Winter city and the potential/space of Siberian identity

O Ye Zheleznyak
Smagin Department of Monumental and Decorative Painting and Design, Irkutsk National Research Technical University, 83 Lermontov str., Irkutsk 664074, Russia

E-mail: oglaejl@yandex.ru

Abstract. The article dwells upon making winter cities livable not by means of “survival” programs but by unlocking the positive living experience, identifying the unique winter potential of a location, and its suitability for living a fulfilling life. The relevance of this research stems from the industrial development of winter/northern cities being prioritized over the establishment of living culture, which has degraded the urban and cultural environment. Viewing a winter city as a self-sustaining territory, capitalizing on the unique features of the region in winter helps unleash the productive potential of “winter life.” The article dwells upon the relevant features of winter cities, tourism industry, and festive culture as the enablers of city development and prosperity. An important aspect of the paper lies in addressing the uniqueness of a location and the winter potential of the Siberian identity. The author’s research and project designs seek to give Irkutsk a positive winter city image; they cover winter festivals and the Baikal identity. This research shows the value of having a unique location and creating a positive winter city image, etc. in the context of making Irkutsk a comfortable and investment-attractive winter city. In general, the ideology of developing a winter city as a place that will attract investment and generate technological initiative in a blend with traditional values is what makes the winter environment livable not just as a survival system, but as a self-sustainable and unique city that has its positive vibes.

1. Introduction, research relevance, and objectives

The problem of winter city life has always been relevant for Russia. It manifests itself both in some objective parameters of a location [1] and in Russia’s image, and related stereotypes that often stem from the cultural archetypes of the “winter origin” (cold territory, severe climate, “the snows of yesterday”, etc.). The discussion of the winter/northern lifestyle in the world is generally driven by the need to make northern territories more attractive and competitive [2,3] as well as by the projected climate change, in particular the expected temperature downfalls in Western Europe that is set to experience harsh winters due to the slowdown of the Gulf Stream.

Meanwhile, the self-sustainability of winter cities is an ever more relevant subject of discussion; it comes from the balance of “commercial, educational, social and cultural institutions”, [4], the “nature-population-economy” triad, [5-6] the system of urban development targets that combines versatile planning of life-sustaining activity, various types of development, and a “single authority” in city management (in the “new cities” of the U.S.) [7], etc. Such balance implies preserving and furthering the traditional living style of indigenous groups [8] while transforming a winter city into an attractive destination for the development of various activities, including tourism.[9,10] Human capital generally tends to become more impactful in the strategies of modern city life, which is in line with the
increasing impact of external economic factors that drive the “creative city” concept,[11] and with the targeted “capitalization” of the wintertime urban identity.[12]

Accordingly, the relevance and the goal hereof lies in researching the peculiarities of making winter cities livable not by means of “survival” programs but by unlocking the positive living experience, identifying the unique winter potential of a location and its suitability for living a fulfilling rather than miserable life. Focus is made on the winter features of Siberian cities by the example of Irkutsk.

2. Theory

2.1. Northern/winter cities: problems and solutions
Katsuhiro Akimoto, President of the World Winter Cities Association for Mayors, urges to take the opportunities that “winter gives us” when discussing the problems and prospects of winter city development. Shifting the focus from the traditional representation of a winter city as a place of trial and a territory of survival towards seeing it as a precious potential of “life in harmony with winter”, [13] the Association sets a new approach to the creating the conditions for comfortable living and expands the research area. The Association monitors the relevant problems in the framework of the measures it takes and shows that art, culture, health and recreation, preservation of local natural resources and cultural heritage, tourism development, diversity of design and images of “winter cities” are growing ever more important to be on par with the generally recognized problems of design and construction, transportation, efficient use of heat, eco-friendly snow melting [13], etc.

Today, creating a comfortable environment is becoming a top priority as being limited to a set of basic services and needs actually results in an unfulfilling life and can be interpreted as a “degradation sign” and refusal to develop. In addition, such territory has a significantly weaker potential as a place of residence and is less capable of attracting long-term human capital investment, which jeopardizes its competitiveness. [4]

The modern ideology of winter city development focuses on representing it as a place that will attract investment, generate technological initiatives in a blend with traditional, ethnic and cultural values on the other part, making the winter environment livable not just as a survival system, but as a self-sustainable and unique city that has its positive vibes. This relevant trend that winter cities display is the foundation for their positive image and fundraising.

2.2. Tourism industry and festive culture of winter cities: development and prosperity prospects
Tourism industry combined with the festive culture as a part of the local brand that enables the area to flourish is one way to further the one-of-a-kind nature of a place, help it manifest itself, and utilize the specific potential of the area to create a comfortable living environment in a winter city.

Boosting the tourism industry [14] and utilizing the nature as an attraction for tourist programs coupled with a luring winter city image is what helps transform cities into attractive sites, world-famous resorts, natural oases, etc., ultimately resulting in competitiveness and economic success. For instance, 5% to 6% of Alaska's GDP comes from tourism, making it the second-largest source of income on top of the tourist influx having doubled by the late 20th century and the state’s population rising by 31% over 1990-2011. [12] The concurrent processes of “capitalizing upon winter identity” and making up a whole set of symbolic authentic brands help promote local products (venison, whitefish, northern berries, ethnic products, etc.) and the locations themselves including by means of promoting tourism per se (hunting, eco, ethnic, historical, and extreme tourism). [15,12]

Winter tourism is gaining traction, which also applies to some exclusive activities like extreme fishing and hunting for professional hunters, a night stay in an ice hotel (Jukkasjärvi in Sweden, Finnmark in Norway, Saariselkä-Fell in Lapland), ice skating at the Canals of Amsterdam, thermal baths of Budapest and Snow Jacuzzi in the hot springs in the Ice Land of Iceland, subglacial diving in France and Russia, skijoring, bobsleigh, snow-tubing, winter windsurfing, etc. in addition to the more conventional winter sports and fairs, fairs, concerts, and other events.
Unique brand holidays and festivals that become attractions in their own right, a unique resource and symbol representing the city and the area are what creates a positive image and turns the location into a touristic Mecca. [16] An integral part of urban life, a festival is embedded into the processes of creating the local identity and the city image, promoting the location and competing for investment and tourist flows. [16] Thus, the Winterlude Festival is boosting the popularity of Canadian provinces, transforming it into “the snow capital of the world”; the torchlight procession of Brighton has become a landmark event that gathers millions of tourists while giving the area a better quality of life and a competitive edge. The Snow Festival in Sapporo, the Harbin Ice and Snow Festival, the Geilo Ice Music Festival, the Siberian Festival of Ice Sculpture in Novosibirsk, and Magic Ice of Siberia in Krasnoyarsk, and Russian Snow and Ice Sculpture Cup in Perm, etc. are widely recognized winter festival role models that symbolize the location and showcase actual life in harmony with winter while being presented as winter gifts.

International Winter Festival Hyperborea in Petrozavodsk is a great Russian example of showing how good winter life could be. It draws upon the myths of Hyperborea, “the country outside the northern wind”, which is well consistent with the modern winter city development concept of living in harmony with winter. Hyperborea, a land of happy people and “wonderful flamboyant lights” [17] in the opinion of the ancient Greeks, spawns unique talents and lifestyle under the protection of Apollo. Thus, the key idea behind the festival in Petrozavodsk lies in the unveiling of the unique features of local life, in creative development, in manifesting the local winter charm. The festival program features a winter carnival, snow and ice sculpture competition on the shores of Lake Onega, winter swimmers racing, creative contests (Miracles in Ice, Wind Music, Ice and Fire, Снеговик.ком), the Onega Perchling Ice Fishing Championship, extreme biking shows, trying the indigenous cuisine of the North, etc.

2.3. Uniqueness as a resource. Winter potential of Siberian identity
Great importance for the economic development is attached today to the resource that is the uniqueness of winter cities and territories. “Specific city symbols, be it food, songs, local products, or scenic surroundings provide a resource for added value generation”. [11] A stronger local identity results from taking care of the environment quality, contributing to making the city livable, and creating its cultural identity. The potential of the place identity and the regional traditions often produce a creative approach to solving problems, as symbolic, and historical, and cultural factors can “outweigh” arguments based on logic alone, Ch. Landry believes. The locals’ creativity cultivated upon the soil of such uniqueness can generate a constant flow of innovative solutions and has produced a popular late 20th century idea of “quarters of cultural industries” and cultural experiment centers. The Arctic Center of the Lapland University in Rovaniemi exemplifies experiments with the identity of the winter territory/city as it helps the winter city to fill its own niche while retaining the image of Santa Clause’s home; on the other hand, the same Arctic Center has been a source of many innovations from heat saving technology to communication innovations required by the conditions of living in the Arctic circle. [11]

TSSW Center — Siberian University of Future researchers the potential of Siberian uniqueness and local to identify the positive markers for the “Siberian image and regional positioning as a global communication hub”. [18]

INRTU is developing the Winter City Concept for the Siberian region as a platform for technological start-ups and adapting cities to winter conditions. [19] The Winter City Project focuses on the key problems of cities that have a harsh climate, as well as on the need to improve living standards and reduce the cost of living while boosting the city’s economic potential. The project follows the classical ideology of the technogenic world oriented mostly towards the survival through technology development, problem solution, addressing the adverse anthropogenic factors, etc. The project has virtually no positive intonations or estimates; it fails to study and utilizes the resources of winter cities. The underrated productive potential of winter locations and the lack of analysis of unique
resources the winter life of Siberian cities provides is what creates a gloomy image of “harsh”, difficult-to-live-in locations.

At the same time, research into the pros of living in Siberia that define the Siberian identity, identify the specific “natural conformity” inherent to the local lifestyle, link the location to the value of “own land”, the tolerance and nomadic mobility of the locals, and penchant for diversity, including that of object-spatial environment and lifestyles. The future of Siberia is thus seen to lie in “creating the image of a good region for living”, in having a better and more competitive environment. [20]

The vicinity of Lake Baikal amplifies the positive atmosphere and popularity of the Siberian winter image, in particular, that of Irkutsk, as it serves as “identity marker” of the location, a unique territorial resource with vast potential, from ice fishing and winter diving where one can marvel at ice galleries and grottoes underwater to simply enjoying the infinitely transparent ice or taking part in the ice percussion festivals, etc.

3. Results

3.1. “Winter city” as a potential positive image of Irkutsk

Given the fact that an attractive environment, including the diversity of the development is integral to a self-sustaining and effective city life in winter, environmental diversity and emotional integrity become crucial for winter life and development of Siberian cities today. This also addresses the problems of social segregation in the settlements that have a harsh climate. [4] In the context of the Siberian identity, one more relevant and promising trend consists in the active use of environmental technology, [21] green design, and landscape architecture. At the same time, any strategy and concept of winter city development that seeks to create comfortable, investment-attractive living space should be unique in terms of both the solution and its relation to the local authenticity while also being prioritized by the urban communities. [12] Moreover, each project should be accompanied by positive transcultural images, “the symbols clear not only for locals”. [22]

Accordingly, to create a positive and unique image for the city, the Winter City Project proposed for Irkutsk should reasonably have a section dedicated to the analysis of traditions and innovations of a winter city as a resource and potential for development. The idea for the section is to analyze the traditional territorial resources and the way of life in the context of the polycultural identity of the location, as well as how they could be used in combination; the creativity of using the resources of winter locations is subject to analysis, too. Everything is built upon the actual traits of the area and immersion in its mythology. It is also necessary to study the vision of Irkutsk from inside and outside to identify the most popular image markers (Decembrists, wooden architecture, clean water, center of science and culture, etc.) and formulate the actual codes, ideas, and concepts. This will enable projecting Irkutsk’s development priorities in the context of the identified images. An important role is thus assigned to Baikal’s identity that tends to assimilate other public ideas of Irkutsk and the region.

3.2. Winter holidays and the Baikal identity

Being a significant discourse of understanding the multifaceted nature of a location, festive culture seeks to reveal the images of urban identity and the mosaic pieces of its environment, to create an attractive image and, as a rule, to bring people together. The most popular winter holidays definitely include New Year, which locally complements the Russian traditions of celebrating the New New Year, Christmas and the Old New Year with Christmastides, the rituals of the Oriental New Year, and the fest of the White Month Sagaalgan. Such tradition mix is particularly relevant for Siberia that brings together many cultural traditions of the East and West/North (especially given that Russia and Siberia are both referred to as the North), shamanism, paganism and Christianity, Soviet and post-Soviet cultures. Arrangement of these holidays and the environmental design are of increasing importance.

Fortuna is a corporation that has commissioned a New Year Festival concept to be presented in Irkutsk in winter, which can now be cited as a comprehensive solution that combined various
tradi ons, images, and activities connected to the holiday organization, and utilized the festive potential of the winter to the fullest. The design concept is based upon the interpretation of several key plot lines: Fortune’s Wheel, Stampede of the Bulls, Rainbow in Ice City; these share a common space of concepts symbolizing fortune, welfare, success, etc. To add more, the search for the winter city’s and the corporation’s New Year image uses the analysis of traditional norms and rituals corresponding to the festive cycles of the Christian culture and the specifics of New Year celebrations as held by the lunar calendar. The project incorporates an integrated set of suggestions regarding the corporate festival image, event scripting, urban landscape and interior design, a package of printed media, etc. This is an exclusive interpretation of one of the most popular holidays in Russia that is held in high esteem. Designing an authentic winter holiday so important for the city is an undertaking interpreted by the authors as a synthesis of design solutions from the urban planning concepts to creating a unique festival space, a system of holiday attributes and souvenirs. Taking into account that the celebration concept is developed for the company whose facilities are scattered over the city, it has a unifying design theme for Irkutsk’s festive environment. An important part of the solution is the need to create space for celebrating the Central Children’s New Year Party of the right-bank part of Irkutsk. Active use of the opportunities ice and snow create, performance of Siberian rituals, references to the local endemics and rituals of the Oriental New Year become the characteristic feature of the project and make the location even more attractive in winter.

Understanding that Lake Baikal is a unique local winter resource and a symbol of the territory is associated with a focus on designing the patterns and symbols the winter image of Siberia, creating an ideology that seeks to build a positive reputation, as well as on utilization and branding. The search for the concepts and interpretations of Baikal’s images is part of the Baikal Iconography Project that interprets this undertaking through two interconnected and relevant key stories: eco-trend and nomadic philosophy. The symbols and signs of winter Baikal are studied and recreated in the art and design that interpret local myths, characteristic natural phenomena, and endemics. Creative use of traditional cuisine representations as image components is also part of such recreation. This allows representing natural and climatic features as well as the specifics of local winter life as pros.

4. Conclusions
The current situation, where industrial development of winter/northern cities is being prioritized over the establishment of living culture, has led to a degradation of the urban and cultural environment. Viewing a winter city as a self-sustaining territory, capitalizing on the unique features of the region in winter helps unleash the productive potential of “winter life”.

The identity of a location, conscious development of a positive image of the city life in winter through better festive culture among other things, and utilization of the opportunities tourism industry and high-quality living environment provide will turn Irkutsk into a comfortable and popular city that will lure investors.

References
[1] Gavrilyeva T N and Arkhangelskaya E A 2016 Northern cities: general trends and national characteristics EKO 3 63–798
[2] Pankevich N V 2008 The concept of regional competitiveness: implementation paradoxes Scientific Yearbook of the Institute of Philosophy and Law of the Ural Branch of the Russian Academy of Sciences 8 279–92
[3] Diamond J M 2008 Collaps. How societies choose to fall or succeed (Moscow: AST) p 768
[4] Bury OV and Dmitrieva T E 2015 Theoretical and practical issues of creating self-sufficient Arctic settlements Bulletin of the Komi Scientific Center, Ural Branch of the Russian Academy of Sciences 3(23) 141–48
[5] Gerashchenko D A 2011 Russian cities in the Arctic: new problems and ways to solve them Bulletin of MSTU 1 199–205
[6] Rokhchin V E, Zhilkin S F and Znamenskaya K N 2010 Strategic planning for the development of Russian cities: a systematic approach (Togliatti: TSU) p 403

[7] Howard Z P 2002 New Towns: An Overview of 30 American New Communities

[8] Melamed I I and Pavlenko VI 2014 Legal basis and methodological features of the development of the draft state program "Socio-economic development of the Arctic zone of the Russian Federation until 2020" Arctic: ecology and economy 2 6–15

[9] Menshikova T N 2019 Spatial analysis of the development of tourism in the regions of the Arctic zone of the Russian Federation based on the cluster approach Herald of the Moscow State Regional University 2 94–100

[10] Safaryan A A 2015 Territory as a destination Modern problems of science and education 2-2

[11] Landry C 2011 Creative city (Moscow: Publishing House "Classic – XXI") p 399

[12] Martyanov V S 2013 Urban development strategy in the Arctic region of Russia EKO 5 124–37

[13] Katsuhiro A 2016 WWCAM World Winter Cities Association for Mayors (Sapporo) p 18

[14] Grushenko E B 2018 Ecological tourism as a factor of sustainable development of the Western Arctic Arctic and North 32 18–29

[15] Kobylkin D 2011 Management of the development of Arctic tourism in the Yamalo-Nenets Autonomous Okrug Social Policy and Social Partnership 5 26–30

[16] Zheleznyak O and Korelina M 2020 Authentic universality of holidays Project Baikal 63 35–40

[17] Wojciechowski A I 2000 Secrets of Atlantis (Moscow: Veche) p 480

[18] Spicheva D I 2017 Digital image interpretation of the image of Siberia in the electronic communicative space Connekt-Universum – 2016: a collection of materials of the III Int. Transdisciplinary scientific and Practical WEB Conf. (Tomsk: Publishing House of Tomsk State University) pp 239–44

[19] Mayarenkov S 2020 Winter as a source of economic growth Project Baikal 63 76–77

[20] Inozemtsev V L 2013 Siberia: from a dependent territory to new horizons Macroregion Siberia: problems and development prospects (Krasnoyarsk: SFU) pp 10–39

[21] Sokolov Yu I 2013 Arctic: to the problem of accumulated environmental damage Arctic: ecology and economy 2 18–22

[22] Kiselev K V 2006 The discourse of regional identity in modern Russia Modern theories of discourse: multidisciplinary analysis (Yekaterinburg: Publ. House "Discourse -PI") pp 144–50