The Quality of Life in Arctic Cities: how is northern discomfort compensated by the vacation trips

The quality of life is a complex phenomenon including not only the economic living conditions as well as dwelling and infrastructure but also the feeling of it which depends on values and past living experience. What is especially important for Arctic city sustainability that is the compensation mechanism of northern discomfort.

As for economic conditions of living they differ dramatically within the in Arctic cities. West Siberian Russian cities are among the most high-income cities in the whole Russia with high developed social infrastructure. But some Russian cities suffers very much from their mono-profiled industry collapse and infrastructure degradation. The diversity in economic conditions results in many demographic and psychological effects. For ex. in low-income regions there is a high percentage of abortion and high percentage of children in one-parent families (in Russian conditions this is not due to the second demographic transition but this is a marker of social deprivation and marginalization). We also can see the dramatic diversity in the quality of life satisfaction.

The qualitative analysis of the quality of life feeling in Russian Arctic cities bases on the researches in Norilsk (2013) and Noyabrsk (2014) and some more old field trips as well as the search in literature on this theme. It was find that the quality of life feeling depends on a very complex system of factors but regular and long vacation trips are of great importance. Russian labor laws allows for those who have a job in the Arctic zone a vast holiday (in fact about 2 months or more) and a financial compensation for the vacation trip ones in 2 years. So Arctic residents feel their long vacation trips to the southern places as a legitimized compensation for the Arctic discomfort.

First of all such a trip is thought as a chance to get “the season diversity” and “see real summer”. The extension of experience is also very important. The northerners think they are more mobile, more informed and have more wide mental outlook and high creativity than those who are called “Southerners” or “middle-zone citizens” (“srednepolosniki”) just due to their opportunity to go to long vacation trip and “see the world”.

The next role of the vacation trips is the maintains of the social networks and also the week social ties usage. The great portion of informal communication takes part in the period of the vacation trips for Russian Arctic people.

For example our respondents arrived to the decisions of the university choice or real estate purchases due to advises of friends while having a rest in southern cities. For the low-income cities the vacation is also a chance to get more cheap goods including vegetables and some other food.

There is also a controversial problem about the role of vacation trips. Having a regular trip to the large cities such as Moscow or southern resort places the northerners absorb the value of high standards of living. Coming back to their Arctic cities they feel disappointment not only because of cold but also because of the lack of some features seen in large cities (for ex. McDonalds restaurant is such a marker of “normal city” for Arctic youth and the lack of it is thought as deprivation). Many young Arctic people do not satisfied the conditions which are “objective” much better then in dozens cities of small population in other parts of the country. From the other side the high quality of life standards carried from the vacation trips push northerners to improve their own cities.