

## Destination development in Western Siberia

*Tourism governance and evolutionary economic geography*

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# Destination Development in Western Siberia: Tourism Governance and Evolutionary Economic Geography

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## Abstract

Tourism development has often been identified as tool for balancing negative effects of economic restructuring not least in peripheral regions. The availability of abundant nature is often utilized in order to create tourism based on activities in nature, but while most studies of destination development presented in the English-language literature are from western contexts, examples from post-Soviet Russia are rare. This article focuses on Western Siberia, a periphery with access to natural resources and heavy industrialization, but remotely located toward domestic and international

markets. Also here tourism is considered a savior not least for the regional economies, and the purpose of this article is to analyze how stakeholders in a Russian resource periphery arrange governance and cooperation aiming at destinations development in a time of institutional, economic and social changes. Inspired by evolutionary economic geography and based on primary sources and interview data, the article analyzes tourism development and stakeholder relations in three regions in Western Siberia: Tomsk, Kemerovo, and Altay Krai. It is concluded that tourism to make a significant contribution has come onto the economic development agenda in all three regions, albeit only achieving a permanent high-profile presence in one of them, being crowded out by other (especially primary) industries in the two others. Although the specific tourism governance set-up varies between the three regions, it is clear that public tourism governance still sits somewhat uneasily between state control and market economy, with substantial public subsidies subsidizing especially large-scale investment projects, and depending on federal support within a governance system where decentralization seems to be both rather limited and somewhat unstable. Thus, the article demonstrates that tourism path development in the Siberian periphery is highly dependent on state intervention and success in other sectors.

## **Keywords**

Tourism destination development, destination governance, path dependency, Russian Federation, Siberia

## 1. Introduction

Tourism development has often been identified as tool for balancing negative effects of economic restructuring not least in peripheral regions (Hall *et al.*, 1998; Botterill *et al.*, 2000; Hall & Boyd, 2005; Hall, 2007; Müller & Jansson 2007). In this context the availability of abundant nature is often utilized in order to create tourism based on activities in nature. It has been discussed in the literature to what extent it is a reasonable idea to develop tourism in peripheries since access in most cases is limited and evidence for great success scarce (Hall & Boyd, 2005; Müller, 2011). Still, it is obvious that even moderately developed tourism has helped to overcome crisis in extractive industries and sometimes led to a diversification of peripheral labor markets (Müller, 2011).

Hence, tourism development has also been acknowledged in a Russian context as a way of reacting to sudden economic decline after the devolution of the USSR (Burns, 1998; Braden & Prudnikova, 2008;). Indeed, there are reports indicating economic growth, but also numerous challenges not least related to political and market instability as well as the absence of institutional structures (Maloletko *et al.*, 2015). Still, it has been argued that the idea that a post-soviet situation implied an institutional vacuum, does not apply (Grabher & Stark, 1998). Instead embeddedness in various social networks creates a complex social ecology, which influences stakeholders' abilities to engage in regional development activities. In this context governmental emphasis on maintaining social stability motivated subsidies, further keeping industrial structures largely intact (Crowley, 2016).

Hence, the post-soviet transition indeed influenced productivity of the Russian industry positively, however mainly within sectors of limited state involvement (Ahrend, 2006). Moreover, a concentration of gainful development occurred in urban centers rather than rural Russia, also increasing spatial and social inequalities (Bradshaw, 2008; Kolomak, 2013).

Against this background it is of interest to assess the role of tourism in peripheral areas of Russia. Most studies of destination development presented in the English-language literature are from countries with long-standing market economies, while examples from post-soviet Russia, a system characterized by increasing capitalism with a slow devolution of state control and planning, are rare. Here focus is on Western Siberia, a periphery characterized by access to natural resources and heavy industrialization, but remotely located toward domestic and international markets. Even here tourism is considered a savior not least for rural areas, but within the cities, too, tourism is increasingly realized as a way towards diversification of the economy (Yakovenko, 2016). However, tourism

development has to be done in a time of transition, in a periphery, and with great uncertainty regarding markets, regulations and supplies. It is therefore important to see how stakeholders navigate in this context to achieve a positive tourism development.

The purpose of this article is to analyze how stakeholders in a Russian resource periphery arrange cooperation and destination governance in order to further tourism development in a time of institutional, economic and social changes, and the impact of this on the development path of Siberian tourist destinations.

## **2. Theoretical background**

Recently in the scientific literature it has been argued that understanding tourism and destination development requires also a look back into history (Ioannides, 2006; Brouder & Eriksson, 2013; Brouder, 2014). Within economic geography, this has been acknowledged under the theoretical umbrella of Evolutionary Economic Geographies (EEG) (Martin & Sunley, 2006; Boschma & Martin, 2010). As Brouder puts it, “EEG is not concerned with equilibrium and stasis in the spatial economy but with the historically influenced, geographically embedded, long-term processes that cause the economy to transform itself from within over time.” (Brouder, 2014:2). Accordingly, product innovations form the core of potential change for firms and regions (Frenken & Boschma, 2007). However, EEG also highlights how the economy is organizing itself and changes spatial structure as well as how it is contingent of place and path dependencies (Martin & Sunley, 2006).

Though EEG-thinking is not necessarily new for tourism geographies (Brouder, 2014) – indeed Butler’s Tourism Area Life Cycle (Butler, 1980) could be understood as an antecedent – its popularity within economic geography certainly spilled over into tourism geographies as well (e.g. Papatheodorou, 2004; Gill & Williams, 2011; Halkier & Therkelsen, 2013; Ma & Hassink, 2013; Sanz-Ibáñez & Anton Clavé, 2014; Halkier & James, 2017; Brouder *et al.*, 2017). In a review, Brouder (2014) suggests the following areas for EEG applications within tourism geographies; knowledge transfer; path dependence; and regional branching. Here not least the latter are in focus for a further discussion.

Peripheral areas have historically been developed in order to utilize natural resources such as timber and minerals. The risks and opportunities of such a development path have been discussed not least

with regards to the staple thesis (Innis 1930/1956, Mackintosh 1939/1964, Clapp, 1998; Gunton 2003; Hayter, 2003). Accordingly, Innis claimed that a staple resource-based development implied an economic injection into the periphery and a possibility to utilize the natural resource as nucleus for a further development of civic society and a diversification of the labor market. Later commentators, however, highlighted the risks and the fact that this export-led local regional development seldom occurred. Instead they saw truncated economies (Gunton, 2003), where diversification did not happen, and local control of production remained low (Hayter, 2003). Hence, the resulting single industry towns in peripheries suffer from path dependence and remain highly vulnerable to economic and structural change.

Even tourism, as already mentioned, often identified as a solution to economic restructuring in the periphery, has been discussed in relation to the staple thesis. For example, Schmallegger and Carson (2010) argued that tourism, although often intended to diversify peripheral economies, could turn out as a new staple, implying a tourism industry controlled from core areas and highly exposed to volatile tourism demand. Müller (2013) demonstrated in a study of the tourism-nature-resource nexus in northern Sweden a rebound effect. Thus, tourism appeared to be an attractive sector during bust periods within markets for forestry and timber, while interest faded quickly when those sectors recovered. Theoretically, attempts to develop tourism can thus be understood as a way of re-resourcing peripheries aiming at a constant yield of otherwise seemingly worthless land (cf. Perkins, 2003) often guided by the superficial idea of tourism as easy and cheap way to regional development seemingly applicable in all locations (Hall, 2007).

In this context, it has, however, to be acknowledged that above notions have derived from studies in western world countries where free market conditions dominate, though state interference through economic subsidies or regulations may apply (cf. Hall, 2008; Almstedt *et al.*, 2016). Centrally planned states in Eastern Europe did not prioritize tourism in their development plans, instead stressing manufacturing industries. For example, in Poland government recognized tourism as an industrial sector not least for the recreation of workers as late as in the 1960s, but already then certain regions were disqualified because of pollution (Kruczala, 1990). Moreover, while in western states destination development has mainly been a function of free markets, centrally planned economies had a more “scientific” approach to designate places for tourism and recreation. Hence, the optimal place for tourism was not where free supply and demand met, but rather it was decided upon by sometimes quasi-scientific landscape analysis. This ascribed certain recreational values onto certain physical

landscape features and hence a potential for being suitable for the recreation of the working class (cf. Benthien, 1984; 1997). Although this procedure also identifies beaches and mountains as suitable tourism areas, it tends to underrate the importance of location in relation to demand markets and transport infrastructure. Furthermore, the absence of competition and as a matter of fact the scarcity of material goods did not support a development of international quality. This may explain why tourism destinations within centrally planned economies at least historically performed sub-optimal concerning visitor arrivals and overnight stays, though it should be acknowledged that already during the 1980s the trend was to open for western visitors not least with the aim of earning foreign currency (Buckley & Witt, 1990; Hall, 1998).

Against this background, a transformation towards a market situation is tricky. Few studies have actually addressed the issue of destination development in the context of systemic transformation. Focusing on Estonia, Jaakson (1996) mentions four factors of importance for tourism development in the transition from a centrally planned economy; democratization; privatization; land and property reform; and decollectivization of not least agriculture. Williams and Baláž (2002) further adds the re-internationalization and globalization, and the polarization of consumption within domestic tourism as further critical points. Are these preconditions satisfied, opportunities for a successful tourism development are created. However, as already mentioned institutional legacies are not easily overcome and political and economic transitions did not lead to an institutional vacuum (Grabher & Stark, 1998). Moreover, as Williams and Baláž (2001) demonstrated for the the Czech Republic and Slovakia, tourism developed in the regions that had been featured as tourism destinations already prior to transition. The dependence on domestic tourism mainly and a greater stratification in social class changed access opportunities, but state intervention implied that economic development paths were sustained against a free market contestation (Hall, 1998; Williams & Baláž, 2001).

The international academic literature on tourism development in Siberia and non-metropolitan Russia is growing but still fairly limited, focussing on the resources that can potentially be mobilized for economic development (including touristic) purposes (Kuleshov, 2012), and the early stages of institutional flux and the uncertain relationship between public and private actors that characterized the first years after the introduction of market-economy reforms (Burns, 1998). The most comprehensive discussion can be found in Braden & Prudnikova's (2008) analysis of the challenges associated with ecotourism, focusing especially on the relationship between local stakeholders and communities on the one hand, and national/international stakeholders on the other, both with

regard to conflicting conceptions of tourism drawing on natural resources, and investments in new tourist developments. In their paper the relational geographies of tourist destination development and macro-level analysis is, however, the main focus, and thus the internal stakeholder relationships within the regional destinations are only touched upon briefly. Unsurprisingly, more extensive contributions have been made in the Russian literature, including analyses of regional tourism geographies, emerging governance structures, and innovative experience economy in Kemerovo (Baev *et al.*, 2015; Denisova *et al.*, 2016), Altai Krai (Kolupanova, 2010, 2015), and Tomsk (Goncharova, 2015; Dryga *et al.*, 2016; Goncharova *et al.*, 2016)

In summary, the review of the literature suggest that the post-soviet development has been "...not on the ruins but with the ruins of communism" (Stark, 1996:995). This indicates the importance of awareness of path dependence and, indeed, of state intervention sustaining a particular development path. While EEG has so far not really highlighted the role of institutions, it already has been claimed that this should be done by treating institutions as organizational routines influencing the geographical settings of regions (Boschma & Frenken, 2009; Carson & Carson, 2017). It must, however, also be stressed that path dependency should not be seen as a deterministic 'iron cage', but that both incremental developments, the coexistence of competing institutions and organizations through layering or branching, and the possibility of incremental plasticity through reinterpretation of individual institutions may sometimes entail considerable scope for change that can be exploited by public and private actors (Mahoney & Thelen, 2010; Strambach & Halkier, 2013; Brouder & Eriksson, 2013). This tension between continuity and change may be particularly applicable in a post-soviet context, and especially in a peripheral setting where state interest in the smooth production of staples for export traditionally has remained high. This will now be further illustrated by a case study of tourism development in western Siberia, focusing on the ways in which public and private actors try to collaborate in order to shape the future path of their region as a tourist destination.

### **3. Concepts and methods**

The conceptualization of tourist destinations has changed in recent decades, gradually moving away from effectively treating destinations as self-contained entities towards interpreting destinations as 'open systems' with internal interactions and structures that are deeply imbedded in global flows of people, capital and knowledge (Dredge & Jamal, 2013; Hultman & Hall, 2012). Inspired by traditions



within institutionalism (North, 1990; Thelen, 2009; cf. Halkier & Therkelsen, 2013), the starting point for the analysis will be to identify the key institutions that govern the relationship between central stakeholders, namely the visitors, the tourist industry, and government. All three groups consist of a multiplicity of actors with different resources and preferences (Dredge, 2006; Ioannides & Debbage, 1997) – e.g. leisure and business travellers, local attractions and multinational airlines, local tourist offices and national planning authorities – and regional tourism development is located in its wider inter/national context through identification of key institutions that shape their interactions.

Both in leisure and business tourism the relationship between visitors and service providers is conducted primarily on the basis of market relations, while interactions between providers within destinations often entail network relations, because they compete for the same visitors but this shared reliance can also further collaborative ventures (Hall & Williams, 2008; Hjalager, 2010). Finally, the relationships between regulators and both visitors and providers have both hierarchical and non-hierarchical elements, ranging from visa requirements and spatial planning to place branding and establishing public-private partnerships in order to further innovation (Dredge, 2006; Valente *et al.* 2015). The relationships between stakeholders can be institutionalized in ways that make it more or less difficult to bring about change within the destination, that make external stakeholders more or less influential, and that posit public bodies as potential coordinators of fragmented private activities (Dredge & Jamal, 2013; Halkier & Therkelsen, 2013; Valente *et al.*, 2015).

In order to analyze how stakeholders in a Russian resource periphery arrange regional cooperation aiming at destinations development in times of uncertainty and change, fieldwork was undertaken in three relatively urbanized regions in South Western Siberia: Tomsk, Altay and Kemerovo. These regions represent three different forms of tourism – MICE, nature tourism, and active tourism – and hence their potential destination development paths, and their key features will be presented in the following section. By comparing the three regions we aim to capture 1) a diversity of stakeholder configurations as well as common features of destination development in peripheral Russian regions, and 2) the relationship between stakeholder configurations and unfolding destination development paths.

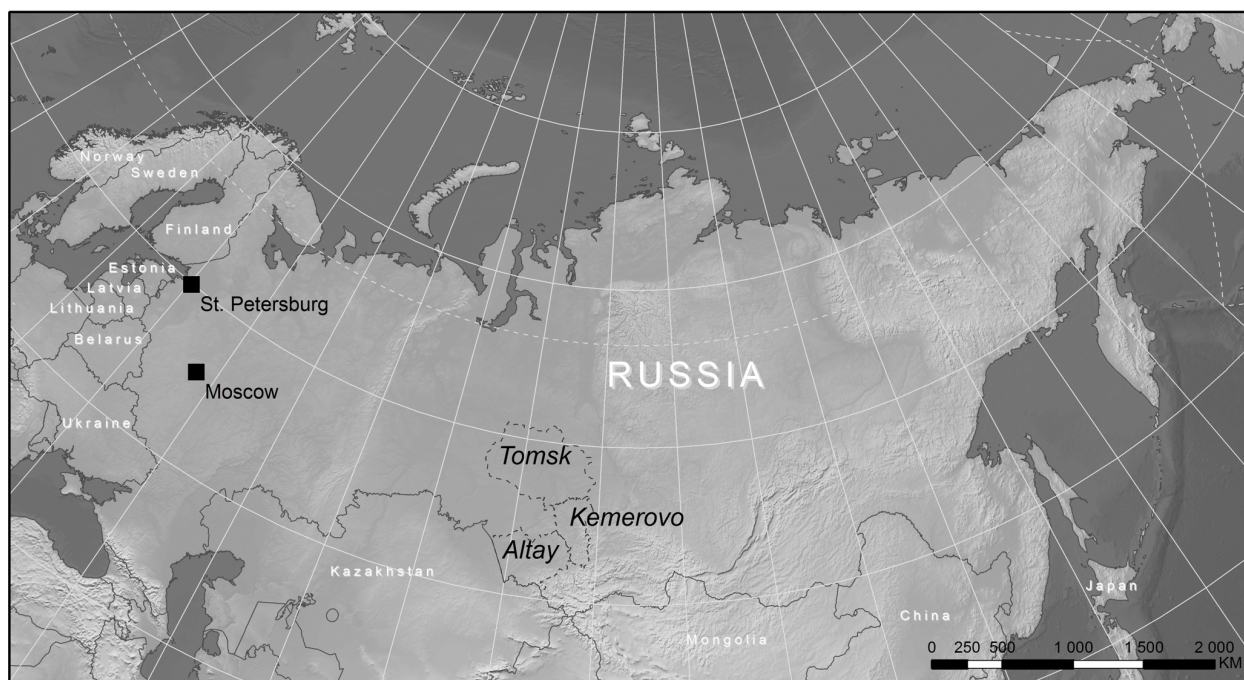
Fieldwork was undertaken by local teams of university-based researchers working on the basis of a shared conceptual framework and trained to use the same topic-guide for explorative enquiries. Face-to-face interviews took place on the premises of the interviewees and lasted between 45 and 90

minutes. In each of the regions interviewees were selected on the basis of their prominence within the four stakeholder groups, and thus a total of 70 semi-structured interviews were conducted with 70 key stakeholders (see Table 1). A thematic content analysis of recordings and field notes was conducted in order to identify patterns of cooperation and destination governance, and this was supplemented by policy documents and statistical data on current tourist activities and key development trends.

<b>TABLE 1: Distribution of interviewees by region and stakeholder group</b>				
	<b>Tomsk</b>	<b>Kemerovo</b>	<b>Altay Krai</b>	<b>Total</b>
<i>Private tourism firms</i>	2	18	5	28
<i>Public government</i>	2	6	2	13
<i>Public cultural institutions</i>	5	4	4	15
<i>Knowledge institutions</i>	3	9	1	14
<i>Total interviews</i>	12	37	12	70

#### **4. Case study areas**

The three regional case study destinations are located in the relatively populated south-western part of Siberia (see Figure 1). While they share important similarities in terms of their economic and political position as resource peripheral regions within the Russian Federation, tourism has developed along rather different trajectories in the three destinations (see Table 2).



**Figure 1. Case study regions within the Russian Federation.**

The three case study regions are similar in the sense that they were all settled by Russian emigrants in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century and now constitute regions (*Kraj* or *Oblast*) within the Russian Federation, enjoying a – by European federal standards – relatively limited degree of capacity for autonomous decision-making (Libman, 2011). Moreover, the regional economies have all been built around primary production – agriculture in Altai, oil in Tomsk, and coal, metals and chemicals in Kemerovo – and as such they have made major contributions to the growth of the Russian economy since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, but also been affected to various degrees by recent crises within their stable sectors and, despite privatisations having been undertaken, still heavily influenced by government thorough ownership and regulation (Nefedova *et al.*, 2011). All three regions are dominated by regional urban centres with populations between 0.5 and 0.7 million, well-connected to the rest of south-west Siberia by road and rail – and to Moscow through frequent flights and a history of largely electing mayors and regional governors that have been on good working terms with the governing party. Finally, all three case study regions have experienced considerable growth in tourism activities since the systemic transition began in the 1990s, although the tourism share of regional GDP is still below the Russian Federation average of 1.1 per cent, and generally overshadowed by the role of extractive industries like oil and coal. The increasing number of visitors are primarily domestic, and while commercial travel agents continue to concentrate on selling international trips to local consumers,

the challenges faced by the primary producing sectors has underpinned a search for alternative sources of income, which has resulted in a tourism sector that has become increasingly dominated by private firms through privatisation of public facilities and individual entrepreneurship in the hospitality sector.

TABLE 2: Case study regions: Key tourism data									
(2015 unless otherwise stated)									
	Kemerovo			Altai Krai			Tomsk		
Regional capital	Kemerovo			Barnaul			Tomsk		
Key regional economic activities	Coal, metals, chemicals			Agriculture			Oil, education, research		
Current form(s) of tourism	Alpine skiing			Nature-based tourism, wellness			Business tourism		
Key (potential) tourism resources	Accessible mountains (cultural heritage)			Accessible mountains (gambling zone)			Knowledge institutions (cultural heritage)		
Region / population (million)	1995	2005	2015	1995	2005	2015	1995	2005	2015
	3.1	2.9	2.8	2.4	2.6	2.7	1.1	1.0	1.1
Tourism share of regional GDP (per cent)		2005	2014		2005	2015		2005	2014
		0.1	0.93		0.8	1.0		0.7	1.0
Travel agents total		2005	2015		2005	2015		2005	2015
		66	303		76	167		62	116
Tourist arrivals in commercial accommodation	1,500,000			660,000			109,800		
International arrivals in per cent of all arrivals	1.8			4.3			1.3		
Commercial accommodation facilities	180			278			150		
Sources: <a href="http://tmsk.eks.ru/">http://tmsk.eks.ru/</a> ; <a href="http://www.dmps-kuzbass.ru/tourism/development/">http://www.dmps-kuzbass.ru/tourism/development/</a> ; Denisova et al., 2016; <a href="http://akstat.eks.ru">http://akstat.eks.ru</a> .									

Despite considerable similarities, it is, however, also important to stress the differences between the three case study regions with regard to the forms of tourism activity that constitute the core of the respective regional offers. Tourism in Kemerovo is dominated by alpine skiing, with accessible

mountains having been originally developed for winter sports events in late Soviet times and now having become commercial operations with recurring popular events targeting mainly a young audience (Baev *et al.*, 2015). In Altai Krai tourism is driven by accessible natural resources and commercial wellness resorts, also benefitting from the presence of high-altitude wilderness in the adjacent Altai Republic and recently enhanced by the construction of the major gambling resort *Siberian Coin*, targeting Chinese visitors in particular (Altai Region, 2016; Siberian Coin, 2017). Finally, in Tomsk tourism is centred around urban business tourism, driven by a considerable cluster of high-profile universities and research institutions, that attracts high-spending visitors that may also enjoy Siberian cultural heritage in the form of elaborately decorated wooden architecture from the pre-revolutionary period (Goncharova, 2014).

## Results

In order to illuminate how stakeholders collaborate in order to promote destination development, the analysis in each of the three regions will focus on the aims of key actors, the ways in which resources are mobilized for tourism development, and emerging patterns of destination governance. Having reported on each of the regional destinations studied, the final conclusion will first identify shared patterns and local distinctiveness in the light of the position of the case study regions within the Russian and international context, and then consider the implications of this on the development path of Siberian tourist destinations.

### *Kemerovo: Mining tourism development?*

The development of tourism in Kemerovo can be traced on the basis of history of Sheregesh, the region's now internationally reputed ski resort on Mount Shoria in the Tashtagol area, now attracting over 1 million tourists annually. Historically, Kemerovo region, established as late as in 1943, was a key resource and industrial base for the USSR economy. The first skiing facilities were built in Sheregesh in the late 1970s for athletes of the Russian *People's Spartakiad*, but Sheregesh never became a mass tourism destination in the Soviet epoch. The facilities that remained there after the collapse of the Soviet Union were very basic and very few (interview, local government

representative). In the early 1990s, where the traditional extracting industries in Tashtagol (iron ore and gold extraction, wood production) collapsed, local authorities were searching for new resources, and the area's skiing potential was seen as such. Under the conditions of the post-Soviet recession, the first private-public interaction patterns emerged: the authorities were looking for the ways to improve the socio-economic situation, while the emerging businesses were looking for investment opportunities. Hence the Tashtagol area authorities initiated the establishment of a skiing complex and the conception for tourism development in Mountain Shoriya.

Thus, during the *perestroika* years the traditionally industrial Kuzbass (the name of the coal basin on which the region's wealth was originally built is often used instead of Kemerovo when referring to the region) attempted the transition to a new model of the economy. In the 2000s the region's major mining companies started diversifying their activities and invested heavily in tourism enterprises that could guarantee relatively stable income compared to the volatile market for extractive industries. E.g. in December 2004, the *Kuzbassrazrezugol Mining Company* and the *Ural mining and metallurgic company* established the *Fund for Supporting Winter Sports*. At that point in time the regional and federal government declared that the task was to transition from the industrial to the post-industrial economy, and thus new public-private partnership projects focusing on tourism infrastructure emerged. They were financed by large industrial enterprises and supported by the public authorities, and tourism. It was considered the strategic vector of Kuzbass economy development in the 21st century (interview, regional government representative). Nowadays the *Kaskad* group of companies owns *Kuzbass Fuel Company* as well as a hotel and a chair lift in Speregesh. All in all, over 50 companies have involved themselves in further development of the skiing complex, with one of the major investors being the *Fund for Supporting Winter Sports*.

In Kemerovo, regional government, through its Department for Youth Policy and Sport (Tourism Division), plays a key role as responsible for tourism development policy, and the department has been instrumental in producing the *Strategy for Development of Tourism in Kuzbass* (Kemerovo Region, 2013). The main aim of the Strategy is to promote a region-wide tourism-and-recreational complex that can facilitate tourism flows on the basis of a modern tourism infrastructure, and while the main activity of Alpine skiing remains firmly in focus, diversification into other types of tourism (e.g. sports tourism and heritage tourism) is also prioritized. In parallel with this, private entrepreneurs have formed a number of associations that promote the development of tourism, especially around skiing, heritage and sports. The associations work through marketing, quality standards, training, advice –

and representation vis-à-vis public authorities order to ensure a predictable operating environment in times of financial and market uncertainty (Denisova *et al.*, 2016).

Regional government has long stressed the importance of formalising collaboration between public and private tourism stakeholders. At the collective level the region's governor established the *Public Tourism Council* in 2009; a consultative body bringing together executive state, regional and local government bodies, tourism industry representatives, public tourism organizations, museums and mass media, and knowledge institutions and which has been instrumental (Kemerovo Region Governor, 2009).

In a situation characterized by financial hardship for both regional government and private sector actors, two mutually supporting strategies have been pursued to further the development of tourism in the Kemerovo region. Firstly, in the region's 2025 *Strategy for Social and Economic Development* (Kemerovo Region, 2007-2008) development of the recreational sector infrastructure is one of the main investment priorities of the region's development, with considerable commitment of public and private resources in developing the *Sheregesh* ski resort in Mount Shoriya into a year-round resort for winter and summer recreation of tourists, with a view to also appealing to the international market. This goal is pursued through infrastructure investments and the creation of a 'regionally favoured economic zone' (Kemerovo region, 2010) and involved extensive interaction between private companies and regional authorities to attract potential investors. Secondly, collaborative structures have been established in order to bring public and private stakeholders together in long-term strategic relationships in order to further investment in tourism development. This includes the setting up in 2015 of a regional tourism cluster organization, the *Tourism and Recreation Cluster of Kuzbass*, funded mostly by the *Ministry for Economic Development* in Moscow and co-funded by the members of the Cluster. The Cluster brought together regional and local governments, universities and about 50 tourism enterprises with the aim to further coordinated development of infrastructure, innovation and knowledge exchange (VisitKuzbass, 2015). The latter aim is furthermore supported by the triple-helix *Tourism Resource Centre* at Kemerovo State University, set up in 2013 with financial support from the EU Tempus programme in order to engage public and private stakeholders in accessing public research and delivering training of staff in/for tourism and hospitality (Kolodyi *et al.*, 2013). Regional tourism development has in other words combined a willingness to invest public money with sustained attempts to attract extra-regional funding in order to further public-private collaboration.

In Kemerovo region collaboration around tourism development has been under way for nearly a decade, culminating in the establishment of the *Kemerovo Region Tourism and Recreation Cluster* as a mechanism for interaction, cooperation and partnership between public and private stakeholders. This could help overcoming the problems of coordinated agency previously encountered, but as the Cluster is being developed on the basis of federal funding while private actors, though actively involved in all the activities, have so far been quite reluctant to invest any funds, the situation is still fragile. If the system of cooperation within the Cluster does not manage to further engage private stakeholders financially – or if the federal funding runs out – an extensive sector-wide partnership between the business community, cultural institutions, and knowledge institutions will fail to materialize. Moreover, despite the oft-repeated ambition of promoting post-industrial economic activities, regional government continues to pay more attention to the dominant primary industries like coal mining and metallurgy (Denisova *et al.*, 2016), and thus investments in tourism still, paradoxically, depend directly on the fluctuating situation in the energy and metallurgy markets.

Yet, some of the major obstacles for tourism development in Kemerovo region lies outside the stakeholders' control, not least its location. A private tour company director argued that the cost of flight tickets seems to keep most Russian tourists in the European part of the country, because flying to the Caucasus or Sochi is much cheaper than traveling to Kuzbass. From this perspective distance to the main domestic markets is clearly still a challenge despite the quality of the skiing in Sheregesh.

#### *Altai Krai: More healthy tourism?*

Regional government in Altai Krai, operating through its *Administration for the Development of Tourism, Recreation and Health Resort Industry*, is a central stakeholder in tourism development. As stated by a regional government representative:

*The Department for Tourism and Foreign Economic Relations Development of Altai Krai elaborates regional tourism development programs and programs for the development of tourist clusters, attracting the largest tourist companies.*

In the 2011-2016 strategy *Development of Tourism in Altai Krai* (Altai Krai, 2011) the overall aim is defined as developing a modern tourism industry with a growing contribution to socio-economic welfare. This is going to be achieved through a spatial cluster approach that concentrates infrastructure investment in selected localities and combines public – federal, regional, municipal – and private capital as well as input from knowledge institutions in order to further tourism



development. Measures include development plans for special economic zones, including the *Siberian Coin* gambling zone, promotional and branding efforts in Russia and beyond, and service quality development and certification in collaboration with the *Altai Hospitality* association (Altai Regional Tourism Association, 2016). A director of a private tourism company argued that

*The Department provides an opportunity for free participation of the tourist business (companies, accommodation facilities, etc.) in the largest international Russian tourist exhibitions. Together we participate in the organization and holding of newsworthy events on the territory of the region.*

Also in Altai Krai a consultative body, the so-called *Public Council* founded in 2013, supports the work of the regional administration in tourism development. Its purpose is to strengthen cooperation between public and private stakeholders, including regional public organizations, directors of major accommodation facilities, tourist companies, trade unions and knowledge institutions (Altai Krai, 2013a), also in terms of building trust and limiting suspicions of preferential treatment of particular businesses by public officials.

In addition to a large number of small private firms providing accommodation and other services, Altai Krai also has several large tourism operators. A prime example is *Belokurikha Resorts*, today one of the leading providers of health and wellness tourism in the Russian Federation, that offers guest leading-edge practices in hydrotherapy as well as a wide range of active leisure pursuits in high-quality surroundings (Belokurikha Resorts, 2016). Similarly the tour operator *Belokurikha Travel* has been important in bringing about fast growth in visitor numbers in the mountainous parts of the region since its establishment in January 2001, and its growth exemplifies the possibility of major resorts developments having positive trickle-down effects for local entrepreneurs (Belokurikha Resorts, 2016). The industry association *Altai State Regional Tourism Association* brings together a sizeable group of well-established private firms in the tourism trade as well as institutions of higher education, but although its members are primarily outbound travel agents, the association also engages in promotion of tourism development within the region such as development of touristic routes and staff training (Altai Regional Tourism Association, 2016). A tourism association representative explains that

*Altai State Regional Tourism Association (ARAT), together with the Department, invites customs officers, border and sanitary officials to conduct training seminars for business, and ARAT staff acts as an expert in assessing crisis situations arising in tourism.*

Finally, in terms of cultural attractions, the pattern in Altai Krai is similar to that in other regions, namely that tourism plays a minor role for public museums, while it is of crucial importance to cultural institutions based on civil society or private initiatives such as the *Biysk Altai Spiritual Mission History Museum* or the *S. I. Gulyaev Belokurikha City Museum*, founded in 1997 by *Belokurikha Resorts* but now operated by local government in recognition of the importance of the resort to the local community (VisitAltai, 2015).

In order to mobilize resources for tourism development, regional government engages in a dual strategy that combine direct investment in especially infrastructure with persistent – and often successful – attempts to attract external funding for specific projects. Regional government subsidizes construction of infrastructure and assembly of land for tourism development, but as local firms – tour operators and agencies – only invest in their own minor projects (small hotels, cafés etc.), large project in the *Special economic zone for tourism and recreation* designated by the region and supported by the Russian Federal Government are driven by large external private investors (Altai Centre for Investments and Development, 2016a). Altai Krai authorities in tourism – Altai Krai Administration for the Development of Tourism, Recreation and Health Resort Industry – together with local authorities, local government tourism departments and private business sector (investors) constitute the foundation of tourism industry clusters. However, currently tourist organizations or other tourist market stakeholders are not acting as investors, whereas private actors provide hotels, food and entertainment enterprises, alpine skiing tracks and other services. Major initiatives like the second stage of the *Belokurikha* resort and the *Golden Gate* initiative in the city of Biysk are therefore particularly well resourced because they are federal-status clusters partly subsidized by federal funds (Altai Krai, 2013b). Funding for ‘soft’ initiatives (branding, training, networking) does, however, remain limited (Altai Centre for Investments and Development, 2016b), and as the spatial tourism clusters clearly depend on political and financial support from federal government, long-term tourism development perspectives are less certain than recent forward strides would perhaps seem to suggest. Moreover, the reliance on special economic zones where the risk for investors is particularly low may also affect future development through new market-driven projects because private stakeholders may wait for the state to bring initiatives and resources to the table.

The relative advantage of Altai Krai may be that regional government recognises that tourism is a relatively important part of the regional economy, and that some private actors and public knowledge institution have begun to engage in collaboration on an ongoing basis. However, political and

economic uncertainties may still influence the interaction between the stakeholders interested in tourism development because while it makes collaboration and risk-sharing even more important, at the same time it also impels individual stakeholders to focus on short-term goals to the detriment of long-term investment in sustainable tourism development.

*Tomsk: Cultural and/or business tourism?*

In the case of the Tomsk region, the contribution of tourism to the regional economy is comparatively low but increasing over the last 10 years, and during the last 5 years, a paradigm shift has taken place in the field of governmental regulation and stimulation of the development of tourism in Tomsk region. The regional capital, the city of Tomsk, continues not to prioritize tourism, and this makes Tomsk Region the central public actor in destination development, and tourism development has been identified as a primary function of an administrative unit within regional government, the *Department of Culture and Tourism*. The regional tourism strategy, *Development of Culture and Tourism in Tomsk Region 2015-2020* (Tomsk Region, 2014), defines the overall aim as the “development of domestic and inbound tourism on the territory of Tomsk region”, to be pursued through promotion in and beyond Russia (see e.g. TIC Tomsk, 2016), and the creation of a framework for tourism development that will support prioritized types of tourism, in practice leaning towards cultural tourism as suggested by the title. However, the administrative and financial resources allocated by regional government to this task are limited and organizationally fragmented, and the regional strategy was elaborated and coordinated by the Department of Culture and Tourism, with other departments of regional government as contributors, but without involvement of other tourism actors, public or private.

The two main groups of private tourism actors are travel agencies and hotels. Like in the other case study regions, most travel agencies in Tomsk are focusing on outbound travel, but a minority of travel agencies also focuses on incoming visitors. An example of this is the tourist excursion company *Polaris*, operating since 1999 and providing a full range of services for incoming tourists, including foreigners, and in 2004 *Polaris* was granted a certificate of accreditation that enabled the firm to provide its services to official delegations and guests of Tomsk region (Polaris, 2016). The main expectations of private companies of public authorities are destination promotion and infrastructure development, especially transport accessibility and a tourist friendly environment. As a

private hotel owner commented: *we are ready to provide high quality hospitality service, just make Tomsk famous!*

Especially the regional capital Tomsk is well-endowed with cultural attractions, but although local religious communities are open to guests and support efforts to increase interest in visiting Tomsk and its religious sites (Goncharova, 2014), only privately-sponsored cultural attractions see tourists as an important part of their target group. Prominent examples include the *Museum of Slavic Mythology*, founded by Tomsk businessman Gennady Pavlov in 2007 as a private art collection but now organizing interactive exhibitions and operating on a commercial basis. He built a new building for the museum and a small square in the very historical center of Tomsk in 2013, stressing that his investment in the project was *good for the people - and my dream came true*. The *Semiluzhky* fortress, a reconstruction of a 17<sup>th</sup> century Cossack outpost built by volunteers and sponsored by a private entrepreneur that hosts festivals, fairs, folk groups performances, and enable groups of visitors to immerse themselves in ways of working and eating (Travel Tomsk, 2016). But the most prominent heritage feature of the region is undoubtedly the many wooden houses in the city of Tomsk, although interviewees stress that many of them are in a bad state and that there is an absence of a ready tourism product – e.g. tours or a boutique hotels in a classical wooden house – and thus this cultural asset from being systematically used as a key element in the local visitor economy.

Tomsk region presents a very different picture from the two other Siberian destinations studied in that tourism development does not revolve around investment in physical infrastructure or regional/federal designation of special development zones. Instead resources for tourism development are mobilized along other channels, notably through major recurring events that attract large number of visitors to professional or cultural activities. The most important example of former are two series of innovative events aimed at bringing together the three parts of the triple helix: business, knowledge institutions, and government. The international innovation forum *Innovus* was first held in 1998 and has become one of the main sites in Russia to discuss economic and social innovation. The youth forum *U-novus* is a new initiative, starting in 2014 and targeting young scientists, inventors and entrepreneurs, and over 12,000 people attended the first event. Tomsk regional government has developed the concepts, but in 2013 and 2014 the operator of both events was Tomsk Polytechnic University. Along similar lines – but in a very different field of activity – the *Association of military sports clubs of Tomsk Region* has become a major tourism actor as initiator and

organizer of visitor-relevant events. The association has accumulated a substantial financial base, and activities are driven by the enthusiasm of representatives of the association. The vision of the association was *to develop event tourism, “Ethnoforum”, of which is a vivid example* (interview, association representative). *Ethnoforum* is an annual series of cultural events geared towards the expansion of the traditional culture that attract around thousand people, and the *Tomsk Outpost* summer programme for teenagers from different regions that combine athletics training and Russian national culture, sponsored not only by federal, regional and local government by also private companies.

Despite the presence of a specialized regional tourism authority and a regional tourism strategy, Tomsk Region does clearly not have the ambition to function as the coordinator of stakeholder activities and the promoter of the region as a tourism destination. Conversely, all respondents from tourist attractions noted the presence of partners among other organizations that help to implement projects and provide sponsorship. It was also noted that support from private actors does not carry expectations of bonuses and preferential treatment like may be the case with regional government support. Interestingly, there are, however, examples of successful cooperation with the regional administration, namely the *Innovus* and *U-novus* forums. These events were initiated by the administration – and *not* its *Department of Culture and Tourism* – and coordinated by Tomsk Polytechnic University they mobilized a wide range of stakeholders in planning and implementation, each of which was able to solve specific problems - from the capacity problems of hotels to attraction of private sponsors. As a private tour operator noted,

*we are now working together with the regional administration how to promote tourism, this used to be rather ad-hoc but has become much more systematic now the cultural events are in the calendar.*

In line with this a representative from the regional administration explained that

*we are pleased to involve experts from the tourism industry, this helps to increase the quality of the decision making.*

However, in Tomsk region the prospects of tourism development within the region would seem to rely predominantly on it being a spin-off from other socio-economic activities – e.g. innovation or cultural activities – rather than a primary goal of public policy. Unlike the focus on traditional cultural attractions in the regional tourism strategy, the cultural aspect can be a useful “unique selling proposition” in the context of the growing business tourism generated by the prominent knowledge institutions of the regional capital of Tomsk.

## 6. Discussion and conclusion

The section first compares the results from the three regions regarding patterns of stakeholder collaboration in the emerging forms of destination governance, and then discusses the findings with regard to tourism destination paths in the light of the EEG theoretical approach introduced in Section 2 above.

<b>TABLE 3: Destination governance and evolution in three Siberian regions</b>			
	<i>Partnership configuration</i>	<i>Resource mobilisation</i>	<i>Impact on development path</i>
<i>Kemerovo</i>	Inclusive	Mainly internal	Accelerated branching
<i>Altay Krai</i>	Inclusive	Internal/external	Accelerated branching/creation
<i>Tomsk</i>	Selective	Mainly internal	Branching through disjointed path creation

In all three regions, the potential of tourism to make a significant contribution has come onto the political agenda, albeit in rather different ways, as summarised by Table 3. While Altai Krai is the only region in which tourism has achieved a permanent high-profile presence, both in economic terms and policy-wise, the recent prominence of tourism in Kemerovo clearly depends on the misfortunes of the traditional stable (primary) industries, and in the case of Tomsk business tourism seems primarily to be a side-effect of other social endeavours, namely the promotion of innovation. Similarly, the ways in which public-private partnerships are configured also varies: while inclusive partnerships have been created in Kemerovo and Altai Krai, it is only around the big innovation events it makes sense to speak of public-private partnership, albeit in a very specialised form. Finally, in both Kemerovo and Tomsk resource mobilisation for tourism development has been mainly internal to the region, while the major infrastructure projects in Altai Krai also depend on federal zoning and funding.

Although the specific set-up varies between the three regions, it is clear that public tourism governance still sits somewhat uneasily between state control and market economy, with substantial public subsidies financing especially large-scale investment projects, and depending on federal support and designation within a governance system where decentralization seems to be both rather limited and somewhat unstable.

From an EEG perspective, the article demonstrates that in all three cases during the recent decade the regional economies have to some extent branched in to tourism (cf. Brouder, 2014): in Kemerovo and Altai Krai mainly by accelerating the longstanding use of natural resources already employed for tourism purposes in Soviet times (cf. Hall, 1998; Williams & Baláž, 2001), while in Tomsk tourism growth has been a side-effect of other social activities (innovation, cultural revival) that has made event tourism take on a momentum of its own. At the same time, it is, however also clear that tourism path development in the Siberian periphery is highly dependent on state intervention and success in other sectors. Certainly, private enterprises have entered the scene but they continue to serve the domestic and regional market mainly. New product development beyond what has been available before the transition to a market economy seems to be limited also because of the companies' limited capacity to reach and operate on a wider or even international market. Only in Altai Krai the proximity to China is used to attract tourist spending by offering gambling. Indeed, the cases underline the notion of Grabher and Stark (1998) that the post-soviet transition did not create an empty ground. Instead, it seems that state control is still in place and tourism development highly contingent on decisions made in Moscow and in the regional capitals. This control is exercised through funding and bureaucracy but also through the strong involvement of public stakeholders such as universities, museums, and associations in the development of tourism.

The three Siberian regions provide good examples of the extent to which external uncertainties, well beyond the influence of stakeholders within the destination, shape the patterns and rhythm of tourism development. On the one hand the economic vagaries of the interplay between the Russian economy and international markets, where, paradoxically, the crisis of the Russian economy and the weakness of the Rouble as an international currency has undoubtedly helped to strengthen domestic tourism at the expense of outbound international travel – an equation that may change once stronger economic growth returns to Russia. On the other hand, political uncertainties are associated with both international relations – increasing or decreasing ease of cross-border tourism – and, equally important, shifting policies of federal and regional government that makes the tourism development initiatives less attractive for private investors because conditions may change unexpectedly or additional favours expected.

At the best of times, stakeholder collaboration around tourism development in a Russian resource periphery is contested, in that uneven government interest, a bifurcated private sector (big state-dependent firms and micro entrepreneurs) has found it difficult to develop stable patterns of

governance. Unsurprisingly, tourism development continues to depend heavily on uncertain markets and sometimes fickle international politics, thereby discouraging long-term investment in destination development. To some extent knowledge institutions, less integrated in the government apparatus, can function as organizers as triple-helix collaborations at different levels – from regional systems to specific key events – but such initiatives still depend on state/regional funding and political prioritization.

It can be noted that tourism development in Siberia is promoted in order to diversify the regional economy. However, ironically, the autonomy of the regions implies that this requires a successful industrial base in the staple economies. Hence, tourism development has to be promoted in times of industrial boom, since it is the surplus that enables regional governments to act powerfully. During bust, when interest in tourism development usually is be greater, funding for tourism projects is more limited. This runs counter to the rebound effect noted by Müller (2013) in north Sweden where tourism was mainly prioritized in periods with weak performance of the primary stable industries. This, together with the geographical and operational distance in relation to major Russian and international markets, can be expected to limit the potential of tourism as remedy to restructuring and change. Hence, independent of the quality of attraction, tourism in Western Siberia will remain a largely regional endeavor for years to come – unless, of course efforts by private and non-core public actors succeed in maintaining their long-term momentum in developing niches products – wellness, outdoor activities, business tourism – that can appeal also to a wider national or even international market.

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