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, national, 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 invaluable 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.
This chapter explores paradigms for analysing movement and place in the lives of people in Siberia. Much has been written in Siberian ethnography about place and space, particularly in relation to the cosmologies and practices of indigenous peoples. Movement in this context is largely explored through the phenomenology of landscape in hunting, herding, and ritual practices (e.g. Anderson 2000; Jordan 2011; Miggelbrink et al. 2013). Meanwhile, emerging studies of tourism in Soviet and post-Soviet Russia have shed light on mobility, infrastructure, and the discourse surrounding travel (e.g. Gorsuch 2003, 2011; Koenker 2003, 2012; Gorsuch & Koenker 2006; Randolph & Avrutin 2012), but have focussed less on the lived experience of travellers. This chapter suggests a means to bridging these two bodies of work. Here I suggest how a holistic approach might address multiple relations to movement and place among contemporary Siberians. The choices and practices through which Siberian interlocutors craft and represent their life projects — explored in this volume as lifestyle — are examined here through the representation of movement and place in biographical narratives and photography. In the material
reviewed here, our interlocutors recounted travel that anchored them in places named as “home” as well as travel that expanded their horizons. Interviewees discussed places designated as sacred in religious cosmology as well as places discovered through tourist brochures and captured in holiday photographs.

The collaborative project reported in this volume employed photo elicitation interviews to explore visual self-presentation and travel biography interviews to investigate mobility in the lives of Siberian people.1 As the project unfolded it soon became apparent that these elements of lifestyle were closely linked in our interlocutors’ accounts of their lives: photos chosen by interview subjects to represent their life stories often featured travel and tourism, while travel biographies often referred to trips discussed in photo elicitation interviews. In this chapter, I therefore explore the relationship between our interviewees’ travel trajectories, the places that those trajectories connect, and the images and narratives that give meaning to movement and place.

In doing so, I experiment with theoretical concepts to analyse relationships to movement and place. First, I account for trajectories of movement in relation to “spatial imaginaries” that are variously informed by indigenous worldviews, socialist geopolitics, tourist literature, and popular media. Second, I seek to understand the “personal topographies” made up of significant places in an individual’s life and the trajectories of travel and migration that link those places together. I explore how these personal topographies are inscribed through movement, recounted in biographies, and captured in photographic images. Through the voices of our interviewees, I illustrate how the confluence of these practices informs individuals’ sense of identity.

Mobility, geography, and topography

Theorists of mobility and travel have explored the enduring need for corporeal travel in a world that is connected by multiple means of

---

1 This project was a collaborative one, with material shared and exchanged between researchers. I draw on material gathered through my own participant observation and interview work in the Baikal region, including the cities of Irkutsk and Ulan-Ude. In order to gain a broader picture, I also analyse shared material collected by team members from across Siberia. Where I do so, I indicate the researcher and location in question.
communication. John Urry (2002) emphasised the need for physical co-presence for a range of social practices: legal, economic and familial obligations; the need to see people face to face; the desire to spend time with people; the wish to experience a place directly; the need to experience a “live” event in person; or to attend to objects, technologies, or documents that are tied to a specific location (Urry 2002: 262–63). Urry’s approach provides an impetus to combine studies of tourism with analyses of other kinds of mobility and movement. In line with the literature in this field, the term “mobility” here invokes consideration of the conditions and possibilities for travel in a given context. “Movement” refers to travel in practice — from everyday journeys to exceptional holidays or long-term migration, whether that is from village to city or across national borders (see Urry 2007). The project reported here examined obligations and motivations to travel in the Siberian context, and what unique constraints, possibilities, and meanings for movement are evident in the accounts given to us.

In the contemporary world, international mobility and migration, flows of goods and services, and media and communication technologies mean that the borders of a nation state can no longer be perceived as a boundary to the social relations of most citizens. In this context, theorists such as Arjun Appadurai have called for a “postnational geography” that recognises the complex relations to place and space experienced by contemporary subjects (Appadurai 1996).

In this theoretical context, I employ the concept of a “personal topography” — a constellation of places and routes described as meaningful in the life of an individual. For our Siberian interlocutors the personal topography might include a distant homeland, a sacred ritual site, a university town, a workplace, or a fondly remembered holiday destination — places connected by corporeal movement over the life course. In exploring interlocutors’ personal topographies, researchers may learn how movement is influenced by institutional and infrastructural limitations, informed by historical circumstances, and given meaning by collective cultural representations. Furthermore, the accounts presented here describe the interpersonal relationships that are rooted in particular places and experiences of co-presence.

2 I have previously written of “shamanist topographies” to describe constellations of sacred places in the Cisbaikal landscape (Long 2013). Here I use “personal topography” to describe significant places in the life of an individual.
Narratives, images, and the spatial imaginary

Travel biography interviews and photo elicitation interviews draw upon two important ways that individuals give form to their experiences and choices of travel — biographical narratives and visual images. Travel biographies have been developed over the last two decades as a method for understanding the motivations and meanings behind travel (Desforges 2000; Frandberg 2006, 2008; Lanzendorf 2003). This is not only reflected in the destinations that a person might choose, but also in forms of movement that are obligatory, expected, or limited by circumstance. Biographical narratives elucidate how senses of identity are constituted through movement, place and the meanings attributed to them. The second mode of representation explored here — visual imagery — accounts for a fundamental way in which movement is anticipated, documented, and memorialised. Photo elicitation is well established as a method of engaging with a subject’s visual self-representation (see Collier & Collier 1986; Harper 2002). Here the method is used to explore the relationship between narrative and the images that inform both fantasies and memories of place. Schwartz & Ryan (2003) have noted the role of photography in constituting relations to place: photographic images memorialise particular journeys, visits to culturally or personally significant places, and the social encounters that travel allows to happen. The decision to use photo-elicitation techniques was guided by the previous experiences of ethnographers in our team carrying out fieldwork in Russia: all of us could recount multiple occasions on which we had been handed photo albums to look at and comment on as a common feature of hospitality in Russia.

In exploring how individual subjects anticipate and memorialise movement, I suggest the concept of a “spatial imaginary” as a way of considering how places, routes and landscapes are given meaning in visual media and narrative accounts. The “imaginary” has appeared with increasing frequency in anthropological literature over the past two decades. Taking inspiration from the work of Castoriadis (1997) and Taylor (2002), the term “social imaginary” generally refers to collective representations of social identity. In particular, the imaginary has been deployed to denote shared cultural representations that are not limited to national borders or proximate communities (Appadurai 1996). In
anthropological literature, it is common to read of political, religious, and social imaginaries all evoking these — often idealised — social ties. Noel Salazar’s work (Salazar 2010) takes as its focus “tourist imaginaries”, describing the way that certain destinations and journeys are fantasised about and given meaning through tourism advertising and media. Moreover, Salazar notes that while tourist imaginaries are built on culturally and collectively created meanings, they are subjectively and individually experienced (2010: 5–7). It is this relationship between the collective imagination and individual experience that our methods explore.

If, as argued above, tourism can be explored within broader practices of movement and place-making, then the more holistic “spatial imaginary” provides some utility for our present purposes. Here the spatial imaginary is employed to connote the combination of discourses, images, memories, and fantasies that inform and reflect travel practice, realised in the personal topographies of individuals.

This is not to suggest that the spatial imaginary or personal topography exist as coherent or objectified wholes in the minds of individuals. Rather, I use the terms heuristically to describe how collective and individual representations are given coherence through the processes of narrative, particularly those narratives elicited in interviews. I suggest these devices as a means to explore how far travel choices are influenced by collective imaginaries, and to explore the relationships between spatial imaginaries and realised trajectories of movement. I illustrate some tentative applications of the approach below.

Both narrative and image are informed by the cultural discourse that influences a subject’s travel choices. Both are also mediated by the possibilities for mobility in a given context as well as constraints such as affordability, transport infrastructure, and the state regulation of travel. In Soviet Siberia this included processes of ticket allocation, and regimes of passport and visa provision that were heavily controlled by the state. My aim in the passages that follow is not to give an exhaustive picture of movement and place in Siberia, but rather to illustrate how this approach can reveal patterns in the way that subjects picture and talk about travel, patterns that provide insights into the cultural and institutional contexts for mobility. More in-depth discussion of particular experiences of travel can be found in Chapter 3, Chapter 4, and Chapter 8 in this volume.
Changing spatial imaginaries and possibilities for travel

Tourism in the Soviet Union was largely organised and regulated by state travel agencies, workplaces, and trade unions. Often tourism was undertaken in work collectives or groups assembled by travel agencies. Movement was largely limited to the geopolitical space of the Soviet and East European communist bloc. Moreover, as Anne Gorsuch (2003, 2011) and Diane Koenker (2012) have suggested in their accounts of post-war Soviet tourism, tourist travel was promoted as a way of constituting the communist space as a coherent whole in the imaginations and experiences of citizens. This spatial imaginary was cultivated through advertisements in Soviet journals and newspapers, as well as articles in magazines such as *Vokrug Sveta (Around the World)* extolling the merits of Soviet tourist destinations. Official Soviet discourse differentiated between tourism (*turizm*) as purposive, educational, cultured, and even patriotic, and the “rest” (*otdykh*) that took place in sanatoria and tourist bases for health and relaxation (Gorsuch 2011, Koenker 2003; Chapter 4 in this volume). These restful qualities were also associated with outdoor activities such as walking, climbing and camping. Outside of the institutionalised mechanisms for travel, the category of “wild tourism” (*dikii turizm*) denoted leisure travel not undertaken through the organised system of vouchers and travel packages (Noack 2006). Whilst this could imply making one’s own travel arrangements in booking trains, flights, and hotels for a pleasure trip, the term often connotes the camping trips, hiking, and fishing that characterised the outdoor health ethos.

The majority of official tourism in the Soviet Union was organised by trade unions and work places, many with their own tourist bases (*turbazy*). Travel vouchers (*putëvki*) were awarded for productive officials to travel from the remotest corners of Siberia to the Black Sea resorts of Ukraine and southern Russia. In different places across Siberia sanatoria functioned according to the nineteenth-century European model where industrial and agricultural workers could take the air, use the steam baths, and undergo restorative treatments. In the late Soviet era, possibilities to travel elsewhere within the communist bloc increased with tourist trips to Bulgaria and Romania promoted alongside cultural trips to East Germany or Czechoslovakia (Gorsuch 2011). Gorsuch’s research
illustrates very well the promotion of a shared spatial imaginary — a united geopolitical space in which good citizens — that is, good workers — were rewarded with touristic and leisure opportunities. The spatial imaginary of Soviet tourists incorporated Black Sea resorts, the metropolitan cultural centres of European Russia and, in the late Soviet period, partner nations in Europe. Diane Koenker notes an implicit tension in Soviet tourism between the careful control of mobility by the state, with its emphasis on collective travel, and the individual knowledge and self-improvement that tourism was purported to achieve for citizens (Koenker 2012). Attention to biographical narratives and lived experience therefore yields important insights into the way that individual choices and personal development were fulfilled within the regulated infrastructures and cultural expectations of Soviet Siberia.

In Irkutsk, I interviewed Natal’ia (aged 61 at the time of the interview), who worked as an economist in the city’s trade centre. Natal’ia had a fairly typical trajectory for those that were able to obtain путёски in the Soviet era: she made her first overseas visit to Romania in 1981, followed by a later trip to Berlin and Dresden in the German Democratic Republic and then to Czechoslovakia. In 1990, shortly before the collapse of the USSR, her коллектив from the trade centre took part in a competition to visit cities of the Soviet Union and were awarded a trip to Kiev, where — in an archetypally Soviet way — they travelled as a group to watch the Ninth-of-May military parades and celebrations. This last competition illustrates very nicely Gorsuch’s observation that the state used travel opportunities to cement the idea of a Soviet space.

Soviet travel was highly regulated by a system of internal and international passports, and citizens were required to register with the local authorities in any towns or resorts that they visited. Moreover, when travel was granted to Eastern Europe, several of the Soviet-era travellers that researchers interviewed remembered a high level of surveillance and were even briefed on how to conduct themselves when travelling outside the USSR. Natal’ia recalled her trip to Romania in 1981: “When we went to collect the tickets, they studied us for a long time, checked everything, people from the party talked with us: ‘this is not allowed, that is not allowed’ and we were under surveillance everywhere!”
As Natal’ia continued: “In 1983 it was still like that [...] but in the 1990s it was already possible to travel peacefully, no one would tell you how to conduct yourself or what to do”. In the late 1980s, our informants remembered a growing possibility to visit destinations outside the socialist geopolitical space. Nastia, an interviewee whose experiences I recount below, remembers vividly the joy of getting a putëvka to visit Athens in 1988. At that time in Irkutsk, the Soviet tourist agency Sputnik was the arbiter of international travel and Nastia — like many of our informants — remembers being turned down from several different destinations:

At that time, we had Sputnik international travel bureau. We went there to buy travel tickets, that’s where they had tickets. But before that you had to get permission from your work, you had to fill in a pile of documents, a form. They would confirm everything, sign it, and then you went [to the travel agent]. It was very complicated [...] I submitted my documents to travel to the FRG [Federal Republic of Germany], but they didn’t let me go. They didn’t explain. I wanted to go to Spain, but they didn’t allow it, they didn’t explain why. And they didn’t allow me to go to Cuba.

Yet Nastia’s desire to travel remained strong and Greece in particular loomed large in her imagination: “To me Greece was really something! We had a saying ‘Greece has everything’ (V Gretsii vsë est’). The images of Greece as a cradle of civilisation in geographical journals and history books played a part in this as Nastia explained: “Greece was a country that had a high level of cultural development in the first and second centuries BCE — so many millennia and it is generally preserved”.

The post-Soviet era has seen an increase in tourist travel and package holidays to destinations further afield. If the spatial imaginary of the Soviet era focussed on the Black Sea and cities of the communist bloc, then the imagery of the post-Soviet era has been of package holidays to the Mediterranean — particularly the affordable destination of Turkey. Where Soviet tourism was imagined through propagandistic journals as cultured and patriotic, by the 2000s the television comedy Turisty regularly lampooned the exploits of brash Russian holiday-makers in Turkey. While I was undertaking fieldwork in Irkutsk in 2007, a direct flight to Bangkok from the city’s airport was launched with much fanfare. Advertising and media coverage across the city depicted Thailand as a
tropical paradise. The images reflected an expanding spatial imaginary, with travel to new destinations increasingly within the grasp of many Siberians. As the post-Soviet appetite for consumption has snowballed, shopping has also become an increasing feature of travel. Shopping trips to China were very popular among my acquaintances in Irkutsk and Ulan-Ude from where a train to the border town of Manzhouli allows Russian consumers to buy cheap clothes, electronics and luxury goods in enormous outlets.

Alongside the broadening imaginaries of foreign travel, regional destinations were, and remain, particularly important in relation to the idea of “rest” (otdykh). The Altai mountains in south-central Siberia are a popular place of retreat for city dwellers in Novosibirsk Oblast (see Chapter 4), and Lake Baikal is not only a draw for tourists from across Russia, but remains a popular destination for weekends and day trips from the large industrial cities of Irkutsk, Ulan-Ude, and Chita. Nastia, introduced above, remembers spending much of her summer vacation from university in the early 1980s camping on the shores of Baikal, living for weeks at a time as a “wild tourist”. Today in the Baikal region the number of tourist bases on the lakeshore multiplies every year. In the national parks of the Tunka Valley and Alkhanai, Soviet era sanatoria nestle alongside a multitude of new guesthouses and turbazy. Students that I interviewed in Ulan-Ude all recounted weekend trips to these destinations with friends, and I have often joined family trips to Baikal while staying in the region. While the collective spatial imaginary is expanding with possibilities to travel abroad, regional places are no less a part of that imaginary, incorporated into physical trajectories of travel in weekend and summer trips.

Institutionalised rites of passage in travel biographies

Around Irkutsk Oblast in the summer of 2011 it was possible to see posters adorned with the simple line “Work in Kamchatka” underscored by a telephone number. These posters were not only visible in the city, but could be seen pinned to the walls of shops and post offices in the countryside. From the late Soviet era onwards people from the region, especially students, have spent summers on Kamchatka Peninsula in the Pacific Far East of Russia working in fish processing plants and
factories. Mariia Ivanovna, a 51-year-old lecturer, recalled how her university gathered large work teams to send to the peninsula in the early 1980s:

Many students went. First, because it was an opportunity to earn money. But most importantly, it was lots of young people all together. A lot of fun. A lot of dating, boyfriends and girlfriends. And there were students from different universities — not just ours. There were technological and agricultural universities of Buryatia, and students also came from all over Russia [...] And even when we went there on the train, for example, the train was full of the work teams — just students on all the wagons. And when we sailed there, the ship was also all students. Imagine how fun it was. Singing songs, getting to know each other. They were very interesting days, of course.

Mariia Ivanovna worked as a cook, catering for the workers, while her course-mates worked cleaning, salting and pickling fish, and cooking fish eggs for caviar. This institutionalised mixture of fun and work represented an important landmark for Mariia Ivanovna as her first long trip away from home, spending two and a half months in the Far East.

While undertaking fieldwork in Buryatia in 2011, I met a number of students and young people who had undergone a contemporary version of this working holiday, spending a summer in the United States of America through a scheme named Work-and-Travel. The programme offers Russian students the chance to undertake seasonal, unskilled labour such as waitressing or housekeeping at hotels, and provides visa support for doing so. Both of my travel biography interviewees who were in their twenties had participated in the scheme, and a student interviewee was waiting to hear about his application when we met. Several of our project’s interviewees in Novosibirsk Oblast had also spent time in the US through Work-and-Travel. My interviewees spoke of their time in the US as formative and important experiences in their life stories. Both picked photos of their trips as images that said something about their lives for the photo elicitation exercise.

Although Russian citizens face far less regulation of travel by their own state than they used to, travellers often face strenuous visa regimes to travel to western countries to work or study. The popularity of the Work-and-Travel scheme therefore hinges on the visa support that it
provides as much as the experience it offers. I asked Kolia, my student interviewee, why the scheme appealed. Shrugging his shoulders, he replied: “It is a very well-known programme; I had heard a lot about it. My brother went through it. It will be very interesting to visit the United States […] I can have new experiences, see the United States, relax, make money of course, and improve my English”. When I asked why, in particular, he wanted to visit the United States, Kolia added: “Because the programme is limited only to the possibility of travelling to the United States. If you do not go on a programme […] you are left to your own devices, and that seems complicated. For the first time I think it’s easier to go through a programme”.

For Kolia, access to the Work-and-Travel programme — with visa procedures and travel negotiated by the organisers — was a motivating factor for travelling in itself: the spatial imaginary of young people in Siberia today is regulated as much by possibility as by desire.

Both holiday work in Kamchatka and the Work-and-Travel scheme constituted something of a rite of passage for my interlocutors — a formative experience personally, but one undertaken by many of their generation. Moreover, the difference between Soviet and post-Soviet travel cannot be characterised as “controlled” and “free” travel: both schemes represent an institutionalised form of travel, regulated by the possibilities afforded by internal and external visa regimes.

I found that possible freedom granted through the regulated Work-and-Travel scheme became a point of much discussion in itself among acquaintances in Ulan-Ude, however. Over the course of my fieldwork I talked to several participants who knew of young people who had travelled through the programme but remained illegally in the US. Parents and grandparents whom I know expressed worry that their children might stay in the US, concerned whether they could ever return to Russia if they did so illegally. The spectre of unregulated and illegal movement therefore lay behind this institutionalised rite of passage for many parents. In this regard, the expanding spatial imaginary may be one of fear and trepidation for some as much as it is one of possibility and excitement for others.

These brief snippets from narratives of tourist travel and working holidays offer insights into the way that changing infrastructures and regulation influence the motivations and possibilities for travel over
time. Below I look into further ways that these experiences feature in narratives and images of movement and place.

Narratives of discovery

Tropes of discovery were related to travel in many of our project interviews. Sonia, a 25-year-old woman from Krasnoiarsk, picked out a photo of her first visit to Paris in a photo elicitation exercise. Her comments about the memories it invoked typify narratives of travel experiences as pivotal moments in someone’s life story:

When I first went abroad to Europe with my parents, just then I think I learned more about the world [...] I was always like a well-read girl — I read a lot. I knew, in general, about geography — I loved it. But, perhaps, at that moment, when you see all this with your own eyes, something changes in your inner world. Because you understand that the world is not only what you have outside your window — your yard, your city. The world is really huge, and there are these places that are not just pictures in books [...].

Fig. 5.1. Paris: not just a picture in a book. Summer 2001. Photo: Dennis Zuev’s interviewee (with permission), CC-BY-ND.

For Nastia, introduced above, visiting Athens and leaving the USSR for the first time in 1988, the impressions were similarly vivid. As well
as remarking on the marble buildings, the cuisine, and climate, Nastia vividly remembered the differences from life in the communist bloc:

My neck ached from simply opening my mouth and gawping. Why? Because there were so many advertisements, such an abundance of advertising, which we did not have here. For me it was very surprising that so much was stuck up, everywhere things were glued up. There were banners everywhere, advertisements, posters. Everywhere! On every house, on every building!

For Kolia, the student introduced above, even weekend visits to places of interest in Buryatia held such possibilities: “It’s about some kind of new sensation, discovering something new. It is possible to go somewhere nearby [...] somewhere really near and still discover something new for yourself. It’s an interesting, educational sensation for real pleasure”.

Narratives of discovery represent the way that the spatial imaginary turns from one of fantasy and expectation to one of experience, embedding memories and significant moments in a personal topography that expands and changes as individuals travel and move.

Movement that anchors: roots and rodina in personal topographies

Accounting for movement and place in the lives of Siberian subjects requires attention to travel that anchors identity as much as travel that expands horizons. Such movement may be underpinned by a religious cosmology, an ethical obligation to relatives, or an affective attachment to the landscapes in which someone grew up.

Travel biography interviews began with the question “where do you consider home?” and during the interview we also asked about our interlocutors’ travel to visit relatives or return to communities where they grew up. In interviews the term rodina (usually translated as “homeland”) often appeared as an alternative to an interviewee’s current place of residence. A rodina may be a country of origin for international migrants, or a home village in the same province for city-dwellers in Novosibirsk, Irkutsk, or Ulan-Ude. The relational nature of the term was evident in its array of uses in interviews.
The late Soviet and post-Soviet periods have seen a city-ward migration from the Siberian countryside. In this context, relationships to the villages in which people were born and raised often appeared in personal narratives. In multiple cases this took the form of an affective attachment to place, in some a nostalgic or idealised vision of the countryside, in other cases that relationship is underpinned by specific cultural practices and cosmologies. Aleksandra, a 34-year-old woman living in Irkutsk, returned every second weekend to the village where she grew up — some four hours away — to visit family. When I asked her if she felt that this was an obligation or a pleasure, she answered firmly that it was the latter: “it’s not a duty, it’s a pleasure, I simply rest there: my soul rests. You need to leave the city to relax, it gives me strength — the people there, our land. I come back a renewed person!”

This was a sentiment echoed by Vasilii, a 67-year old man interviewed by Habeck in Novosibirsk, who emphasised the generational nature of this feeling; “Those that were born and brought up in the city — they don’t have that attachment to the homeland like me, to the countryside. They are very much ‘crowded in’. But there […] I was in fields, I ran around, I went exploring. But what can you do here? The city is the city”. With no relatives remaining in the village, and limited opportunities to visit, Vasilii’s rodina was not a place that he visited often, but it remained an important presence in his personal topography, and a spatial imaginary that reified the countryside as a place superior to the city.

During my field research in Siberia I interviewed a number of Buryats living in the cities of Irkutsk and Ulan-Ude. Most that I interviewed, including those that had been born and brought up in the city, explained how they made returns to their ancestral villages for kin celebrations and ritual events. Buryat shamanists are obliged to return to their family hearth every summer in order to share offerings with the spirits of their ancestors that dwell in the landscape there (Long 2013). Whilst many also returned to help relatives with cutting hay, for family weddings and celebrations, or just to visit, the attachment to their homeland was underpinned by a religious cosmology that emphasised place as the root of identity and relatedness.

For several Buryats that I interviewed, the personal topography retained a strong spiritual element in regarding the homeland as a sacred place. Galsan, with whom I undertook a photo elicitation interview, chose a picture of his ancestral homeland in the mountains
as a significant image with which to relate his identity, discussing his
genealogy at length. He used the photo to recall a visit in which he
returned to “find his strength” and went on to discuss how his own
shamanic calling was identified by a shaman there.

This shamanist cosmology underpins the romanticisation of the
homeland in Buryat national culture. The song that I most often
heard sung in Buryat is Toonto nutag, a paean to the home village. The
centrepiece of the Buryat National Gallery in Ulan-Ude is a painting with
same title. There is a specific Buryat collective imaginary, then, which
places cultural importance on the homeland — however personal — as
a key place in the personal topography.

As Artem Rabogoshvili demonstrates in this volume (Chapter 8),
culturally significant imaginings of the homeland are not just an urban-
rural phenomenon but also figure strongly in the narratives, images,
and trajectories of diaspora ethnic populations with the former Soviet
space. Rabogoshvili’s interviews illustrate both the ongoing significance
of the homeland and the ideal of returning.

Sites of significance for kin groups, ethnic groups, or religious
communities take their place in collective and individual spatial
imaginaries as concretely as the holiday destinations or cultural sites do
in tourism media. As such, movement is not just a means of expanding
horizons, or opening up new possibilities, but also a means of inscribing
identity and belonging through physical presence at key places.

Visualising social encounters

In over seventy photo elicitation interviews undertaken for this project,
the one answer that interviewers received time and time again when
asking why someone had taken a particular photo was “na pamiat’” (for
the memory). As much as these photographs inscribed memories of
significant places, these were often mementos of social encounters and
relations.

Thus far I have written of “spatial” rather than “social” imaginaries. However, the photographic material discussed in interviews made
literally visible what is increasingly recognised in social science
literature — that the spatial and the social are inextricably interconnected
concepts, that places as meaningful nodes in the trajectories of subjects
are crucial anchors for identity, belonging, and interpersonal relations.
The photographs that our interlocutors chose in order to tell us something about their lives bear testament to the importance of place in memory and the social ties embedded there. Much as movement roots people in their *rodina*, it is not just those places; but the kin relationships and friendships rooted there are depicted in photographs. Nastia picked several childhood images of her family and friends in the village where she grew up, recounting her regular returns to visit relatives and the ongoing significance of the place in her personal topography.

A common feature of the narratives of tourism, travel, and working holidays in Soviet and post-Soviet Siberia seems to be the enduring nature of friendships forged on these trips. Soviet tourist holidays brought together travellers from across the USSR and several of our interviewees described lifelong correspondences with people they met on these trips.

Nastia also selected a picture of a trip to Crimea in 1991 to stay at a Soviet health spa. She travelled on a *putëvka* awarded by her workplace — the Irkutsk branch of the Communist Youth League (*Komsomol*).

Fig. 5.2. A social encounter on the Black Sea coast. Alupka, summer 1991. Photo: Joseph L. Long’s interviewee (with permission), CC-BY-ND.
The picture, of Nastia and her assigned room-mates, was taken by a professional photographer at the Vorontsov Palace in Alupka. It records a particular experience of place; a moment in Nastia’s life that she recalls with pleasure; and a social encounter that led to a lasting correspondence. Nastia remembered in detail “such a powerful palace” with its “unique reflection of light”, “grand rooms” and “botanical gardens”. In a longer discussion of her trip prompted by this photo, Nastia also recalled members of the tourist “team” to which she was allotted to undertake activities — a combination of older men who worked as miners and women of her age. She remembered visits to the fair; bathing and barbecuing on the beach; and being roused at 6am to follow a morning exercise regime. The picture, and the memories that it prompted, revealed much about Soviet tourist sociality. Nastia had travelled alone and been allotted a bed in a room with the two women pictured with her. Recalling her room-mates, Nastia remembered with fondness her friend Sasha from Donetsk. She recalled visiting the fair and bars, and in turn meeting others. She also recounted that “for a time we even corresponded, for a long time we maintained our communication”.

Younger interviewees similarly chose to memorialise social encounters as part of their travels. In an age where ongoing communication can easily be maintained through emails and social networking sites, they also kept in touch with people they had met abroad. Darima, a 23-year-old woman from Ulan-Ude, chose several photos of her Work-and-Travel summer in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina. She placed particular emphasis on a photo of her with a friend getting ready for a night out: “It’s a very important photo for me because she is a person very close to me […] we met by chance […] [but] we constantly call each other, maintain our ties”. As Darima went on to explain: “I think maybe I’ll never find such a person again in my life […] I have a really good relationship with her”.

Sonia, the young woman of 25 whose description of Paris was recalled above, chose to include in her pictures a photo with her friend in Vladivostok to where she had recently moved from her home town of Krasnoiarsk. She chose the picture as she felt it represented her new life, taken only a month after she arrived:

This is Vladivostok. It turns out, this was only taken in the spring of last year, 2010, when I moved. That’s it. And this is my friend, a French
woman, who moved here to be with her boyfriend [...] And I just remember, I did not have any friends here [...] I did not know anyone [...] and it turned out that we got to hang out with one another. It was fun.

Sonia went on to explain how these new social relationships were synonymous with her feelings about her new home and the place depicted in the picture:

This place is the marina. There is a thing [...] I loved to go walking there, and being photographed. Well, for me it was interesting, all the sea, right? There is no sea in Krasnoiarsk, so all that was connected with the sea was unusual and interesting. So I chose this photograph.

Here, as with the accounts of travel quoted above, Sonia combined a sense of narrative, place, and sociality. Sonia’s current life was represented along with the social ties she had formed in her new home.

Urry (2003) uses the metaphor of “facing” in discussing motivations for travel: his categories include, for example, “face the place”, “face the event”, and “face the person”. Acknowledging the dominance of photography as a medium for documenting movement and social encounters, a more accurate formulation might read, “find the place and face the camera”. For it is not only through travel itself but also its documentation that places are given significance for individual identity, through the self-image produced in photography.

Returning to the idea of the spatial imaginary, I propose that just as narratives recall the transformation of anticipation and fantasy into experience and memory, photographs play a key role in fixing that memory and building an imaginary of significant places and social encounters in the life of the individual.

Movement as lifestyle

However regulated travel in the Soviet Union and post-Soviet Russia may have been, narratives and memories built around travel often emphasise choice and the desire for mobility despite the bureaucratic processes involved. Nastia’s yearning for discovery is striking given the refusals, bureaucratic hurdles, and expense of travelling she described above. As she explained: “I earned 300 to 340 roubles a month but a travel ticket cost 5,000. For that money you could buy a flat. I remember
that people said to me ‘You’d be better to buy a one-bedroom apartment or a car, why are you going to Greece?’ I said: ‘But why would I need them? I prefer to go to Greece and see it!’”.

For some of our interviewees narratives of movement were integral to the representation of their lives to themselves and others, given its centrality in their life choices. In some instances — particularly in interviews with scholars and culture workers — travel was intricately tied up with professional activities: travelling with performance ensembles, undertaking expeditions, or attending conferences. In these instances travel was emphasised as a core aspect of interviewees’ wider vocation.

For Zhanna, a 54-year-old woman living in Novosibirsk, her travel activities and professional identity have long been intertwined. Zhanna’s mobility during and after the Soviet times was tied up with her interest in Germany and the German language, an interest that could be mobilised within the communist bloc. As a secondary school student in 1979 she studied hard to win a competition to visit socialist East Germany, where she visited the city of Halle with a group of high-achieving pupils. Zhanna remembers visiting Red Square in Moscow, and Alexanderplatz in East Berlin on her way — sites filled with meaning in the spatial imaginary of communism. Going on to become a German language teacher, and later working in a German culture centre afforded Zhanna many trips over the decades, as she recounted in her travel biography interview. “My travels have been in some way related to my work”, she explained, “Contact with the Germans — that’s my favourite thing: going to Germany”. In the post-Soviet era her cultural work has allowed her to visit more of Germany including Hamburg and the Baltic Coast. In her photo elicitation interview, a photo of Zhanna in Berlin in 2000 was an important part of the self-image that she wished to put across: “This is when I was in Berlin for the first time since [that other] trip long, long before […] [when] we had been there as students, doing a three-week language practice — that had been generally my first view of the world. I had the same mood [this time]”.

Zhanna summarised why she felt travel was important in giving an account of herself: “Well, somehow that’s me. I go, I move. And now I still do… it’s great”. Moreover, Zhanna is very clear that she is more interested in cultural travels than the recent trend towards package
holidays: “I have not even once been to Turkey, where all our people go to swim”, she asserted.

This rejection of mainstream tourism was striking among some of the most seasoned travellers. Yurii, a 52-year-old man from Novosibirsk took a similar view, explaining with some pride: “I have never once been on a tourist trip — really, in the post-Soviet period I have never travelled like that. Either I travel independently, or I travel for work”.

Dennis Zuev’s research within the collaborative project focused on the couch-surfing movement in Siberia (cf. Zuev 2013). He describes an alternative to mainstream tourism by individuals that see travel — and the social encounters afforded by reciprocal hospitality — as fundamental to their lifestyle. Yurii was one of Zuev’s interviews from this network — a seasoned traveller, and a former sailor. He reflected lyrically upon his own relationship to travel when asked about his most memorable trips:

Basically, every journey is some kind of jewel. And there have been a lot of them. To somehow choose from them — which is better: a ruby or malachite — it’s hard to say. They are all different […] As for the meaning, well, I somehow […] that’s a question I find hard to answer, because it’s like ‘what is the meaning of life’, and the meaning of life is to live. What is the meaning of travel? In fact, to travel, of course. That is, the process itself is the meaning.
Mobility and travel have become, to Yurii, much more than the need for discovery expressed by our other informants:

Some time ago, I would have said that I like a change of impressions, some kind of new information. But now a glut has come and I do not feel the value of the new information. I don’t need new information. I mean, I even surprised myself with this […] But the process […] I have gained the habit that I am comfortable when moving […] the process of movement. It is impossible to explain this, I think, it is purely reflex. My body needs it, as smokers need to smoke.

Movement as integral to lifestyle is not restricted to long distance travellers or professionals. As Masha Shaw’s research demonstrates (Chapter 3 in this volume), mobility in the countryside around very remote villages; knowledge of the local landscape; and an unregulated trajectory of hunting, fishing, and backwoodsmanship is central to the self-image of her interlocutors in the Far North of Russia. The emphasis on choice, and freedom to move, even in a context where travel opportunities at first appear limited, resonates with the narratives of interviewees who place long-distance movement at the centre of their identity. It is among all these interlocutors that movement appears not just at significant moments in a life story, but as a lifestyle in itself.

Conclusion

My aim here has been to suggest ways in which travel biography and photo elicitation can draw out common themes relating to movement and place in the lives of people in Siberia. The emerging narratives reveal the constraints and possibilities that governed mobility in Soviet and post-Soviet Siberia. The predictable trajectories of Black Sea tourist trips, cultural exchanges to Eastern Europe, or mountain sanatoria not only reveal regulated trajectories, but also common spatial imaginaries. Such imaginaries are propagated by mass media and governed by those institutional and infrastructural conditions that make travel possible — or impossible. Moreover, spatial imaginaries are perpetuated in the memories of pleasure, discovery, rites of passage and social encounter that surface in interviewees’ stories and they are documented in photographic records. Yet however normative possibilities for mobility are in Siberia, the lived experience of these
constraints and possibilities — evoked in the voices, stories, and memories of individuals — reveals the subjective significance of travel and movement in individual life stories. This includes those narratives of discovery and social encounter found in newly experienced places. It also features journeys that, in an era of city-ward migration, anchor a sense of belonging to an individual’s homeland.

Whilst I have documented different types of place — the imagined destination, the place of rest, and the notion of rodina — these are combined in the life stories of Siberians, together forming the personal topographies of individual subjects. For example, Nastia’s personal topography included Athens in Greece and Alupka on the Black Sea, tourist destinations she had memorialised as sites of discovery. It also included Lake Baikal as a place of freedom and her home village with all its social ties and obligations. Both of the latter places are close to her current residence in Irkutsk city, but hold specific memories and are as significant as her foreign adventures. Kolia anticipated with excitement his trip to America, and looked forward to adding the United States to his personal topography, but he also stressed local sites in Buryatia as places of learning and new experiences, traversed at weekends away from university. Sonia used her photographs to situate Paris as a place of formative experience, seeing the wider world for the first time, and also to reflect upon her recent move to Vladivostok, contrasting the maritime city with her home city of Krasnoiarsk. Describing a photograph of her new home led Sonia to reflect on this significant move in her trajectory, and the social relationships associated with a changing personal topography.

The broader aim of our project concerns the ways in which individuals present their life choices through narratives and images to evoke a coherent life project or personal identity — framed here as lifestyle. The methods recounted here do not just reveal existing practices of self-presentation — in photography and narrative — but, through the interview process, elicit moments of reflexivity, self-stylisation, and attempts at biographical coherence relating to movement and place. Among those interviewees for whom movement was central to their sense of self, stylisation was apparent in the rhetoric of seeing movement as an addiction, of journeys as “jewels”, and choosing images that portrayed themselves as seasoned travellers. But there are elements of creativity
and stylisation in all of the accounts of movement and place reported here. I have tried to preserve elements of our interlocutors’ voices and idioms in the snippets of narrative above precisely because they evoke this process of self-presentation. A crucial way in which individuals create a self-image is through memorialising significant travels and places in their life story, evoking a unique personal topography through their particular trajectories of movement.

References


—. 2012. All this is your World: Soviet tourism at home and abroad after Stalin. Oxford: Oxford University Press, https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:os o9780199609949.001.0001


