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# 10 Youth wellbeing in “Atomic Towns”

## The cases of Polyarnye Zori and Pyhäjoki

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### Introduction

In this chapter we present and analyse two case studies of how young people living in the “atomic towns” of Pyhäjoki (Finland) and Polyarnye Zori (Russia) perceive wellbeing. We look at the two cases through the lens of ethnographic methods and policy analysis to provide insights into how local youth are connected to the energy companies operating nuclear power plants in their hometowns. The two sites differ greatly in their socio-economic, cultural and political setting, as well as in the development stage of the respective power plants. Despite obvious differences, we have found striking similarities in young people’s perceptions of what the “good life” means to them in these prospective/current nuclear towns.

Pyhäjoki and Polyarnye Zori may seem like an unusual pair for comparison, ostensibly sharing little beyond the fact that the former is, and the latter will likely become, dominated by the nuclear power industry. The common yet different connection of these towns to Rosatom offers insights into the relations between the local youth and a major industrial player in places that lack economic diversity. In Polyarnye Zori, Rosatom is a pervasive actor: it produces electricity—its core product—provides municipal housing maintenance and transportation and sees to the catering at large events. This kind of “town-forming company” (*gradoobrazuiushchee predpriiatie*) is a common phenomenon in Russian single-industry towns (see also other chapters in this volume: Bolotova; Ivanova et al.; Simakova et al.). At present, the power company in Pyhäjoki does not have a comparably dominant role, but the community is on track to become an “atomic town” as well. In reviewing and analysing our data from these contrasting field sites, we bring to light the similarities as well as the differences in the factors young people regard as important to their personal wellbeing.

We start by providing insights into our two field sites. Next, we outline our methods and embed our case studies in the relevant policy settings, these being energy politics and geopolitics. Then we compare and describe the studies, which are informed by and grounded in anthropological theories of wellbeing. In our analysis, we contribute to the understudied area of comparing towns reliant on the nuclear energy industry in disparate cultural and

policy settings in the Arctic. Petrov et al. (2017, p. 56) urge that research efforts should increasingly focus on

understudied issue areas with global-national-regional-local linkages, in order to better understand outlooks and pathways for Arctic sustainable development as well as the Arctic’s role in global processes and sustainable development challenges.

Finally, we discuss how the policy analysis and the ethnographic findings can help to understand young people’s decisions about their future in the two regions studied.

### **Polyarnye Zori and Pyhäjoki: two contrasting field sites?**

Pyhäjoki is a municipality located in North Ostrobothnia, some one hundred kilometres south of Oulu, the most populous city in northern Finland. Pyhäjoki, the central town in the municipality, is currently entering a new stage of development: the nuclear power plant will be built in an existing community and the population is expected to grow in the upcoming years as the power plant project progresses. The town has 3,146 inhabitants at the time of writing, with this population currently declining at a rate of 1.3 per cent annually (Statistics Finland 2019). The unemployment rate in 2019 was 10.1 per cent, which was slightly lower than Finland’s general average of 11.3 per cent (Statistics Finland 2019). The municipal council of Pyhäjoki has developed an operational plan for creating new employment and business opportunities by promoting the area to newcomers and existing businesses alike (Pyhäjoki Municipality 2020). Despite ongoing construction work at the power plant site, the municipality has not succeeded in growing the number of inhabitants. In fact, in the year 2019, the number of inhabitants decreased by 2.2 per cent due to outmigration (Statistics Finland 2019). The planning of Fennovoima’s “Hanhikivi 1” project started back in 2007 and Fennovoima continues to wait for the final permits to build the nuclear power plant by Rosatom. Various factors, either within or outside the company, have slowed the progress of the construction work, these mainly relating to building permits and meeting the safety requirements of the Finnish Radiation and Nuclear Safety Authority (Fennovoima 2020).

Polyarnye Zori is a town in Murmansk Region, North-West Russia, about two hundred kilometres south of Murmansk, the largest city in the world above the Arctic Circle. According to the most recent census, Polyarnye Zori had a population of 14,389 (Rosstat 2019). With a population decline of 6.3 per cent over the past decade (Rosstat 2009; Rosstat 2019), the outmigration rate has been lower than in most other towns of Murmansk Region. The current rate of registered unemployment is also low at 3.2 per cent (PZ City 2020). The single most important employment sector in the town is the nuclear power plant (owned by Rosenergoatom (Rosatom’s civilian subsidiary)) and

its subcontractors. The main subcontractor for maintenance is Kolatomenergoremont (owned by Rosenergoatom), but there are also private subcontractors. The town was built in the early 1970s, at the same time as the power plant, meaning that the creation of the town was tied to the creation of the power plant. This dependence is still pervasive but since the end of the Soviet Union private small- and medium-scale entrepreneurship have formed a secondary socio-economic pillar, as in any other Russian single-industry town. Rosatom's structures dominate not only large parts of the residents' professional lives but also much of their leisure time. To cite but a few instances of Rosatom's omnipresence, the town park, the stadium and the sports centre are sponsored by the company; apartment block maintenance is provided by one of its subsidiaries; and the town's favourite *pirozhki* (stuffed buns) come from the power plant's bakery.

For the people of Pyhäjoki, the coming of the power plant entails multiple ramifications, one being the hope that the resulting growth in population will add a variety of services. The municipality, as Strauss-Mazzullo (2020, p. 38) notes, has become a place on the map beyond the national borders of Finland. Polyarnye Zori has gone through the anticipated stages of development a long time ago and is now in the phase where the effects of a running power plant are visible in daily life. The area of North Ostrobothnia is known for having many adherents of the Lutheran religious movement known as Conservative Laestadianism (*vanhoillislestadiolaisuus*); members are particularly known for their active engagement in entrepreneurship, especially in the construction industry (Linjakumpu 2018). This might be part of the reason why the municipality voiced a strong interest in obtaining the nuclear megaproject and thus ensuring prospective employment and continuous revenue for the community members (Linjakumpu 2018; Strauss-Mazzullo 2020, p. 28). While this article does not deal with the effects of religious movements, it is important to mention this specific characteristic since it influences employment in the area and helps to understand why such a megaproject is being constructed in this particular place.

If one visits Pyhäjoki, Fennovoima (and thus indirectly Rosatom) is visible as a single, small, inconspicuous office in the centre of the municipality; Rosatom's visual presence in Polyarnye Zori is ubiquitous. This visibility in Polyarnye Zori has its historical roots in the practice of establishing single-industrial towns, one dating from the Soviet policies of economic specialization. With the nuclear power plant traditionally being essentially the only industrial employer in the atomic towns, city and regional governments have imposed extensive economic and social responsibilities on the operators (cf. Collier 2011).

By describing these two contrasting field sites, and by embedding policy analysis in our study, we demonstrate the structural differences between the communities in size, stage of company development, and political and cultural context. These distinctions are important in order to understand the outcome of our comparative ethnographic analysis of the local youth's perceptions, wishes and aspirations in both locations.

## Methodological considerations and research ethics

Although doing research in two strongly differing towns, we have used the same qualitative methods to gain insights. Anthropological fieldwork lies at the core of our methodological approach, which featured open-ended individual interviews, focus group interviews and media analysis (Clark 2011; Silverman 2013, 2014; Olivier de Sardan 2015). The holistic approach of anthropology is valuable as it takes all different aspects of human living into account and considers both actions and verbal accounts equally (Eriksen 2010; Crate 2011). In the context of our research, we sought to listen to young people and to let their views be heard.

Participatory approaches to youth research are often described in “all or nothing” terms, meaning that young people participate either as active researchers or as passive research objects (Heath and Walker 2011, p. 8). In our research we aimed at finding a middle ground where we actively engaged in youth activities. Through several fieldwork visits by Adams (Pyhäjoki) and Allemann (Polyarnye Zori) between August 2018 and August 2020, we engaged with young people in a way which did not render them passive research objects but rather invited their insights on various topics of their hometowns. While doing research among young people, we tried to be sensible about the issue of the unequal power relations between us as researchers and the youth as the focus of our work. Young research participants may lack the resources, social networks and knowledge of those conducting the research and thus be in a potentially vulnerable position (Cieslik 2003, p. 2). We were aware that we were dealing with sensitive topics, and throughout the research process we were open with our informants about how we would process and store the data. The identities of the young people sharing their life stories, ideas and thoughts with us were anonymized in order to protect them from any possible exposure. At the same time, our analysis enables us to exemplify how young people are connected to their nuclear towns, how they perceive the industries in their hometowns, what wishes and aspirations they have and what opportunities they see in their future.

We were guided by the conviction that the task of finding out about what hedonic wellbeing means for young people could only be fulfilled successfully by working *with* them. In such co-productive research, we see the interviewee as on a par with the scholar (cf. Denzin 2009, pp. 277–305; Allemann and Dudeck 2019). Our interlocutors are not just sources of raw data that we tap into and then interpret. Rather, it is primarily the interlocutors who actively reflect on their own lives while talking to us (Bornat 2010). Our task as researchers is to connect these reflections with each other and with our field observations on political and corporate actors. Thus, we see the interviews not as factual data but as *first-stage* interpretations, on which we build our *second-stage* scholarly interpretations and recommendations.

The Finnish Youth Act (Ministry of Education of Finland, 2017) defines persons up to the age of 29 years as youths, while in Russia at the time of the research the age range was between 14 and 30 years (Government of the

Russian Federation 2014, see discussion of the age-range in Ivanova et al., this volume). The selection of research participants was guided by these respective definitions.

Young people's experiences can offer exceptional insights into the operation and the character of institutions. Roberts (2003) argues that changes in and links and mismatches between institutions become apparent through youth research by giving voice to young people's experiences, which then lays a basis for broader academic debates (Roberts 2003, p. 15). Our research results suggest that young people's views on how a "good life" is constructed in a nuclear town is marginally connected to the industry itself but relies on other considerations, such as educational opportunities, getting work in one's own specialization, having places to "hang out", having access to a functioning infrastructure, being connected to services (such as leisure activities and health services), being connected to nature, having a feeling of safety and being close to social networks of family and friends.

### **Geopolitics, the nuclear sector and corporate social responsibility**

Both Russia and Finland are nuclear power-friendly states in that nuclear power plays a central role in national energy policies: in Russia 18 per cent, and in Finland 25 per cent of electricity is produced by nuclear power plants (International Energy Agency 2018). Moreover, people's attitude toward nuclear energy is relatively positive (Wang and Kim 2018). What is more, the nuclear sector is also a central element in Finnish-Russian trade relations and foreign policy. In Finland, nearly half of all energy consumed is of Russian origin, two-thirds of all energy imported comes from Russia, and nearly all of Finland's fossil (around 80 per cent) and nuclear (varies from year to year between 40 to 70 per cent) fuel comes from Russia (Statistics Finland 2017). Thus, when it comes to energy, the relationship between Finland and Russia is tight, yet at the same time very asymmetric: Finland accounts for a small percentage of Russia's energy exports while energy imported from Russia makes up a large share of total energy imports in Finland. The dependency of Finland's energy sector on Russian hydrocarbons, as well as on its nuclear power technology and nuclear fuel exports, gives Russia political leverage vis-à-vis Finland. The fear of losing the economic benefits gained from consuming, refining and further selling energy of Russian origin have an impact on Finland's policy considerations (Tynkkynen 2016; Jääskeläinen et al. 2018). Thus, the Pyhäjoki project between the Russian state-owned nuclear corporation Rosatom and the Finnish private enterprise Fennovoima includes a foreign policy dimension, not least as the project is symbolically and economically important for Russia. On balance, the social programmes promoted as part of nuclear projects should be understood as intertwined with other (energy and foreign) policy issues.

The main institutional actor in this context is Rosatom, Russia's state-owned corporation which controls the civilian and military use of nuclear energy in

both the internal and the export markets. Rosatom's position is unique, as the company does not have to produce a profit. Accordingly, it is better positioned to promote a wide range of policy objectives set by the state both domestically and internationally. In Russia, nuclear power is prioritized in relation to other energy sectors, and internationally Rosatom has the possibility to increase Russian influence through very attractive deals for constructing nuclear power plants and supplying uranium (Tynkkynen 2016). In the Finnish context, the role of Rosatom is exceptional, as the company will be the exclusive provider of uranium fuel to the Pyhäjoki plant for the first ten years. As long as the project progresses smoothly, the Pyhäjoki power plant, as cooperation in the area of nuclear power, officially stands to make a key contribution to enhancing good relations between Finland and Russia (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Finland 2016; Putin and Niinistö 2017). If problems should occur during the project, they will reflect badly on relations between the countries.

How does this wider political context then affect social policies and the youth in atomic towns? The political context has very much to do with the corporate social responsibility (CSR) practices of Rosatom in Russia, and especially in Finland. CSR is a soft-power tool used by state actors, in addition to all other means, to further their objectives. Rosatom's CSR in Finland is important precisely for geopolitical and geo-economic reasons, and the community's youth are an important target of CSR efforts.

CSR is the instrument by which companies approach the issue of wellbeing. Following a global trend, but also replicating many practices from the Soviet era, CSR is an integral part of social policy among Russian energy giants like Rosatom (comp. Saxinger et al. 2016; Wilson and Istomin 2019). Rosatom promotes social policy under the heading of sustainability. CSR is implemented based on general objectives of the corporation addressing traditional social and work-related issues of the workers, but also promoting the wellbeing of workers' families and, in particular, their children. The youth are explicitly chosen as a focus group within Rosatom's CSR. Work on sustainability is operationalized through two special programmes "Rosatom School" and "Rosatom's Territory of Culture", which promote school children's skills in the natural sciences and nuclear physics, in particular, but also offer youth possibilities to engage in and enjoy music, arts and sports (Rosatom 2020a).

The role of Finland and Fennovoima's nuclear power plant as an important reference for Rosatom is also visible in the company's CSR activities. The webpage of Rosatom (2020b) bills the success of "Rosatom School" in the following terms:

Since 2016, about 1,000 kids from 25 countries have taken part in nine International Smart Holidays with the "ROSATOM School" in Russia, Indonesia, Bulgaria, Hungary, Finland, Thailand and Turkey. [...] For example, in 2017–2018 schoolchildren from Russia and Finland implemented the international project "Educational Tourism". In this project

10 schoolchildren from Sarov visited Pyhäjoki and schoolchildren from Pyhäjoki visited Sarov.

Providing amenities under the heading of CSR by a powerful industrial actor may enhance the wellbeing (basic needs) of people in general and the youth in particular. However, at the same time CSR consolidates the company's political and economic power, potentially diminishing people's choices as to how to live a good life (extended and broader needs). Especially in a single-industry town there is a risk that decisions on which youth activities to develop or sponsor are guided by the dominating company's own interests. In a small town, this both broadens and limits people's choices: on the one hand, a powerful sponsor may make it possible to provide the youth opportunities that would otherwise be impossible, such as the sports school in Polyarnye Zori, which offers a wide variety of different sports. On the other hand, activities that do not coincide with the larger sphere of interests of the dominant sponsor may be dismissed despite a demand from the youth. In Polyarnye Zori, where the Rosatom company is already an established player, this is reflected in an ambivalent attitude towards the opportunities that the company offers (Allemann and Dudeck 2019).

### **Youth wellbeing: Eudaimonic and hedonic perceptions**

What does “a good life” mean for young people living in very different countries and circumstances and what are their visions of wellbeing? Fischer (2014) and numerous other theorists on wellbeing (see discussion in Stammer and Toivanen, this volume) argue that wellbeing, across cultures, cannot be reduced to material conditions alone, which is in line with our findings in Pyhäjoki and Polyarnye Zori. Perceptions of wellbeing from the young people's point of view in the two atomic towns entail more than having access to work or a stable income. Young people long for functioning social networks, mobility and a choice of educational opportunities.

Lambek (2008) addresses the importance of wellbeing in human sciences, while simultaneously acknowledging that it is a ‘problematic’ topic in terms of “measuring or bringing about other people's wellbeing” (Lambek 2008, p. 115). He argues that “measuring from the outside someone else's quality of life” (p. 116) might seem inconceivable, whereas through their ethnographic research anthropologists can acquire more perspectives “from inside” and thus make valuable contributions to theorizing wellbeing, as the introduction to this volume shows (Stammer and Toivanen, this volume). Moreover, Lambek points out that ethnography must suffice as the basis for more general claims concerning an anthropological perspective on wellbeing by elaborating how wellbeing is constituted:

Well-being does not occur in the abstract. As human life is culturally constituted, so well-being only makes sense with respect to the contours of a particular way of life; particular structures of persons, relations,

feeling, place, cosmos, work and leisure. Another way of saying this is that quality of life cannot be simply open freedom of choice. Well-being must include guides and orientations in the making of choice or the exercise of judgement, ones that affirm people’s intuitions.

(Lambek 2008, p. 125)

Our analysis shows that wellbeing has different meanings for young people. While some proportion of the youth perceived their hometown as a place that lacks activities, others described exactly the opposite, as for them their hometowns provide everything that they need.

A range of scholars focusing on wellbeing distinguish between hedonic happiness and eudaimonic happiness (Ryan and Deci 2001; Mathews and Izquierdo 2009; Fischer 2014; Edwards et al. 2016; Johnson et al. 2018). Hedonic happiness refers to everyday, short-term contentment, such as buying a long-desired item or satisfying “a man’s own desire to play instead of working” (Hobsbawm 1968, p. 85). Eudaimonic happiness denotes a broader, overall life satisfaction. While hedonic happiness is more ephemeral, eudaimonic happiness as well is far from being a static condition or a final goal. As Fischer notes, “good life is not a state to be obtained but an ongoing aspiration for something better that gives meaning to life’s pursuits” (2014, p. 2). Eudaimonic happiness consists of many trade-offs, often at the cost of hedonic happiness. The pair “can well be at odds with each other, a tension familiar to most from daily life” (Fischer 2014, p. 2).

In this research we combine these two notions of happiness as key concepts for a holistic understanding of wellbeing. People pursue their individual visions of a good life, but the concept of wellbeing is morally laden with ideas about value, worth, virtue and what is good or bad, right or wrong (Fischer 2014, pp. 4–5). Adding to this observation, Fischer argues that “adequate material resources, physical health and safety, and family and social relations are all core and necessary elements of wellbeing” (p. 5). This means that aspirations are limited by the capacity to aspire. Such constraints on aspiration and agency may be social norms, legal regulations or the labour market. The individual’s will is important, but there also has to be a way (Appadurai 2013, pp. 179–195; Fischer 2014, p. 6).

In our analysis, we sought to achieve a cross-cultural comparison that informs us about the ways in which “beliefs, practices and institutions impinge on happiness” (Thin 2008, p. 135). Thin argues that ethnographic methods and analytical approaches enable researchers “to observe and discuss the quality of human experiences, the ways people feel about their lives in general and about specific institutions and practices in particular” (p. 135). There is a rather limited corpus of anthropological literature developing a systematic interest in the subjective, experiential aspects of wellbeing (see Ortner 2016, and the introduction, this volume for an overview). The topic is mostly associated with and dominated by psychological or economic perspectives (see Johnson et al. 2018 for a recent overview). Brown (2013) attempts a comparison between the “atomic cities” of Ozersk (Russia) and

Richland (United States) and the impact of families. However, our aim is not merely to compare our case towns, but rather to demonstrate young people's views on a good life in their respective hometowns.

Based on these considerations, we ask: What are the important factors prompting young people to live in, stay in or return to Pyhäjoki and Polyarnye Zori? What does wellbeing mean to them? Our results suggest that wellbeing from the youth's perspective strongly emanates from aspects of focusing on the self, the present moment and consuming what a young person wants or needs. This, essentially, is a hedonic perception of wellbeing.

### **The meaning of good life for young people in nuclear towns**

The majority of our informants addressed the need and desire to have places where young people can “hang out” together. In Pyhäjoki the municipality runs a youth centre which is open on weekend nights for youth to informally spend time together in a safe space supervised by a youth worker. A billiard table, game consoles, board games, TV, a stereo, sofas and a kitchenette for drinks and snacks are central elements of the centre, which is used primarily by youths under 18 years. In addition, the local church has a supervised youth space once a week, which attracts many young people (under 18). One collaborative project between the church and the municipality is a small workshop (*moottoripaja*), where young people can come and fix their motorbikes once a week under the supervision of volunteers (usually older local men). Another, easily accessible place in the centre of the municipality is an old youth association house (*nuorisoseuratalo*), which local young people and activists have turned into an indoor skating rink. According to our informants, the facility has a long history of attracting young people from outside Pyhäjoki for events and parties but is now rather run down; young people can hang out there or skate at their own risk. However, many parents do not allow their teenagers to go to the indoor rink, because it is not supervised. Nevertheless, younger youth value the rink, precisely because they are not supervised there, which gives them the feeling of freedom to do what they want. Other places offering possibilities to meet socially are private cottages or homes, where groups of friends are likely to spend their free time. In addition, the local upper secondary school offers its students space to hang out on the school premises. The newly re-opened and only local pub (*Dado*) has been well received, especially among youth aged over 18, who for some years had no place to gather evenings and weekends. In sum, sufficient availability of places where they can spend leisure time is an important factor of wellbeing for young people in Pyhäjoki, as this female teenager indicated:

If I could wish something for our town it would be a burger restaurant. On the main road, just beside the shop would be a good place. We could go there, get some food or drinks and just hang out with our friends. It would be nice to have clothing stores as well, but I know that it is not a realistic wish because of the size of our town.

Having access to a variety of free-time activities is essential for keeping youth in their hometown. Pyhäjoki offers a range of activities and facilities: ice hockey, tennis, hunting, motocross tracks, swimming, floor hockey, soccer, frisbee golf, cross-country skiing tracks, a gym and running tracks, to name the most common ones. However, if young people want more specialized facilities like an indoor pool or horseback riding, they have to travel to the neighbouring towns. In Pyhäjoki different organizations and sport clubs can apply for financial support from Fennovoima; according to informants, however, the money granted is usually not decisive for keeping the organizations running. In Finland leisure activities (*harrastustoiminta*) are considered a core element of youth wellbeing, and therefore access to various activities is guaranteed by the Youth Act (Ministry of Education of Finland, 2017). Youth services, which in Finland include professional youth workers, are provided mainly by the state, not by private actors (European Commission 2017).

In Polyarnye Zori, the municipality offers young people a wide range of organized leisure activities, not least thanks to the presence of Rosatom as a powerful sponsor. There is a sports school, an arts and music school and a wealth of creative activities at the House of Creativity and the House of Cultures, examples being dance classes, theatre groups or scale-model building. All of these activities are free of charge, but they require regular attendance and thus a certain level of commitment. Another option is the Club of Interesting Things (*Klub interesnykh del, KID*), also funded by the municipality and free of charge, but less structured. There is only one adult supervisor present and the idea is that kids and teenagers teach each other useful and fun things, such as playing the guitar, playing ping-pong or writing a convincing speech. What all these places have in common is that they require a young person to be active. If someone wants just a place to “hang out”, there are only commercial venues—shopping centres, restaurants and coffee shops—or socially marginalized options—the railway station or an abandoned construction site. The first category is essentially a limited range of cafés. For teenagers specifically, there is what is known as a “time café” (*Lemonade*), where youngsters pay for the time spent there but do not need to buy anything. It fulfils the function of a private youth centre; teenagers socialize, play games or just relax in a cosy atmosphere, supervised by the owner, a young man who maintains an easy-going relationship with his returning customers. In atmosphere the place comes closest to a Finnish youth centre, but with the big difference that it is not free of charge. This automatically excludes the young people from less wealthy families, but also those who (or whose parents) prefer to spend their money on something other than paying for the time spent in a place. The café-goers largely reflect the prevailing societal rift in the town created by the big gap in income between the “powerplanters” (*stantsionniki*) and the “non-powerplanters” (*nestantsionniki*), a difference sometimes described by the latter, less privileged group, as creating two “castes”. A young female illustrates the situation:

Some parents simply cannot afford that [time café] or they don't allow [their children] to go there. [...] For instance, some friends may say 'let's hang out there' and others say 'I don't have the money', and so in the end we all end up at the railway station or the petrol station.

Thus, for many youngsters the only relatively attractive alternative is free "hanging out" in non-supervised public spaces. In summer, such places are the nearby woods and the backyard of the cinema; in winter, it is mainly the waiting room of the local railway station. Asked in a group discussion why they like to hang out at the railway station, a female teenager answered: "They don't chase us away from there. They don't ask for money; you can just sit there with your smartphone, and it's warm. That makes me happy."

Our comparison shows that in both Polyarnye Zori and Pyhäjoki young people would like to have more places where they could meet up in their hometown:

This skating place is like a second home for me. I come here almost every day after school. I hang out here with my friends because there is no other place where we can go and just be. Sometimes we skate, sometimes we just sit around and talk. Nothing special. Sometimes we go to the shop to get snacks and drinks and then we return.

(young male, Pyhäjoki)

In Pyhäjoki young people are generally content with what has been provided, given the size of the municipality and the relative proximity of the bigger municipalities of Raahe, Kalajoki and Oulu. The nature surrounding the community has been mentioned in particular in many conversations as an important and empowering place of regeneration. Decision-makers in the municipality cite the possibility of carrying out young people's wishes once actual construction on the nuclear power plant starts and the town grows. In the meantime, local youth keep using the available services and continue to visit nearby towns on a frequent basis to meet their needs. The same applies in Polyarnye Zori. Both the surrounding nature and other urban centres, such as nearby Kandalaksha and even more distant Murmansk, offer opportunities to get away and enjoy a change. In both Pyhäjoki and Polyarnye Zori young people say they would like a place offered by the municipality where they could just "hang out" without necessarily having to pursue goal-oriented, constructive activities.

In both of our case sites, access to education becomes an issue after the level of basic school. In Pyhäjoki, the municipality offers upper secondary education (*lukio*) with a focus on entrepreneurship, which is a popular choice among local youth and also attracts youth from the neighbouring towns. However, after graduation, at the latest, young people need to move elsewhere if they wish to continue their studies. For any vocational training young people have to leave town and they will either have to put up with commuting long distances to school, inconvenienced by the inadequate

public transportation, or face having to move from home to another town at a relatively young age (around 15 or 16 years). Decisions on what to study tend to be taken on a very individual level of interest and these choices are rarely linked to the arrival of an industry in town. At the time of our research there were no specific industry programmes in place designed to train young people for professions in the power plant, yet educating local youth to work in the plant can be understood as a facet of CSR. However, the vocational schools in the region (Koulutuskeskus Brahe 2020) provide a variety of educational opportunities, which include qualifications in technical fields and construction.

Polyarnye Zori has one educational institution at the post-secondary level: a vocational school with several degree programmes to choose from. Originally, the school was conceived as a supplier of an educated workforce for the nuclear power plant. Today, as a result of the regional budgeting based on competition between educational institutions, the school is trying to diversify its educational offerings and also to attract students from outside of Polyarnye Zori. About half of the students come from other cities. However, attracting them is not easy and the school expends considerable effort in doing so. About half of the curricula are designed especially for the energy sector. Two-thirds of the students are male, one-third female, usually starting their training around the age of 15. Recently, the school introduced a new curriculum serving the hotel trade, diversifying its offerings to perhaps attract more female students and thus reduce the gender imbalance in the student body. The school has limited co-operation with the nuclear power plant. This centres on obtaining internships for students and does not include any employment programmes. The situation differs therefore considerably from that of other Russian Arctic single-industry towns, such as neighbouring Kirovsk and Apatity, Neryungri and Novyi Urengoy, where the dominant industry in town is heavily involved in educating specialists on the post-secondary level and offers employment for many graduates (see Simakova et al., this volume).

As a result, the employment situation for young people in Polyarnye Zori is not an easy one. Information gathered in interviews with the vocational school headmaster, pupils and power plant employees clearly indicates that the school produces far too many specialists for the nuclear sector. Students consistently report that it is very difficult to find a good job in Polyarnye Zori despite Rosatom being widely perceived as one of the most stable and well-paying employers in the entire region. According to the headmaster, only about 10 per cent of the young people graduating with a vocational education get a job at Rosatom. Local family ties play a significant role when it comes to getting a job with no more than a vocational-level education, with dynasties of power plant workers being a common phenomenon.

The nuclear energy sector also has an above-average need for specialists with a higher education, mostly in engineering. Indeed, about 40 per cent of the vocational school's graduates leave Polyarnye Zori to go on to complete a higher education. However, informants have repeatedly claimed that the

proportion of locals among the power plant's recruited employees with a higher education is low. Thus, according to several informants, among employees with a higher education an overwhelming majority are not from Polyarnye Zori. There seem to be informal loyalty ties (Ledeneva 1998, 2006) between several cities in the Urals and Siberia, which have specialized universities and from where some of the management come. A young male power plant employee described the situation as follows:

Yes, unfortunately it's like that. There are loads of those who come from those few universities. It's as if they deliver them here in buses. As a local I feel frustrated about this. [...] But if Mum and Dad work there then yes, chances are higher that you get in. Because they will trust you more.

On the other hand, there are plenty of job openings in medicine and in the school that cannot be filled because there are not enough specialists who want to move to Polyarnye Zori. The problem stems from the low salaries and lack of support programmes. For most of the local youth, what remains are less attractive jobs, such as being a salesperson or waiter, or moving away. A few become small entrepreneurs (see also Bolotova, this volume, on "forced entrepreneurship", pp. 53–76).

In Pyhäjoki finding suitable work is also a major concern for young people, as one male participant noted:

There are certain sectors where you could get a job immediately if you wanted, like taking care of elderly people or working in some construction company. But that's not what I am interested in. If you want something else, you either have to commute or come up with creative solutions, like starting your own business. But sometimes you have no choice other than to move away if you want to find something matching your education.

Once young people have chosen an educational path and have graduated, it is important for them to find work that satisfies their expectations. This being the case, they tend to move elsewhere to pursue their career dreams and aspirations if they cannot find a suitable place in their municipality. However, there is a group of young people, especially young males, who express hope in being able to find a job in construction associated with the nuclear power plant. Not unlike their counterparts in Polyarnye Zori, many of our informants in Pyhäjoki assume that local labour will not be needed as much as external expertise and therefore hopes of getting employed by the power plant are not too high.

Interestingly, our analysis shows that environmental concerns in times of climate change do not seem to be relevant in the view of the northern youths in the two countries. It seems that young people are more concerned with the lack of services and infrastructure rather than with what the presence of a nuclear power plant will do to their environment. The nuclear power plant in Pyhäjoki is being marketed as "green energy", but this discourse

understandably does not include local environmental issues related to nuclear power, such as the risk of accidents, nuclear waste management and so on. The green in this setting is the potential of nuclear power to cut national and global greenhouse gas emissions if it is to replace energy produced from fossil fuels. In Polyarnye Zori, where the city’s identity is strongly linked to Rosatom, nuclear energy has a special presence in school tuition, and for most of the local youth ecological concerns about nuclear energy are not an issue. This uncritical attitude towards potential ecological hazards does not mean that Rosatom dominates young peoples’ perspectives on their lives and aspirations. The opposite is true for many members of the older generations in Polyarnye Zori, who actively participated in the place’s coming of age as a city.

In this section, we have focused on comparing four major aspects of wellbeing that local youth in both places identify as vital from their own perspectives: hangouts, leisure activities, educational possibilities and future work opportunities. These four elements open up a wide field of issues. Young people in both places have emphasized the importance of functioning relationships and family ties as key components of their wellbeing. Besides work and education, these are important factors that determine youth wellbeing and thus the motives for staying in or leaving a place. Through our ethnographic examples, we have demonstrated how a “good life” is constructed from the perspective of young people. The connection to nature and a desire for purposeful activities through “eudaimonic” leisure opportunities play an important role in the perceptions of wellbeing, but even more striking is the importance of friends and rather “hedonic” pastimes that is reflected in the wish for more places where one can simply “hang out”. While the “eudaimonic” components are valued by our participants and promoted by the industries, we conclude that “hedonic” components of wellbeing should be given more attention when creating viable towns for young people.

### **Conclusion: wellbeing rewired**

With this chapter we contribute to the discussion of wellbeing that is embedded in specific, national policy frameworks. According to Larsen and Petrov (2020, p. 80), the Arctic region faces significant challenges related to regional and local economic development, industrial production and large-scale resource extraction. The role of nuclear power in the Russian Arctic region has been important traditionally.

Young people in both Polyarnye Zori and Pyhäjoki tend not to associate their futures with the (potentially) strong presence of Rosatom/Fennovoima. The reason is perhaps that the employment opportunities for locals are perceived as rather scanty, or as not coinciding with their perception of a “dream job”, despite the fact that in both countries the nuclear sector is seen as a stable employer. Working in the atomic sector is perceived as applying to a very specific occupational group and there are many other professions that appeal to young people. Income does contribute to achieving a satisfactory

level of subjective wellbeing but, as Fischer suggests, it is not everything: “Increases in happiness level off dramatically after people reach a relatively low income threshold” (Fischer 2014, p. 8). Even if the salaries at the power plant in Polyarnye Zori are satisfactory, working there is not an attractive option for many young people because of the burdensome hierarchies and rigid workflows, similar to what Bolotova (this volume) found in Kirovsk. In Pyhäjoki, the final phase of building the actual power plant seems remote to for young people, as the process of obtaining permits and building has been going on for years with no concrete completion date in sight.

Our research confirms that income alone from possible employment in the local nuclear power plant is not enough reason or motivation for young people to stay in the towns of Pyhäjoki and Polyarnye Zori. Rather, there are various other factors, such as family ties and friends, as well as educational and employment paths, that lead to an individual decision to either stay, leave or return. Our research also shows that policy analysis is relevant for the overall outcome, as it highlights the structural frameworks in which the companies operate and provides answers, for example, to the question of why significant investments are being directed to social programmes and the youth in this exceptional sector.

We have shown needs common to the youth of both Polyarnye Zori and Pyhäjoki, such as places to hang out. A place for “purposeless” hanging out clearly is what the young people in Polyarnye Zori miss most. By contrast, the presence of a wide range of “educationally valuable” options to organize one’s leisure time is seen as something provincial. Many informants look at the bigger cities, which offer more opportunities for freer and idler pastimes. For instance, some informants mentioned the municipal “Centre for youth initiatives” (Tsentri molodezhnykh initsiativ 2020) in the large city of Belgorod (southern Russia) as an example worth emulating. Similar to Finnish youth centres, this place offers a free and supervised space for spending time in ways that are not structured from above.

We suggest that hedonic happiness be taken more seriously as a factor for youth wellbeing. “Good life” scholars like Fischer (2014) tend to consider hedonic happiness as the less gratifying form of happiness because it is not long-lasting. However, they are presenting their arguments from the vantage point of a mature, adult person. In this perspective, wellbeing is framed in terms of permanent and stable levels, and these levels can only be achieved through eudaimonic happiness (purposeful activities). Implicitly, the same attitude can be identified among many administrators who organize teenagers’ leisure time (an insight based mainly on observations from Polyarnye Zori). However, for young people, opportunities to fulfil one’s needs for hedonic happiness seem to be a relevant factor for wellbeing and thus for staying in a single-industry town. Taking these wishes seriously implies creating more opportunities for short-term gratification, which is interesting to young people but which administrators and educators often dismiss as useless or even harmful. Such “hedonic”, “useless” activities may include places to play computer games or to just “hang around” with peers. Based on direct

interaction and interviews with youth, we argue that having enough opportunities to experience positive emotions from “hedonic” activities is very important for young people (especially teenagers), while ideas about “higher” goals, purposes and achievements have lower priority before one’s personality is fully developed, that is, around the age of 20 (Johnson et al. 2018, p. 8). Therefore, it is important to differentiate between the wishes of younger youth (approximately those under the age of 20) and older youth, who may have already returned or are considering returning because they value the peace, safety, nature, family-friendliness and relatives around them. Taking these different needs seriously has the potential to make small towns more liveable for their young population, especially in encouraging youth to return once they have finished their education.

Furthermore, we have argued in this chapter that finding suitable work in our case towns is not always easy for young people. Either the required social networks are missing or the jobs available do not match the education and aspirations of young people. However, we also met a substantial number of young people who were satisfied and had found work in their fields of interest. In both Polyarnye Zori and Pyhäjoki these were mostly “older” youth (over 20 years), who had already been elsewhere and then returned to start a family or be close to their family and relatives. It is understandable and unavoidable that people may have educational aspirations that they cannot fulfil in their hometown and therefore move away. It is also unavoidable that a large proportion of these people will not come back. The factors that motivate an eventual return to one’s hometown are ultimately determined by a wellbeing surplus compared to the life in a big city. Coming to appreciate this surplus has much to do with one’s biographical path: experiencing the difficulties or drawbacks of life in the “big city” and mirroring them against experiences of happiness in the place of origin. By showing that wellbeing is constructed of many different layers that are embedded in a particular policy framework, we have sought to contribute to wellbeing theories in anthropology and beyond. Our research suggests that the municipalities of Arctic atomic towns, such as the ones we have analysed here, would do well to offer activities, facilities and opportunities, which fulfil the youth’s needs for both, eudaimonic and hedonic happiness.

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