitable for swampy roadless terrains. Home constructors assemble such vehicles from spare parts (cf. Usenyuk, Hyysalo & Whalen 2016); alternatively, they modify cars like Lada Niva or UAZ, furnishing them with oversized tyres. As the data from Chavan’ga demonstrate, in the 1990s the barter schemes included exchange of food for mechanical parts (in one reported case a barrel of salmon for a former military tracked vehicle). Thus, a surplus of food could be converted into mobility extensions. Such practices are known also from other regions, e.g. among reindeer herders who exchange reindeer meat for fuel.
Additional modes of public transport

Private means of transportation are not always available, hence the importance of public transport. The role of the railway has already been discussed; this section deals mainly with bus services, both within the cities and outside. Long-distance services between cities, towns, and larger villages are usually cheaper and sometimes faster than the railway on the equivalent connection. They are operated by public and private companies. The public companies run buses on the basis of timetables, the private ones use smaller vehicles — equipped with twelve to sixteen seats — that operate on the basis of actual demand. When the driver decides that a sensible number of passengers has accumulated, he starts going.\footnote{Drivers and conductors of municipal buses and trolleybuses are either male or female, whereas drivers of commercial buses and \textit{marshrutka} vehicles are always male. If there is a conductor on board, then this person is most likely a woman. This is an example of the division of labour between sexes in some vocational domains. For other examples in the Far North of Russia, see Povoroznyuk, Habeck & Vaté (2010).} This system (\textit{marshrutnoe taksi, marshrutka}) is in practice all over the former Soviet Union, and has been for more than 25 years.

\textit{Marshrutka} lines have come to compete with bus lines not only between, but also within cities and towns. In the Soviet era, going by bus was more cumbersome: one often had to wait a long time and perhaps in vain because the bus would be full, with few routes servicing the city districts. Tramways, trolleybuses, and Hungary-imported Ikarus buses can be seen in the streets of the largest Siberian cities, but \textit{marshrutka} vehicles are now much greater in number. With the arrival of private companies, the number of routes increased, and going from one point to another is now much easier and faster — generally, though not always (depending on traffic jams and accidents). A \textit{marshrutka} ride costs fifty to 150 roubles,\footnote{The exchange rate between euro and rouble was one to forty in the summer of 2011. As of summer 2019, seventy roubles were roughly equivalent to one euro.} roughly double the price of a single ticket for the tram or trolleybus. In cities like Irkutsk and Vladivostok, public transport, including \textit{marshrutka}, ends at approximately 9:30pm, in Novosibirsk and Krasnoiarsk at about 11pm; after that, one has to take a taxi or a shared taxi. Even though the latter two cities count more than a million inhabitants each, there is no night service on public lines. This is also
true for the two underground lines of Novosibirsk.\textsuperscript{31} Whether one wants to return home from the club in the late evening or to catch an early-morning flight: one has to rely on friends for a ride or take a taxi.

**Going abroad and crossing the borders**

International mobility of Siberian residents is still a relatively new phenomenon. While for residents of remote locations like Chukotka or Sakha (Yakutia) it is still rather unusual, it is particularly relevant for the border areas in southern Siberia and the Far East and the big urban centres. The infrastructure for international mobility in Siberia is related to the availability of cultural centres, foreign consulates, and flights. In this respect, the major cities on the Trans-Siberian railway differ from each other.

Visa centres are a relatively new development: they serve as an intermediary between the individual applicant and the consulate. In the past, visa applications were received directly at the consulates. However, since 2008 many consulates terminated this service and established visa centres — which means an extra cost for the applicant (visa fee plus service fee). However, visa centres make it possible for people to avoid a trip to Moscow. One of the frequent student practices of “Work and Travel” requires that applicants come for an interview to Yekaterinburg or Moscow. In some cases, applicants had to make a trip from Krasnoiarsk or Irkutsk to Moscow — just to learn that they were refused their visa (see Zuev’s interviews with these students in Chapter 5 in this volume).

The situation of cultural centres, such as the Goethe Institute or the British Council has changed over the years. British Council centres were opened in several Siberian cities. The council provided language materials and computer facilities for free use. The opening of such centres was seen as a positive change by young people in particular. Language learning became more available, which in turn made it easier for young people to go abroad independently. Having said that, the closure of regional offices of the British Council in 2007 and the complete cessation of its operation in March 2018 exemplify the consequences

\textsuperscript{31} Novosibirsk has had a metro since 1986; the construction of a metro in Krasnoiarsk started in 1995 but has been abandoned in 2012 and not yet resumed.
of international political tensions (cf. Kinnock 2018). As a side effect, such state policies are conducive to curbing international (“western”) cultural influence.

Despite the presence of the consulates and visa centres, many visas still have to be processed in Moscow and most of the international traffic is routed via Moscow. To fly to Japan from Krasnoiarsk is still more convenient through the Russian capital, but routes via China and Korea are not impossible. Perhaps, travelling habits have been so strongly associated with Moscow that even now it is hard to imagine other routes. This is, however, not the case of the Russian Far East, which is more oriented eastward, so that tourism and especially student mobility are developing towards Asian destinations.

We estimate that thousands of young people go to work in Thailand and China. Moreover, Thailand has emerged as a highly popular tourist destination since approximately 2005 (King 2018: 8–9) and we know of a sizeable number of young citizens from Novosibirsk and other cities who prefer to work and relax in the tropical resorts of Thailand than endure the Siberian winter at home. Others spend extended periods in Goa or Bali, participating in music festivals and/or searching for spiritual enrichment (Buchner, forthcoming). In other words, for urban youth from Siberia, it is no longer unusual to spend weeks or months abroad. This new development seems to eclipse the attractiveness of Moscow or St Petersburg (Leningrad), which used to be the most coveted destinations of youth in the Soviet era. It also means that individual work biographies, practices of holiday-making, life projects, and aesthetic predilections are now more frequently connected with places outside Russia, and urban Siberians’ connoisseurship of tastes, cultural expressions, and modes of living has come to embrace a more global ambit.

At the same time, strong tendencies of state-induced isolation can be discerned in Russia’s politics over the last decade. Partly as a result of geopolitical conflicts (for example, sanctions in certain spheres of consumption), partly promoted by a self-centred turn towards patriotism (discussed in Chapter 11), a strong emphasis on all things Russian — for example, in the fields of cultural legacy, consumer goods, holiday destinations, and demeanour — goes hand in hand with growing apprehension of cultural imports, fashions, and styles from
“the west”. While the latter continues to be attractive in many regards, its importance as a source of inspiration or fascination is increasingly put into question.

In addition, one can observe that proximity to the border does not necessarily mean an openness to travel and trade. While during the Soviet time Russian cars imported to Finland were re-imported to Russia (Karelia and the Russian north), and the border trade with China and Mongolia has been booming since the 1980s, sensitive areas such as Chukotka remain closed to international border crossing. There is no regular connection across the Bering Strait and the practice of boat crossings introduced in the 1990s was prohibited after a few accidents, enhancing the unwillingness of the border guards to let people pass. By contrast, in the geopolitically sensitive South Sakhalin and Kuril Islands area, Japanese boats are allowed to make trips to the islands and there is a regular sea connection between Sakhalin and Japan. Vladivostok remains the centre of international sea connections to Korea and Japan, at the same time as ships from Vladivostok to the Kuril Islands and Sakhalin no longer operate.

With the growing presence of privately owned cars, short-distance and long-distance trips abroad have become more frequent. Until 2015, China did not allow the entrance of Russian cars; at present there are more than a dozen border-crossing points for passengers travelling by car.\textsuperscript{32} The border areas that cater for Russian tourists provide a wide range of low-cost services. It has become common practice for residents of Vladivostok to go to China for a few days in order to enjoy a foot massage, eat Chinese food, change their whole set of tyres, and install a new set of teeth implants, as well as stock up on some new clothing and household appliances. In the beginning of the 2000s, the practice of pomogai (helper) was based on individual tours to China: each participant could enjoy a free bus ride with a two nights’ stay in a hotel in return for twenty kilograms of duty-free goods transportation.

Finally, international sports events and conferences have made tourist numbers larger and international encounters more frequent — not only

\textsuperscript{32} Pogrаничные пункты пропуска [Border-crossing points]. ISSA Tamozhennologisticheskiy servis. http://issa.ru/forms/kpp/?curPos=70 — this page and subsequent pages 9–11 list all border-crossing points between Russia and China (accessed 28 July 2019).
in the European part of Russia. In the Russian Far East, for example, the University Forum of ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) in September 2016 and the International Sports Games “Children of Asia”, repeatedly held in Yakutsk, have contributed to cross-border contacts.

![Fig. 2.10. Russian shuffle-traders (chelnoki) with typical striped bags (risovki) boarding the ferry from Heihe (China) to Blagoveshchensk (Russia) across the Amur. Photograph by Dennis Zuev, July 2007, CC-BY.]

**Telecommunication, media, social networks, and photography**

One of the characteristics of Siberia is a spatially disproportionate availability of different technologies that mirrors the wide disparity in transportation options across the region. These disparities not only affect the daily running of people’s lives, but also strongly influence the ways in which communities and individuals frame their past, their current existence, and their aspirations. The generation and circulation of images and imaginaries, of codes of conduct and commonalities of taste, are necessarily conditioned by the ways in which people can participate in telecommunication networks, or at least receive images and messages. This will be discussed in more detail in several subsequent chapters of the volume. Centrality and peripherality play out in this context as they do in the case of physical mobility — and yet in a very different way, as shall be demonstrated in this section.
Telecommunication (telegraph, telephones, mobiles)

Even before the railway, the telegraph came to Siberia, connecting European Russia and European countries with East Asia since 1871 (Weiss 2007: 158–61). For much of the world, the telegraph was overtaken by the newer technology of the telephone by the mid-twentieth century; in the Soviet Union, however, the period from the 1920s all the way through to the 1980s was the age of telegrams. Highly official orders and instructions, letters of congratulation, as well as requests for being picked up at the railway station were all transmitted by this technology. The railway became important as the backbone of transportation of goods and passengers, while the telegraph became the backbone of telecommunication across the whole country. In the mid-1990s, sending and receiving telegrams was still common practice. Each city had a telegraph office, usually in combination with the mezhgorod (“inter-city”) telephone office, and queues were not unusual. The emergence of the telephone did not replace telegraphy, at least not in the official sphere, because printed messages had (and still have) a more binding force, as they can be archived and retrieved whenever necessary. By the same token, a telephone call is more expedient whenever the necessity for personal negotiations and arrangements arises.

It was only when telefax and email (elektronnaia pochta) appeared in the larger and smaller cities that telegraphy was gradually abandoned. Telefax quickly spread over Siberian cities and villages in the first half of the 1990s, while email became widespread only after the year 2000.

Telecommunication was a sign of prestige and occupational status in the first post-Soviet years. The first mobile device acquired by businessmen (biznesmeny) in the big cities of Siberia was a pager (beeper), a one-way device for receiving messages. The pager served as a status symbol in the second half of the 1990s, then to be gradually substituted by the mobile phone, the possession of which was conspicuously demonstrated and shown off even during concerts or theatre performances. Since the 1990s, in Russia the number of mobile phone subscribers has grown immensely; it increased tenfold between 2003 and 2009 (Popov 2012: 163). Network coverage of different providers varies greatly, so that local residents sometimes combine a nation-wide

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33 Rohozinski (1999: 7) stated that the larger number of phones on a desk, the more influential the boss.
provider (such as MTS, Megafon, or Beeline) with a regional one (for instance, YeniseiTelekom for Krasnoiarsk Region or BaikalVestKom for Irkutsk region). Not all villages are covered by GSM, not to mention the vast stretches of land in between permanent settlements. Florian Stammler (2013) has noted that, for the Nenets reindeer nomads in the Yamal Peninsula — in particular for the younger generation — the question of whether a certain area does or does not have mobile phone coverage influences where they decide to pitch their camp. Sometimes it helps to travel to a nearby hill to catch a network signal.

Smartphones combine many functions: audio player, radio, camera, TV, gaming device, navigation system, and communication device. In Russia as elsewhere, many people spend considerable time on their smartphone. This leads to the question of whether habits of communication have changed as such (see Popov 2012 on the emergence of “networked individualism” in Russia). One may assume that people visit each other less now that they can just phone each other. However, from our observations, mobile phone calls, text messages, emails, etc. do not reduce the number of personal encounters, they rather make it easier to arrange meetings at short notice.

Radio and television

From the late 1950s onwards, radio, and about two decades later, television became rapidly and widely available to households in the Soviet Union (Durham 1965: 15–16). Inexpensive radio receivers were placed in almost every apartment and every office; these were complemented by more sophisticated receivers that would also catch shortwave and other bands.  

34 The content of the “First Programme” (Pervaia programma Vsesoiuznogo radio) as well as that of all other programmes was planned and produced centrally.  

35 Alternative media

34 Some reindeer-herding brigades also possessed Latvian Spidola radios which provided news and entertainment.

35 According to Lapin (1975), five radio programmes were broadcast in 1975: the first programme with official news and a variety of themed broadcasts, including intermittent periods of music; the second (named Maiak) with a higher proportion of music, including music from abroad; the third with a pronouncedly high-culture profile and broadcasts for students; the fourth with Soviet and international music, broadcast on FM only; and the fifth with news and information “addressed to
content nonetheless found its way into Soviet society through inventive and partially subversive methods, such as *muzyka na rëbrakh*, i.e. LP-like audio records on disks made from discarded x-ray pictures (Yurchak 2006: 181–84). After 1990, more radio channels appeared, most of which were broadcast onFM bands.

In the 1980s, the typical Soviet household owned a television set by which to receive two channels via the communal antenna on the top of the residential building. Radio and television content came to beset knowledge, emotions, and collectively held imaginaries throughout the country. The magic of television fundamentally altered Soviet citizens’ free-time habits: watching television became an all-important activity, to the detriment of social life in the street and artistic activities in public places (cf. Dubin & Zorkaia 2011: 28).

In the late 1980s, with the dispersion of video clubs and video recorders, *kooperativnyi* cable TV came into existence in some Siberian cities, providing an alternative to official (state-directed) television. There was a short-lived boom of public video rooms (*videosalon*) that showed mainly western commercial productions to an audience that was highly eager to watch films that had been shunned by Soviet TV stations. The practice of viewing films in small groups in video rooms was followed by more individual ways of watching pirated copies of films on VCR tapes, CDs, and DVDs. Some foreign channels, such as MTV, were slowly adapted for the Russian-language audience; the same happened with western talk-shows and entertainment shows. Individual aerials and satellite dishes gradually mushroomed in the cities and small towns. Currently, in each of the large cities there are several channels that provide regional news, entertainment shows, and films free of charge. In his study on media use in modern Russia, Pietiläinen (2008) observed that television remains the most important source of any sort of information for Russia’s citizens. Similarly, Hutchings and Tolz argue that “television’s role [in Russia] has been reinforced, rather than diminished, by the rise of new media technologies” (2015: i).

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Soviet citizens outside the country (seamen, fishermen, polar staff and other)” (1975: 354–55). The first programme was broadcast in four identical but time-shifted versions, to cater for radio listeners in the different time zones of the Soviet Union.
Audio and video recorders

The development of devices for music storage for private use went from vinyl disks to audio tapes (music cassettes) and later to CDs and DVDs. In the 1980s it was possible to buy audio tapes in special kiosks or shops or even leave a blank tape at the shop for the desired recording to be made. In the vicinity of Krasnoiarsk, industries in the closed cities were engaged in “conversion” from military to civic production, and the Krasnoiarsk Electro Chemical Plant began to produce its own tapes using BASF technology, while the Soviet MK-60 tapes became obsolete.

Dennis Zuev recalls his personal experiences of using tape and video recorders in the 1990s:

When I turned 14, I dreamt of a stereo. In 1992, I bought a Vega tape-recorder. These were produced in Berdsk and while being technically quite simple, nobody questioned their quality or functionality. In the 1990s, locally produced stereos were available and affordable to a wide public. Double-cassette recorders were still hard to come by and dubbing tapes was a widespread practice. Two single-cassette recorders would be linked by cable for dubbing and it took several hours to dub one tape. I made copies for myself, for my friends, and even sold some of the copies. This practice helped to socialise with friends and schoolmates with whom we exchanged music recordings; we dubbed them for each other and discussed which new ones to buy and who would buy them so we could listen to more. But things in the 1990s were changing very fast: in winter 1994 our family could not even think about buying a small good-quality Hi-Fi stereo in Krasnoiarsk, so I brought one home from my school exchange trip to the United States — only to discover that by summer 1995 the shops had a full stock of different foreign brands of audio-visual equipment stereos with television sets, video recorders, CD players, and CDs. These were slowly displacing the business of tape selling kiosks and tape-dubbing studios. The street markets were at the same time still supplied mostly by the cheap China-made products of counterfeit brands such as Panasoanix, Sonic, Sonyo, etc.

The practice of renting a videotape and later DVDs was still existent in most of the big cities until 2012. However, with the development of the internet these forms of video rental and music recording have petered out to online video streaming (including YouTube), torrent downloads, and MP3 file downloads. These, however, require high-speed internet, which is a privilege of urban centres and is not widely available in small district towns and villages. The prices for technical devices and other
consumer goods used to be much higher in Siberia than in Moscow until approximately 2010, and it was common for Siberians to travel to Moscow to find a wider variety of goods at better prices. The increasing availability of new consumer goods in Siberian cities has often gone hand in hand with higher levels of small consumer loans and living “beyond one’s means”. Recent statistics demonstrate that inhabitants of Siberia now take few consumer loans but of larger amounts (Galaguz 2018). With the increasing practice of online shopping via Ebay, Amazon and the like, it has become possible to buy diverse items at comparatively low cost online, including books, music, sports equipment, and gadgets.

Computers and internet

Inexpensive computers such as the ZX Spectrum appeared in the households of urban residents by the 1980s. They were primarily used for computer games. The computer classes in city schools became part of the normal curriculum in the 1990s. A peculiarity of internet development in Siberia — and Russia in general — was Fidonet, a data transfer protocol that preceded the internet, based on modem-to-modem exchange of data badges (usually messages) during night hours, when phone calls could be made at a reduced charge. This was a non-commercial, grass-roots initiative of individual users. The first node of Fidonet in Russia was established in Novosibirsk in early 1991. There was a Fidonet community of up to 100,000 users in 1998 (Rohozinski 1999: 11). A few years later, however, the internet prevailed. Free access first appeared in Siberian universities in 1996 when the Soros Foundation jointly with the government of the Russian Federation launched a programme entitled “University Centres of Russia”. Each student had two to four hours of free internet use (the use of somebody else’s account was strictly prohibited). Computer salons and internet cafés in the cities were quite rare until the 2000s. From the first internet café in 1998 in Krasnoyarsk, internet provision developed to dozens of cafés with free wi-fi hotspots (see Table 2.2). State financed institutions caught up with this more slowly, for instance, in the Siberian Federal University wireless internet appeared in 2008.

In numerous district centres and occasionally in villages, libraries offer free — if slow — access to the internet. Using email and the
internet on a regular basis was, for many inhabitants of Russia, the point when they started to learn some words of English, and to use the Latin (English) keyboard of the computer.

Table 2.2. Number of wi-fi hotspots registered at wifi4free.ru in selected cities of Russia (accessed 10 May 2013). The data given here provide a snapshot of the spread of wi-fi in the public sphere; since 2013, the number of registered hotspots has grown further (the website continues to be active). Population data compiled from the Russian version of Wikipedia, based on data of the Federal State Statistics Service (data of the Census on 1 October 2010).

| City           | Total number of wi-fi hotspots as of May 2013 | Free of charge | Not free of charge | Population as of 1 October 2010 |
|---------------|---------------------------------------------|----------------|--------------------|---------------------------------|
| Moscow        | 1,397                                       | 1,163          | 234                | 11,503,501                      |
| St Petersburg | 943                                         | 747            | 196                | 4,879,566                       |
| Kazan’        | 220                                         | 135            | 85                 | 1,143,535                       |
| Krasnoiarsk   | 211                                         | 201            | 10                 | 973,826                         |
| Yekaterinburg | 190                                         | 180            | 10                 | 1,349,772                       |
| Vladivostok   | 159                                         | 144            | 15                 | 592,034                         |
| Novosibirsk   | 122                                         | 109            | 13                 | 1,473,754                       |
| Omsk          | 112                                         | 96             | 16                 | 1,154,116                       |
| Tomsk         | 55                                          | 53             | 2                  | 524,669                         |
| Barnaul       | 49                                          | 36             | 13                 | 612,401                         |
| Khabarovsk    | 41                                          | 41             | 0                  | 577,441                         |
| Angarsk       | 27                                          | 25             | 2                  | 233,567                         |
| Ulan-Ude      | 22                                          | 7              | 15                 | 404,426                         |
| Surgut        | 20                                          | 19             | 1                  | 306,675                         |
| Yakutsk       | 7                                           | 5              | 2                  | 269,691                         |
| Magadan       | 1                                           | 1              | 0                  | 95,982                          |

The spread of internet usage in Russia has been recorded by the Yandex Institute in its annual reports (Analiticheskaia gruppa 2012). They indicate that the Far Eastern Federal Okrug was the fastest growing region. The level of penetration of the internet (defined as the percentage of monthly internet users among the overall regional population) is particularly high in the Far East, whereas the Siberian Federal Okrug slightly lags behind the average level (ibid.). However, each location or region has its own specific properties and — generally

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36 Yandex is known to be the largest Russian language search engine.
speaking — the internet is thus far more widely and easily accessible in urban areas, despite the fact that growth rates are currently higher in the villages than in the cities (cf. Gelvanovska, Rossotto & Gunzburger 2016; Rykov, Nagornyy & Koltsova 2017). According to the last Yandex report published in 2014, the share of the rural population connected to the internet increased significantly along with an increase of the share of senior users in urban areas. Visible decrease of the cost of mobile internet also clearly facilitated access to the internet in urban and economically developed areas (Analiticheskaia gruppa 2014).

There can be no doubt that the internet has contributed to the pluralisation of lifestyles: it is now the number-one platform of visual and verbal exchange for nearly all subcultures, minorities, and hobby groups — from death metal lovers to *estrada* (Russian language pop music) fans, from extremely conservative nationalist youth groups to queer activists, and from self-declared gardening experts to devoted live-action role players.

With regard to one of these groups — the live-action role players — we give an example from an interview conducted by Tatiana Barchunova with the key organiser of annual games in Novosibirsk, Vadim Zevlever (nickname: Makar, see Chapter 10 in this volume):

**TB:** How do you think the preparation for the games has changed [with the development of the internet]?

**VZ:** Immensely. Now the internet substitutes just everything. You don’t need anything else. [...] Not just the internet but social media: first of all VKontakte. Because I sometimes even think that next year we won’t even make a special website for Makarena [the annual event]. I’ll just upload everything in VKontakte. It is enough. This year we have a group in VKontakte and a website, but [...] I have all reason to believe that there are only few people who look at it. So I am thinking about closing down [the website] [...] 

**TB:** So as to not waste time on it?

**VZ:** And money!

The internet has fundamentally changed the ways in which individuals can access information, plan their activities, make appointments with each other, etc. We have already mentioned its role in the purchase of tickets, music, media, and consumer goods. Moreover, the internet has
also come to function as a specific element of tourist infrastructure, as is demonstrated by the case of the online couchsurfing hospitality communities along the Trans-Siberian railway (Zuev 2013a, 2013b). Travel arrangements no longer depend on official providers of local knowledge, such as municipal information desks (gorspravka) or tourist information offices. Foreign travellers can directly establish contact with locals and stay in their homes, enjoying the infrastructure that comes with hospitality.

As with the mobile phone, for urban residents the use of internet resources and social networking sites is now becoming habitual or, in fact, obligatory. Even those who express a sceptical attitude towards technological innovations and unnecessary “gadgets” are usually compelled to use online forums and resources. Not only does the internet serve as a backbone of communication and information exchange, it also redefines conventions of communication. Online forums and resources cater to an enormous variety of visual and textual impulses, yet they also shape the perceptions and channel the desires of individual users. They provide a format in which individuals see others and consequently come to see themselves and present themselves. In the following subsection, we briefly portray how the technical development of visual media have affected aesthetic conventions (a strand that will be explored more deeply in Chapter 6).

Photography

Photography’s technical limitations and gradual improvements have led to new understandings of what pictures can (and should) tell and how they can (and should) be displayed. Photography in the Soviet Union of the post-war period was a serious business, a quite complex procedure, and a solemn moment for those in front of the camera. Professional photographers took pictures of assemblies, collectives, school classes, weddings, anniversaries, and similar events. People appeared in festive dress and tried to take on a proper posture. The number of snapshots was comparatively small. Up to the 1970s, holiday trips and excursions were equally documented by professional rather than amateur photographers. Many families kept a photo album as a collective biographical record and also as an important means to present themselves to visitors. The photographs themselves could
serve as mnemonic devices to remember relatives, to talk about their achievements and adventures, and to recollect genealogies. Typically, these albums contained black-and-white pictures on grey cardboard, with colour photographs appearing in the 1970s and 1980s.37

Black-and-white photography gradually expanded from a merely professional business to an activity of some passionate amateurs, whereas colour photography remained largely the sphere of professionals. Since around the 1970s, residents of some cities could buy the tools and chemicals needed for the processing of black-and-white photographs, though our research reveals that availability of chemicals was very unequal across different geographical areas.38 Roughly at the same time, Houses of Culture, youth centres, and schools started offering hobby groups (foto-kruzhok), which probably increased the popularity of amateur photography. By the early 1990s, numerous households had a camera, usually a Smena, Liubitel’, or FED — comparatively cheap and straightforward makes — and less frequently a Zenit or Kiev — more sophisticated and expensive types which had a changeable lens. From our colleagues’ and our own interviews, we conclude that taking photographs and processing films was mainly a hobby of men rather than women, which reflects the close connotation of photography with technology, conventionally thought to be a male domain of activity.

With the arrival of Polaroid photography and then point-and-shoot cameras, photography expanded massively. The home-based processing of films became almost obsolete with the arrival of Kodak studios. The first Kodak shop in Krasnoiarsk appeared in 1995 and by the 2000s it was equipped with monitors where one could see the images and select the pictures individually. Masses of people acquired Kodak cameras, while more advanced users kept using their SLR Zenit or Kiev cameras. The mass photo studios like Kodak later gave way to digital photographs. These are no longer printed out at the previous scale, but instead they are shared and distributed by email, USB sticks, and social networking

37 Colour photography appeared very early in Russia, namely in the 1910s (Allshouse 1980), but then did not result in a widely available technology, which means that it became available for the masses only from the 1970s onwards.
38 Interviewees in Novosibirsk (with Habeck) stated that these items were cheap and always available, whereas in Krasnoiarsk interviewees (with Zuev) said that films and chemicals were hard to buy. In some remote villages — as we know from Panáková’s interviews in Novoe Chaplino — there were one or several amateur photographers who took pictures on request, acting as substitutes for professional photo studios.
sites like VKontakte, Odnoklassniki, Instagram, Facebook or Moi Mir. To quote M., a woman aged 35 at the time of the interview (with Eleanor Peers), from Yakutsk:

M: At first, I didn’t like any digital pictures, because I preferred printed, because you can touch them and just have a look at them […]. But now I like digital. I am rather conservative […] maybe I need some time to get used [to new things], yes.

EP: I mean, so do you sometimes print out your digital pictures?

M: No. No, never.

EP: And I mean, are you on VKontakte and Facebook?

M: VKontakte and Facebook, yes, it was rather a new thing for me too, I just registered only in autumn, last autumn, in October or September [2010], I don’t remember. Because everybody asked me: “Are you on VKontakte?” And I knew nothing about that and then I thought: “Am I old-fashioned, or what?” I should be on VKontakte and I registered there, yes. And I didn’t even know how to write VKontakte, I thought that it was just “kontakt” and I typed it, I was surprised, then I had to use the Yandex search [engine] and I found VKontakte.39

The cardboard photo albums are kept as part of people’s personal or familial belongings, but few people make the effort to update them; instead, they are substituted by folders of digital pictures on CDs and hard-drives. Contrary to the general trend towards digitalisation, the number of small one-photographer photo studios (tochka) providing foto na dokumenty has increased in bigger cities to satisfy the growing needs for passport photographs in line with biometric standards.40

Cameras built into mobile phones provide a wide sector of the population with an easy, at-hand medium of visual recording. Mobile phones and later smartphones have replaced photo cameras almost entirely. In fact, up to very recently, some residents of northern villages used their mobile phones primarily for taking pictures because the

39 The interview was conducted through English.
40 A search for “foto na dokumenty” (in Cyrillic) gives 124 addresses in Krasnoiarsk and 154 in Novosibirsk. mxkr.ru/ru/foto_na_dokumenty/ (accessed 28 July 2019). In future years, this service is likely to be partially replaced by automatic photo booths.
absence of any GSM signal did not permit them to make phone calls (cf. Chapter 6).

As a rule, information and communication technologies burgeoned in Siberia considerably later than in the European part of Russia. The Russian Far East differs in this respect, not the least because of its proximity to Japan. The booming border trade with China has also come to provide cheap alternatives for telecommunication gadgets, computers, and visual technologies. The use of mobile technology is no longer considered something extraordinary and prestigious or a conspicuous nuisance (as in the 1990s), although the material value of the object itself can still be used for status display. The ubiquity and ease of taking images has in some ways come to debase the professional and also artistic character of earlier photographic production. This popularisation of photography has allowed it to become a prominent feature of social networking sites, which also serve as archives for sharing images, social connection, and storage. Simultaneously, art photography or video production have turned into popular hobbies and taking pictures on the streets is no longer seen as a sign of journalism, but a mundane action.
Conclusion

Technology and infrastructure connect in multifarious ways with mobility and practices of distinction and lifestyles. As Vladimir Popov argues, “social preferences of a particular means of transportation are connected with various ways in the organization of daily life, with overall lifestyle” (2012: 154), and the same may be said of information technology. In Siberia, the most obvious aspect of this interconnection is the highly disparate availability of goods and services: in small places, this limits the number of domains in which distinction can be played out. Similar to other countries, it is mobility itself that serves as a marker of distinction; but in a much more elementary sense than in other countries, mobility can be crucially missing. Mobility is usually considered to enable people to pursue their goals: it is the precondition for creating and utilising social networks, for making plans come true. Where spatial mobility is limited, inventiveness and flexibility may serve as substitutes. Immobility can attain valorisations of stability, rootedness in a region, and stewardship of a place (for an example, see Chapter 3).

Muscovites may make condescending comments about the provinciality of Siberian cities; the residents of the latter may make malicious jokes about the district centres; and everybody may feel united in their negative attitude towards life in glubinka (very remote areas). However, there is a threshold where remoteness turns into an asset again. Glubinka can be likened with sincerity (in the sense of directness and intimacy), authenticity of human interaction, a certain purity of existence, and a special magic power, as is manifest in the sustained admiration and, sometimes, romanticism that many urban residents feel for traditional livelihoods, shamanism, and life in harmony with the natural environment. Sincerity and trust, we believe, are very persistent concerns in Russian society (cf. Boym 1994: 100–02; Ries 1997: 131, 158–60) and they are still relevant today. We can see this concern about purity of existence as a sensibility in its own right, along with other sensibilities, aesthetic choices, political issues, and moral convictions.

Lifestyles can be understood as communities of taste (Chaney 1996: 126), and their diversity seems to be determined by the range of domains available for the display of distinction and personal predilection. The
domains themselves are subject to change inasmuch as sensibilities, aesthetic choices, political issues, and moral convictions grow or wane in public importance. The promotion of idols and imaginaries holds strong sway over the formulation of collective aspirations and personal desires. They play out in opinions and decisions about familial life and social ties, about emotions and responsibilities, about work and leisure, and also about material assets and residence. In the preceding paragraph, we have spoken about the attractiveness that a life close to nature holds for some. In this respect, certain areas of Siberia are particularly attractive. There has been an increasing willingness to relocate into a private zagorodnyi dom (a house outside the city) and even a revival of some long-abandoned dacha communities. This lifestyle choice has become largely possible with increased automobile ownership, as well as the internet and other technological amenities. Now it is possible to experience an autonomous mode of living, away from the city and yet in a “civilised” way. By the same token, the rapid increase in automobility constitutes a new challenge to Siberian cities, leading to traffic jams and contributing greatly to air pollution (Kirsheva 2016).

However, there is the opposite attractiveness of modernity, which for many decades used to be the dominant collective aspiration. In fact, modernisation constituted the core of Soviet ideology (see Chapters 1, 6, 7, and 11). Modernity continues to be one of the key sensibilities in Russia around which individuals and communities build their life projects. What we find is not simply that several generations of Siberians arrived to “open up” and “civilise” the Far North, and it is not simply that several generations of indigenous peoples underwent socialist education to embark on self-modernisation. What we also find is a profound feeling of “lagging behind”, a zeal for catching up with the rest of Russia that characterises many people’s self-perception in Siberian cities and villages. In this light, technology and infrastructure attain a tremendous symbolic importance.

In this chapter, we have discussed changes in transport, telecommunication, and use of media. These shifts have created entirely new modes of presenting oneself and relating to others. The flux of visual communication, of icons and inspirations has multiplied and diversified; we may thus assume that visual modes of
communication have generally gained in significance. Authorship of media content — once the exclusive claim of a small number of state-paid professionals — is now diffusely distributed among substantial parts of society. The proliferation of digital cameras and mobile phones brings videos and self-produced images into a greater number of households. And yet, people’s appropriation of new technologies occurs very unevenly across space. Access to the internet is a matter of not only the strength of the signal, but also the individual’s or household’s budget. The latter is even more decisive when it comes to buying technical devices. While nearly everybody can now afford to buy a mobile phone and personal computers are no longer a rare item in rural settlements, comparatively few people in rural settlements own a tablet or laptop.

We have also discussed changes in the availability and affordability of transportation. A general shift can be observed from collective towards individual means of transport. In addition, there is now a broader choice of tourist destinations. The combination of these two developments creates a new domain of distinction in which age and income, educational level, and place of residence inform choices on where to go and how to travel. Travel for recreation within Siberia remains a popular option — exactly because of remoteness (i.e. “purity”) and the lack of infrastructure. Some parts of Siberia and the Far East — the Altai mountains, Lake Baikal, and the Pacific shore — experience a growing influx of tourists (which is subject to seasonal variation). The internet and open borders have greatly influenced the life of students in big cities and there are more opportunities for cultural exchange and “cosmopolitan learning” for young and middle-aged people (Zuev 2013a, 2013b). Young Siberians can get to know other people’s languages and worldviews by going abroad, but also by communicating with visitors from abroad via computer-mediated social networks, which — despite a recent decrease in the popularity of couchsurfing — continue to form an important component in the tourist infrastructure in the cities along the Trans-Siberian railway.

Notwithstanding the pervasiveness of money as the primary currency for the exchange of commodities and services, some transactions and some travels are still more easily facilitated through social connections.
Social relations are still crucial for travelling as they reduce the financial costs and often compensate for the poor quality or the complete absence of commercial services (guesthouses and cafés, hotels and restaurants). Simultaneously, new apps such as Bla Bla Car make trips more predictable and cheaper, especially for the segment of travellers that is more accustomed to the secluded comfort of automobility rather than public transport.

We hope to have demonstrated that the Soviet-type dendritic infrastructure, which is based on administrative boundaries and the centrality of the Trans-Siberian railway, has largely remained in effect and continues to shape people’s mobilities and travel biographies. At the same time the internet age has brought new developments and new types of affordances, such as social media, that allow for more convenient ways of planning individual physical movement. However, the limited availability of goods and scarcity of monetary resources remain a feature in the remoter parts of Siberia: despite the improvements of certain urban hubs, the transition to socially sustainable and inclusive mobility remains problematic and economically disadvantaged groups have only very limited access to places beyond their residence.

As a final remark, with the economic sanctions of western countries against Russia, the prospect of rising incomes and standard of living in Siberia is now less certain. This may limit the range of travel destinations and reduce the material means for individual expressions of taste and lifestyle. The necessity to support one’s family and the aspiration of improving one’s quality of life push many talented young Siberians to bigger cities and abroad. This does not always result in a permanent relocation, however: the familial, social and spiritual bonds with Siberia as a place of birth remain strong.

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