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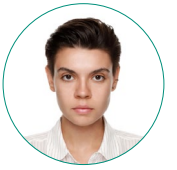

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FROM REGIONS TO METROPOLISES: MODELS OF REGIONAL AND POLITICAL IDENTITIES TRANSPOSITION AMONG RUSSIAN YOUTH

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FROM REGIONS TO METROPOLISES: MODELS OF REGIONAL AND POLITICAL IDENTITIES TRANSPOSITION AMONG RUSSIAN YOUTH

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Abstract. The article examines the transformation of regional and political identities in the context of internal migration in Russia, focusing on their transposition within metropolitan settings. Drawing on Erving Goffman's theory, transposition is conceptualized as a shift in the tone of identity that preserves its internal logic and reflects individual agency during socio-cultural transitions. The study adopts a constructivist perspective, treating identity as a dynamic and reflexive construct shaped through socialization, positioning, and lived experience. The empirical data consists of 50 in-depth interviews with young intraregional migrants from the Kamchatka Krai, the Republic of Karelia, and the Tula and Kaliningrad regions who relocated to Moscow or St. Petersburg. Based on qualitative analysis, the article identifies several models of identity transposition, illustrating different strategies of adaptation, reinterpretation, and preservation of identificational foundations. Transposition models work with significant factors that shape a particular mode of "I" in the context of relocation. The study reveals how regional and political identities may compete, complement each other, or form hybrid configurations under conditions of biographical change and metropolitan integration.

ИЗ РЕГИОНОВ В МЕГАПОЛИСЫ: МОДЕЛИ ТРАНСПОНИРОВАНИЯ РЕГИОНАЛЬНОЙ И ПОЛИТИЧЕСКОЙ ИДЕНТИЧНОСТЕЙ РОССИЙСКОЙ МОЛОДЕЖИ

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Аннотация. Статья посвящена анализу региональной и политической идентичностей в контексте внутренней миграции в России, с фокусом на модели их транспонирования в новых условиях мегаполиса. Под транспонированием понимается изменение тональности идентичности при сохранении ее внутренней логики, отражающее агентность субъекта в ситуации социокультурного перехода. Исследование основывается на конструктивистской парадигме и рассматривает идентичность как гибкую и подвижную конструкцию, формирующуюся в процессе социализации, позиционирования и рефлексии. Эмпирическая база включает 50 глубинных интервью с молодыми людьми, переехавшими из Камчатского края, Республики Карелия, Тульской и Калининградской областей в Москву и Санкт-Петербург. На основе этих материалов выделяются модели транспонирования идентичностей, каждая из которых демонстрирует различные стратегии адаптации, переосмысления и сохранения идентификационной базы. Модели транспонирования работают со значимыми факторами, формирующими тот или иной модус «Я» в контексте переезда. Работа раскрывает, как региональная и политическая идентичности могут конкурировать, дополнять друг друга или формировать новые гибридные формы, и предлагает ана-

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литическую рамку для изучения изменений идентичности в условиях биографических и контекстуальных сдвигов.

Keywords: multiple identities, models of transposition, migration, regional identity, political identity, identity transformations

Ключевые слова: множественная идентичность, модели транспонирования, миграция, региональная идентичность, политическая идентичность, идентитарные трансформации

The question of how identity transformations unfold across different contexts, as well as the triggers that initiate these processes, remains open in both Russian [Lisenkova, 2021] and international [Linchenko, Gartwig, 2023; Stewart, Brown, 2023] social research. A significant strand of the debate on the construction and reconstruction of an individual's multiple identities concerns the role of territory or place [Slobodin, 2019; Aslam et al., 2020: 150]. However, while existing research on identity construction has extensively addressed regional identity as a distinct category, or in relation to other territorial or, less frequently, ethnic-national dimensions, less attention has been paid to the joint analysis of regional and political identities within a single analytical framework [Paasi, 2003; Paasi et al., 2022]. In particular, there is still limited understanding of how multiple identity components are jointly reconfigured within the process of identity formation rather than as its resulting states. This study therefore adopts a process-oriented perspective, focusing on how regional and political identities are co-constituted and transformed from within the lived experience of individuals undergoing migration in Russian context.

The selection of regional and political identities is grounded in the analytical assumption that migration affects spatial and territorial belonging along with political and institutional positioning. While regional identity refers to forms of attachment to specific places and regional contexts, political identity captures the individual's relation to broader structures of statehood, citizenship, and inclusion. Although these dimensions are often analysed separately, their interaction becomes particularly salient in the context of migration. Focusing on these two dimensions allows us to trace how territorial and political modes of identification are jointly reconstituted within a single process of identity formation.

Regional identity is sensitive to internal and external sources of instability and can be destabilized by them. At the same time, a significant body of research suggests that it often demonstrates a degree of resilience and can become particularly salient in contexts of uncertainty or perceived value disruption, sometimes gaining prominence relative to other forms of identification (e. g. [Paasi, 2003]). This duality makes regional identity a particularly productive for studying identity transformations, as it offers insights into the (re)configuration of an individual's multiple identities.

Political identity is another important concept for this study. It is analytically distinguished from other dimensions of the self within the structure of multiple identities and is rarely examined in dynamic terms — especially in the Russian academic

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tradition. This derives from the widespread perception of political identity as a stable, sometimes rigid aspect of identity that interacts only weakly with others, except for civil identity, which some scholars treat as one of its manifestations [Ethier, Deaux, 1994; Winterich, Mittal, Aquino, 2016].

The study systematizes possible empirical variations and demonstrates the triggers, characteristics, and trajectories of the processes through which young people's regional and political identities are reshaped when they move from Russian regions to metropolitan centers. The empirical focus of our research lies in problematizing the processes that accompany relocation as part of a broader disruption of multiple life contexts. We investigate how the specific features of relocation influence the reshaping of regional identity and how young people's political identities become integrated into this transformation. Moreover, we explore the typical models through which these two identities undergo simultaneous change in the context of migration to major urban centers.

Regional and Political Identities and the Context of Migration: Theoretical Perspectives

Conceptualizing and operationalizing political identity are complex tasks. Political identity in Russia has certain specific features. It is seen as a static and relatively immutable aspect of a person's identity throughout their life. The focus is on party identity as the most common and understandable manifestation of political identity [Winterich, Mittal, Aquino, 2016]. This approach limits the conceptual framework of political identity, which also includes social movement, civic, and national identities [Semenenko, 2011]. When viewed in this context, political identity becomes so broad that it loses its analytical power. Therefore, this paper will consider political identity within the European academic understanding. It will mean the concept developed by the group and its members about the goals and ideals that should underlie a political system [Winterich, Mittal, Aquino, 2016]. This conceptual framework emphasizes the contextual nature of political identity and its ability to adapt to the discourse emerging in the group.

In this study, political identity will be examined through the subjective experience of its bearers, as we assume that it is only within real-life experience and interactions that political identity becomes most discernible [Callero, 2003]. Political identity, as we conceptualize it, includes political beliefs, attitudes, and explicit or implicit adherence to political ideologies [Block, Block, 2006; Jost et al., 2003]. We also use Alistair Cole's approach to operationalizing political identity [Cole et al., 2021]. This approach includes not only party and ideological aspects of political identity but also forms of political participation and a person's general attitude towards politics and political processes. Given that these approaches generally view political identity as flexible [Winterich, Mittal, Aquino, 2016], we also account for the reflexivity of an individual regarding the experience of changing or maintaining these attitudes over time and in a changing context.

In operationalizing regional identity, scholars agree on the identification of several significant elements [Raagmaa, 2002] that contribute to (re)constructing identity within a specific context. These elements are mainly linked to four dimensions: phys-

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ical, social, cognitive and sensory, and memories [Shao, Lange, Thwaites, 2017]. The physical dimension primarily concerns place of residence and the material characteristics that anchor individuals to a location. The social dimension operates at both the individual level, through personal ties and social capital, and the community level, through horizontal and vertical relationships within the region. At the individual level, it also encompasses practices, habits, and lifestyles and their transformation (or continuity) during integration into a new community. The cognitive, or sensory, dimension captures emotional perceptions of regions and their communities, including subjective reflections on personal change that resist rationalization. Finally, memory links regional space, social connections, and affective attachments to specific past times and places in which the individual lived.

A substantial body of literature has addressed educational migration, focusing on patterns of interregional mobility, inequalities between regions, and the role of educational institutions in shaping migration trajectories [e. g., Kurbatova et al., 2022; Gabdrakhmanov, Nikiforova, Leshukov, 2019]. These studies predominantly examine educational migration through structural and institutional lenses, emphasizing factors such as access to educational resources, regional stratification, and labor market outcomes. At the same time, less attention has been paid to the subjective and relational dimensions of mobility, including the ways in which educational migrants negotiate multiple forms of belonging across different localities. The present study builds on this literature while shifting the analytical focus toward translocal configurations of identity and everyday experiences of young educational migrants.

Another important theoretical perspective relevant to the proposed research puzzle is the concept of transnationalism [Vertovec, 2001], along with the related approaches of translocality and transboundary identity [Kapustina, 2017; Abashin, Brednikova, 2021]. While transnationalism primarily focuses on international migration, it can also be applied to the analysis of internal mobility processes and the adaptation of young migrants, as well as to the (re)construction of their multiple identities [Vertovec, 2001]. Furthermore, the perspective of translocality and transboundary identity emphasizes identity as a relational configuration of belongings, which enables forms of multiple embeddedness across different localities [Kapustina, 2017]. From this perspective, identity is understood as processual, multi-sited, and contextually activated rather than as a fixed or territorially bounded category [Abashin, Brednikova, 2021].

The main theoretical premise of the research builds on Erving Goffman's dramaturgical approach [Goffman, 1959] and his concept of keying [Goffman, 1974]. In this article, we use the notion of identity transposition as an analytical extension of Goffman's idea of frame transformation, referring to the reconfiguration of roles, self-presentations, and masks that constitute social identity across different situational contexts and interactional expectations. Identity transposition thus captures processes through which individuals adjust and reorganize their identity elements in response to shifting social and normative environments. These transformations may occur at the micro-level as situational adjustments, but they may also develop into more sustained forms of reconfiguration within new socio-political contexts, which is of particular relevance to the present study.

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Importantly, transposition does not imply a complete substitution of one identity for another. Rather, it denotes a selective re-articulation of identity elements, in which certain components of the original identity are retained while being re-expressed within a new contextual frame. In this sense, identity transposition can be understood as a gradual and non-linear process of frame re-keying rather than a rupture between discrete identity states. This interpretation resonates with Jeffrey C. Alexander's theory of cultural performance, which emphasizes how meaning structures are continuously re-coded and re-fused within changing social contexts, without the dissolution of underlying symbolic elements [Alexander, 2004].

Moreover, this means that regional and political identity are seen as elements of a complex, multi-dimensional identity, which is ever-changing and cannot be fixed. This identity is always in a process of transformation and is influenced by various factors [Du Gay, Hall, 1996]. This view is supported by the context in which identities are formed, such as the context of migration, where individuals experience a complete change in their lives, from their physical surroundings to the symbolic spaces around them.

The process of identity transformation occurs when the social context in which an individual builds and maintains their identity changes, and they feel the need to adapt their identity to the expectations and practices of the reference community. This leads to a redefinition of both the physical aspects of identity, such as daily routines, habits, and lifestyle, and the social aspects, including social circle, communication style, self-image within the group, and overall perception of the reference group. As a result, an individual's identity undergoes a transformation.

Methods and Data

This research is conducted within the interpretivist paradigm. We apply textural and structural analysis [Moustakas, 1994] to analyze the experiences of young people following a seven-step phenomenological procedure inspired by Moustakas, of which the most analytically significant stages are outlined below. First, horizontalization was applied to all interview transcripts in order to identify and equalize meaning units related to the experience of relocation. At this stage, statements describing perceived changes, tensions, and continuities were extracted, allowing the delineation of the thematic boundaries of identity transposition as a holistic process. Second, textural analysis was conducted by reading the horizontalized statements sequentially and deconstructing them into concise, descriptive formulations of informants' lived experience. This step resulted in the identification of recurrent experiential factors that later informed the construction of analytical models. Third, structural analysis aimed to reconstruct the subjective and intersubjective causal relations articulated by the informants themselves. The horizontalized material was revisited to situate identitarian transformations within their immediate biographical and social contexts, thereby establishing internal logics and connections between experiential elements. Finally, the synthesized results of textural and structural analyses were integrated into composite descriptions of experience, which served as the basis for distinguishing variations of identity transposition and categorizing informants into analytically derived models.

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Table 1. ***Regions sampling criteria***

Regional Regime [Gaivoronsky, 2015] / Remoteness and isolation from the Center [Shao, Lange, Thwaites, 2017]	**Proximity to major metropolitan centers and low levels of isolation from the core**	**Significant remoteness and isolation from the Center**
Consolidation of the political (media) space	Tula Oblast (Region)	Kamchatka Krai (Territory)
Plurality of the political (media) space	Republic of Karelia	Kaliningrad Oblast (Region)

The data were collected through in-depth interviews. Core topics of the guide included the decision-making process surrounding relocation, emotional and affective responses, transformations of self-perception and regional identity, specifics of social relations, and perceived shifts in political attitudes and practices. All interviews were collected, processed, and analysed by the author herself. Interviews were conducted over a one-year period, from February 2024 to February 2025.

The total sample for this study consists of 50 young people from four different regions of Russia (see Table 1). Regional cases were selected through the combined application of two analytical criteria corresponding to the two identity dimensions examined in this study. The first criterion captures territorial positioning — specifically proximity to or remoteness from major metropolitan centers — as a structural condition shaping regional embeddedness and the formation of regional identity [Shao, Lange, Thwaites, 2017]. The second criterion captures variation in regional political regimes, particularly differences in the degree of political-media consolidation and regional political pluralism [Gaivoronsky, 2015]. The use of these two criteria reflects the theoretical premise of the study: territorial embeddedness constitutes an important basis for regional identification, while the regional political environment provides a key context for the formation of political identity. Importantly, the selected typology is employed not as a description of present-day regional politics, but as a historically grounded framework corresponding to the period of political socialization of the respondents, when regional political differences were more institutionally pronounced.

The sample of participants for the study (see Appendix) was stratified by region, with homogeneous subsamples within each region. We focused on young people aged 18–35. This age range was chosen to ensure respondents' relative autonomy in migration decision-making and their capacity for reflexive interpretation of their migration experience. While acknowledging the internal heterogeneity of this age group in terms of life stage, education, and occupational trajectories, the study does not aim to compare age or generational cohorts, but rather to identify models of regional and political identity transposition in the context of various lived experience.

To ensure comparability of experiences and analysis, we limited our sample to individuals that have been living in a metropolis after moving one to ten years. A minimum threshold of one year ensured that all respondents had completed the initial phase of adaptation, while the upper limit allowed for the inclusion of more stabilized and

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retrospectively reflected experiences without capturing cases of long-term secondary socialization. This temporal range makes it possible to analyze identity transposition as a process unfolding across different stages of the migration cycle [Marques, Aleixo, 2021]. Finally, we consider only two metropolises, the main hubs of youth in the European part of Russia — Moscow and St. Petersburg — as recipient regions. The informants who moved from remote and isolated regions, such as Kamchatka Krai and the Kaliningrad Oblast, were recruited both into Moscow and St. Petersburg subsamples. Young people from other regions were selected according to their proximity to the capital cities. This approach was necessary for a better understanding of the effects of the physical distance between regions on young people's experiences.

Youth is an important group for us, as they are still forming their attitudes and identities [Laffan, 1996; Lipsman, 2007]. Young people are more socially mobile and often move around in search of new experiences. These experiences can have a significant impact on their lives [Skok, Kondratieva, 2016]. Therefore, young people are more likely to undergo identity transformations, especially when they relocate.

For the purpose of analysis, we identified several principal analytical categories for classifying respondents' reasons for relocation (see Appendix). The first category encompasses motivations related to education, specifically the pursuit or continuation of an educational trajectory that is available exclusively in a metropolitan context. The second category refers to career-related motives, including access to employment opportunities and long-term career prospects offered by large cities and their labor markets. In cases where respondents did not explicitly frame their relocation in terms of education or career advancement but emphasized the broader range of opportunities for self-realization associated with metropolitan life, their motivations were classified under the category «greater prospects/opportunities». A distinct category captures negatively framed motivations for relocation, namely the desire to leave or escape one's region of origin or its surrounding social environment. Finally, the category «Other» includes informants whose relocation was primarily driven by personal circumstances, such as family-related or emergency reasons, as well as those whose motivations were shaped by specific perceptions of place.

Empirical Foundations of Identity Transposition Models

In this section, we will describe those factors that are particularly evident in our sample and that our informants use as individual explanatory models to describe certain decisions or perceived changes in communication.

The first factor is the proximity of the region of primary socialization to the metropolis, specifically the physical possibility of returning there at any time. In our sample, four regions represented extremes in terms of remoteness. In Kaliningrad and Kamchatka, relocation is emotionally challenging: the distance and limited accessibility amplify social loneliness and make it difficult to stabilize life if needed, leading to abrupt changes in adaptation and social ties. In contrast, for Tulyaks and Karelians, frequent returns to their home region allow them to maintain social and household connections, making the initial move less disruptive. Thus, regional proximity can significantly delay the adaptation process, and identity transposition could be delayed as well (e. g. [Hu, Cheung, 2024]).

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The second factor is the presence or absence of a conflict (either latent or explicit) between an individual and the community of their primary socialization region. The presence of conflict, along with the remoteness of the region, can lead to a sharp and drastic change in communication patterns, prompting more active and intense interaction with the metropolitan community and integration into it. In contrast, the absence of conflict with the community of primary socialization can have different effect. In such cases, the community is seen as having certain «sacred» qualities and (initially at least) appears to the young person to be more positive and unique. As a result, young people may strive to maintain their involvement in this «special» community to preserve their positive self-image. These ideas about the regional community create a specific and unrealistic framework for young people's expectations of the metropolis, a framework that is difficult to fully adapt to.

Another factor arises from the peculiarities of how the reference group is represented — the ideas about the image of Muscovites and Petersburgers. A significant number of our informants (mainly outside the Tula region) showed a tendency to believe that the image of a resident of Karelia/Kaliningrad/Kamchatka carries symbolic advantages in interpersonal encounters, shaping how they are perceived by people with whom they establish new social ties or engage in everyday communication, whereas the images of Muscovites and Petersburgers, by contrast, are stigmatized and perceived rather negatively. These respondents mostly do everything they can to avoid outwardly identifying with the stigmatized group of metropolis residents and maintain a more favorable image for themselves.

The most interesting aspect for us, in a qualitative sense, is the unknown factor of the length of stay in a metropolis. It seems clear that the longer a person resides in a new location (city, region, or country), the better they understand the cultural codes of that place and form a stronger place attachment [Marques, Aleixo, 2021: 123]. They will have more opportunities to integrate into the local community and, as a result, begin to identify more with it due to the greater number of experiences and memories formed there [Shao, Lange, Thwaites, 2017].

The required duration for self-identifying with a particular region remains unclear and has not been rigorously studied. Nevertheless, long-term residence in a metropolis — averaging four years in our sample — appears sufficient for young people to consider themselves part of the region. Those who have lived in Moscow or St. Petersburg for an extended period often see their present and future as linked to the metropolis and no longer resist being identified as Muscovites or Petersburgers by their home communities, nor do they resist adopting this identity themselves. Typically, their social circles shift almost entirely to the region, with remaining ties in the region of primary socialization limited to family, usually parents.

The next factor is the sense of stability in the metropolis and the perception of one's future within its framework. When young people anticipate that they will move again in the future or generally seek a more comfortable place to live, they do not strive to adopt the identity of the regional community, as they perceive their presence in the region as temporary and experience living in the metropolis as being "*on borrowed time*" (man, 22 years old, informant No. 37).

The experience of moving and adjusting to new circumstances, as well as integrating into the regional community of a metropolis, differs greatly for those who leave their

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home region immediately after graduation (or even earlier) and for those who move at a more mature and conscious age. Young adults who have moved away from their home region experience a disruption in contact with their social circle from their primary socialization region more smoothly and with a greater understanding and have a wider circle of people from their region with whom they interact.

Young people who move immediately after finishing school experience relocation more acutely and emotionally, as it is typically their first significant separation from the parental home. Their social environment primarily consists of situational ties formed at school or other social institutions — not based on shared interests or desires, but on the shared experience of daily life and constant in-person interaction. When such interaction ceases and their lived experiences begin to diverge, communication becomes either very difficult or altogether impossible, and young people lose social contacts in their region of primary socialization. This often leads to frustration and a range of personal emotional experiences.

From the perspective of political identity, another significant aspect can be highlighted — the initial level of engagement with the political agenda and, more broadly, the degree of political ossification of the region of primary socialization. For those who were raised in relatively pluralistic and heterogeneous regional political environments, moving to Moscow or St. Petersburg does not constitute a political revelation but rather serves as a point of transformation in their practices and attitudes toward them. In contrast, for young people originating from politically rigid regions, relocation to a metropolis becomes an eye-opening experience, revealing that «things could be done differently», including the possibility of open political discussion, more emotionally neutral and reflective debate, and a greater focus on the structural causes and mechanisms of political events rather than solely on their immediate consequences. This encounter with a different political-discursive environment activates political identity, making it more salient, reflexive, and explicitly articulated [Gaivoronsky, 2015]. Young people begin to reflect on political processes, which in turn prompts reflexivity regarding their own positions.

Models of Identity Transposition in the Context of Migration

Based on the available empirical data, we have been able to identify six models for how the transposition of regional and political identities can take place, taking into account the factors mentioned above that determine the specifics of each model.

Transposition Model I: «Escape from a region»

This first model is primarily based on the conflict with the regional community. It is a precursor to the process of adaptation and integration into a metropolis, and it predicts the further development of these processes.

Within this model, the main motivation for moving away from the region of primary socialization and the subsequent explanatory model of integration is the desire to escape from that region, regardless of how difficult it may be to adapt to new conditions in the future. Young people voluntarily minimize their visits back home, and if they do return, they tend to limit their interactions to communication with family members. As a result of these infrequent movements between regions, young people ex-

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perience a more vivid contrast between the physical and social environments of the two areas. Due to their initial distance from the conflict-ridden community, young individuals more easily abandon the norms and values significant to the community of their primary socialization in favor of the new ones. This happens not only because of the conflict with the regional community, but also because the conflict arising from the young man's initial failure to comply with the region's socialization rules. All this leads to a radical change in habits that is realized by young people when they return to their native region and through conflictual communication with their former social circle.

At the same time, their active and long-awaited integration into the local community fosters close ties and a deep understanding of the metropolis, as well as a significant reorientation of their internal values. Within this model, young people strongly emphasize the loss of a sense of belonging in their region of primary socialization and the relocation to the region, where they could live the life they want and, therefore, self-actualize and develop. This leads to a rapid and contrasting transformation of regional identity.

Karina (here and further, the name has been changed — author's note), aged 21, informant No. 14, notes:

> *I don't know, I have a good family, everything is fine, and so on. But I needed to break out. And I was glad that I did. I was also in my first relationship back then. And that also created some kind of vibe, since he was here too. And I moved, and the dorm, new people… Overall, it felt more or less normal, but sometimes it was hard. Only now am I starting to really feel that that's it — I've already settled here, because I'm gradually settling in <…> I often have negative emotions about things from the past. And I avoid them… and I haven't returned to my old environment* [after the move].

In this model individuals seek to establish their own political positions and better understand political processes, supported by a sense of community solidarity within the megalopolis. This desire for integration leads to adaptation in political practices and habits, with the basis for political identity being the constant immersion in political discourse and ongoing discussion within the community.

Given the protest against the dominant socialization and its norms, young people in this political environment are prone to radicalization within the political spectrum. Thus, we can observe the process of transposition or activation of political identity, depending on the initial level of inclusion in the political agenda (the lower it is, the more likely we can talk about the activation of political identity). Christina (21 years old, informant No.7) describes the process of her political identity transposition in the context of migration experience:

> *As for my political position, when I was still living in Kamchatka, I was very much influenced by my family's views. In general, my father is a very political person — very patriotic <…> So I was patriotic too <…>* [Later] *I started to undergo some changes, little by little. I began to realize that maybe I was thinking about some things the wrong way, or that I simply did not understand the issue well enough. When I moved to St. Petersburg and started getting closer to some acquaintances who later became my friends, it also became nor-*

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mal for me to question everything that was happening more broadly — not to take the information that entered my field of vision as ultimate truth, but always to look into things myself and search for some kind of provisional truth, if such a thing even exists.

Transposition Model II: «Return and Return Again»

This model is contingent on the proximity of the region of primary socialization to the host metropolis and is typical of migrants from regions such as Tula or Karelia. This situation makes moving easier emotionally in the short term, as young people could return home if necessary and immerse themselves in their familiar environment. However, in the long term, this opportunity can have some negative effects on the regional identity of young people. The contrast between life in their original region and the changes brought about by relocation can be difficult to understand, and it takes time for young people to fully grasp these differences.

Frequent returns to the region of primary socialization, considering the format of pendulum migration, create a situation where a young person lives simultaneously in two regional spaces. Young people adapt to two regional communities by adapting (rather superficially) and trying to build their lives in different ways in two regions.

Within this model, regional identity becomes blurred. Initially, young people may feel largely unchanged, perceiving themselves as locals with only minor differences. Over time, they develop new habits and social connections in the metropolis, albeit partially, resulting in an intermediate identity in which they cannot fully identify with any single region. A second crucial factor is the duration of residence. Even when young people attempt to navigate life between two regional spaces, gradual adaptation to the metropolitan area occurs, leading to partial integration into its community. This process is prolonged and often depends on acquiring certain «attributes of belonging», such as local education, stable employment, or homeownership. Ultimately, it is the long-term, subjective experience of metropolitan life that allows young people to gradually internalize the region as a familiar and meaningful space.

An example of this model is Georgy (28 years old, informant No. 36). The informant moved to Moscow from the Tula region and notes that returning to the region of his primary socialization was a normal part of life for him during the first years after the move:

Every two weeks, I went home. I mean, it's pretty understandable that it takes time before you get used to living without your mom and dad, without your own apartment, your room, without a proper bathroom, at the very least. And while you're… trying to get used to living on your own, there are still some issues that pull you back to your home harbor — at the very least, even just to do your laundry. I remember that it wasn't only to see my mom, but also to do my laundry, or, for example, to bring back some food from there. I remember that every two weeks, so as not to exaggerate, for at least a year I definitely went home <…> Well, of course, it's not only because of our parents that we go back, but also because of our friends, who also, not having found a circle or people close to them in Moscow yet <…>.

In the political aspect, the model does not demonstrate the most positive outcomes for the process of identity formation. Initially, young people are immersed in two conflicting media and information environments simultaneously and begin to compare

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their feelings about the more dangerous and politically active space of the metropolis with the more comfortable and less politically engaged environment of their region of primary socialization. Initially, the familiar environment wins, serving as a secure informational buffer. Over time, the pressures of the megalopolis increase, and the lack of integration into the local community leads to attempts at political escape. The political identity, which has become more active in the metropolis, is quickly suppressed and remains only in a passive and tonal form.

As Maksim (21 years old, informant No.20) pronounces it:

> *When in Moscow, I pushed myself into a bubble, because at some point political issues became unbearable for me — when it started shifting from this vaguely looming global cloud in the form of the media and various other organizations and institutions <…> and when it started spilling over into more everyday things — into conversations between friends, when the topics changed from, I don't know, casual jokes and lighthearted banter about random things to political arguments –that was when I realized I would rather stay in my bubble, shut myself off, and not take part in it.*

Transposition Model III: «Growing Up and the City»

This model is based on the age of relocation. Young people are more likely to move after graduation or later in search of work, when the main stages of separation and growth have already passed. In this case, it is easier for them to distinguish the changes associated with moving from those of growing up, although these processes are often intertwined.

Within this model, relocation to a metropolis is experienced as relatively smooth. Social detachment from the region of primary socialization occurs earlier and is accompanied by the formation of more reflexive and stable social ties that do not depend on physical proximity. As a result, moving does not generate pronounced anxiety or loneliness, as young people retain a supportive social buffer.

Moreover, the change of regional space is less disruptive because key life strategies and patterns of independence — such as separation from family and the establishment of everyday routines — are already in place prior to relocation. Unlike student migrants who often face uncertainty related to employment and self-positioning in the megalopolis, individuals within this model encounter fewer structural challenges, which facilitates their adaptation to the metropolitan environment and integration into local communities.

This model of identity transition is marked by duality: while the region of primary socialization remains a familiar and taken-for-granted space of belonging, the metropolis increasingly functions as a personal home. Regional identity does not dissolve through relocation but becomes hybrid, combining continued attachment to the region of origin with the gradual formation of a metropolitan regional identity.

Grigory (25 years old, informant No. 48) notes that for him, the feeling of home after the move gradually became hybrid, taking on a dual character:

> [In the Tula region] *I feel like I'm 'one of my own' <…>. I understand this sort of social environment, I understand the people there <…>. I more or less understand the setup, I know*

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these people <…>. Probably, yes, I'm still 'one of my own' there, but already with some caveats <…>. Moscow also already feels like my city. [In the political sphere] there's more thinking, yes. I mean, here it's as if… changes happened in my life that weren't directly connected to the city, but they pull you into this a bit. You start talking to people who are into this, and people say things about it at the university.

In political terms, the mechanics of this model are the opposite of the previous one. Young people engage in two information spaces and compare them, but due to increased stability and awareness, they feel less anxiety and analyze politics more deeply, leading to more active participation in political communication. Katherina (23 years old, informant No. 8) describes it as follows:

Before I moved, I didn't really have any particular political views. I wouldn't say that I have any clear-cut position now either. I just understand, more or less, the pros and cons of what is happening in the political environment overall. Sometimes I try to make sense of what is going on and how things work. And that's about it <…> I've just started following the news more.

Political practices within the regional community change without causing conflict or a sense of danger, instead integrating into a more stable structure through solidarity. Similar to the first model, a dynamic is at play: either the transposition of political identity when moving from a pluralistic region, or its activation when it has initially atrophied.

Transposition Model IV:

The fourth model is based on a sense of instability in the new region, but it has two different variations. The first is related to the experience of being unsettled in a metropolis, primarily through material factors. The second is the voluntary departure from a stable base in Moscow/ St. Petersburg in anticipation of moving to other cities in Russia or, more commonly, abroad.

Transposition Model IV/I: «Existing on Sufferance»

In this model, young people do not feel confident about their embeddedness in the metropolis. For some, a temporary employment contract is an indicator of instability, while for others, it is a limited period allocated for studying. Important indicators of belonging are material and social attributes that are visible to other members of the regional community: a private apartment with a residency permit, a stable job, affiliation with a polyclinic, and other social institutions.

Alina (20 years old, informant No. 3) demonstrates a particular significance for her of physical attributes in connection with regional identity:

You know, the rational part of me definitely says that you need to have some property in this city, just so that you always have the possibility to return to it. To be physically anchored here, at least on some legal level, to exist here and always be here, so to speak, as an owner. And, I guess, living here for more than three years for some reason — that's a sufficient amount of time to really get accustomed to the city. I think I would mention work.

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Regional identity within this framework also appears to be somewhat intermediate: young people do not deny their distance from their community of primary socialization, but they also do not feel completely at home in the metropolitan area, where they have transformed their daily habits and routines. As a result, returning to their home region becomes less appealing in the long term.

Material markers of belonging for young people remain largely disconnected from their region of primary socialization, while attachment to it is reduced to a formal status based on birthplace. At the same time, they do not fully internalize the regional identity of the host city or experience it as home. In this context, ongoing turbulence appears more salient than reflexive engagement with changing practices or worldviews. As Urnov and Kasamara [Urnov, Kasamara, 2016] argue, this results in a present-oriented temporal perspective, with young people focused on securing their position in the metropolis rather than imagining a coherent future.

In terms of politics, being immersed in the media of a metropolis also does not provide a sense of stability. For young people, for whom physical environments are already a significant part of life, this can create additional discomfort when they become aware of their physical proximity to political and governmental structures, and the very real possibility of experiencing the consequences of political instability in everyday life. As a result, young people often resort to political escapism as a strategy to minimize this discomfort. This involves immersing themselves in their own information bubble, where they can escape from the realities of politics. Alena (20 years old, informant No.4) provides her point of view:

> *And here, it seems to me, there is also more control over all of this, and in general it all feels much closer to you in a very literal sense. For example, there was that Wagner Group rebellion march that happened in the summer. I remember being suddenly overwhelmed by the feeling of just how much I was at the epicenter of events. Because, as far as I remember, they were heading toward Moscow. And when, in real time, I was not even following the news but understood that it was literally getting geographically closer to me, I felt scared and confused, and all I wanted was to get away from it.*

Transposition Model IV/II: «California dreamin'…»

In another variation of this model, a sense of instability also plays a significant role. Young people consciously choose to be constantly on the move in search of new places and communities to socialize and realize themselves. Here, the physical aspect of regional identity is minimized, while the social aspect is crucial. The transformation of social practices and the accumulation of social capital are essential for life in a metropolis, but they also stimulate further mobility instead of anchoring young people in a particular region.

The feeling of home in this model is rather temporary, as the main parental home remains in the area of primary socialization. Regardless of the context or region of present residence, young people can temporarily return to this place. However, the future, which is not related to the metropolis and its planning, dominates their spatial and temporal development. Regional identity becomes almost elusive and thin, acquiring more instrumental features for certain purposes than situational ones.

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In political terms, the sense of turbulence that emerges from the more diverse political landscape of metropolises, and the feeling of physical closeness to events and their consequences, paradoxically becomes another reason for thinking about the future rather than the present, and not being rooted "here and now". Young people actively seek out new information, deeply analyzing the political agenda and politics in general, trying to understand and embrace politics, while also maximizing the social capital they accumulate. At the same time, their political identity becomes more prominent and is used to find common ground with the local community and integrate with it.

This transposition model can manifest, as in the case of Sima (23 years old, informant No. 50). The young woman notes that instability for her becomes more of a strategy:

> *So, I just kind of think, I'm only twenty-three for now, and the world is so big, I need to try as many interesting things as possible, live in different places, and figure out what I like the most. Because if I don't try, I won't know <…>. I just understand that at a certain point in life, a person needs one thing, and then time passes, and you need something else. And I sort of understand that, for example, right now this is how I choose to live — not somewhere in a village. And I guess I'm choosing some kind of big city, where there are more opportunities for education, for, I don't know, just — however banal it may sound — but really, where there are more possibilities to somehow realize yourself, I don't know, find a job…*

Transposition Model V: «Muscovite! Sounds… Unimpressive»

This model is based on the perception of young people who move to Moscow and St. Petersburg as being stigmatized and having a dubious reputation among other regional groups. However, the explanatory scheme is more complex than simply denying the existence of a new regional identity.

Young people increasingly orient themselves toward the metropolitan environment, integrating into local networks and adapting to urban norms. While differences with the community of primary socialization persist, this process often entails a gradual detachment from their original regional community. As a result, the sense of home becomes associated less with a specific place and more with the metropolis as a social space that structures everyday life and identity.

Over time, this reorientation may produce a contrast with the region of primary socialization: individuals can come to be perceived — and to perceive themselves — as «Muscovites» or «Petersburgers» in their home regions. At the same time, within the metropolis they emphasize their regional origins and develop a situational regional identity marked by a persistent sense of outgroupness. Solidarity is thus primarily formed around peers who share the experience of relocation and adaptation, rather than around a fully internalized metropolitan identity.

This effect is demonstrated by Kira (22 years old, informant No. 25) noting that identifying herself as a Muscovite is not something she can't do for some reason, but rather something she simply doesn't want to:

> *Well, I tend to consider myself more of a Tula native, for some reason. I just don't feel like identifying as a Muscovite, because there are so many Muscovites, and there don't seem*

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to be that many Tula natives. And you kind of want to show off a little. And I, well, I'm not really a Muscovite, and not exactly a Tula native either.

Vera (22 years old, informant No. 2), on the other hand, demonstrates a perception of the stigmatization of the Muscovite/Petersburger image, which prevents regional identification with the metropolises:

Even though I absolutely love Moscow, and I feel comfortable here, this identity of 'I'm a Muscovite' — I would say it's a bit tainted. Because there's also a negative myth, which is partly true, and stereotypes about Muscovites…

In political terms, this model varies greatly in terms of the triggers for the transposition of political identity. When a physical factor dominates for a young person, they may develop political escapism in the context of rejecting a new community.

Vera (22 years old, informant No. 2) continues:

But at the same time, besides anxiety and attachment issues, I have a fear of rejection. Because of that, certain things hurt me more deeply — political events, things happening in the world in general <…> That is, political escapism in the form of withdrawing from reality and sleeping for 17 hours a day was a regular occurrence, at least once a week. There was an inability to spend time alone with myself, and difficulty — almost an inability — to be in public places in Moscow.

On the other hand, when the social factor is more important, even if there is a sense of anxiety or insecurity in relation to political events, integration into the community can lead to a transformation of political practices and activation of political identity:

When we were in school, all those kinds of statements just sort of passed us by. But now, yes — when we get together with friends, all these conversations about politicians start coming up. It wasn't like this before <…> Now, on the contrary, I feel the need to form my own opinion, to look into the historical background. (Female, 22 years old, informant No. 25)

Transposition Model VI: «There's No Place Like Home»

The last model could be considered, to some extent, as the opposite of the first one. Here, the formative factor is the sacralization of the region of primary socialization, which results from the cognitive and sensory factors of regional identity and memory. Within this model, young people experience strong feelings about leaving, which lead to a sense of long-lasting nostalgia. This leads to the idea that their native region has unique advantages, and the community in this region also possesses certain characteristics. While earlier research captured such sentiments as recurring emotional reactions among respondents [Chebanova, 2023], the present study demonstrates that this orientation is not universal. Rather, it represents a distinct pattern of identity transposition that characterizes only one specific model among several identified in the empirical material.

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Due to this, the new community does not attract many young people, and they do not strive for deep integration. Instead, young people seek to preserve their old selves, with their specific language, customs, and habits.

Young people generally perceive themselves as largely unchanged by relocation, viewing this experience as having provided no substantial basis for identity transformation. A sense of home remains firmly anchored in the region of primary socialization, while the metropolis is approached in an instrumental manner as a means for accumulating financial resources, acquiring education, or achieving career objectives. Temporally, respondents orient themselves predominantly toward the past, associated with life prior to relocation, and toward a distant future, envisioned as a return to the region of primary socialization:

> *When I want to go home in the emotional sense, like I want to be with close people, it's more like there <…> when I miss exactly… I often feel very nostalgic about school and all that… It's always Kaliningrad, of course.* (Young woman, 20 years old, informant No. 1)

At the same time, young people may struggle to sustain strong ties to their region of primary socialization, experiencing both rejection from regional communities and a utopian desire to return to an irretrievable place and time. This impossibility may result in frustration and the formation of an intermediate regional identity.

Politically, this situation is similar to the "IV/I" model, where young people without a buffer against the metropolis community, through which they could adapt to the political environment and feel stability through solidarity, instead choose a strategy of political escape. Since young people initially exhibit a tendency to resist change within this model, this pattern is equally relevant in the political sphere.

Conclusion and Discussion

This study demonstrates that both regional and political identities of young people are dynamic and situational, shaped by physical relocation and social integration in metropolitan contexts. The process of identity transposition reveals a fundamentally translocal logic, whereby individuals remain simultaneously embedded in multiple territorial, social, and symbolic spaces. However, this logic should be understood as characteristic of a substantial share of observed cases rather than as a universal pattern, models of total devotion to a single regional space — or to no space at all — still persist. At the same time, the empirical material also reveals more intermediate configurations in which translocal embedding is less pronounced or operates in a more limited form. The analytical value of the concept, however, lies precisely in capturing this spectrum of variations, including cases where translocality emerges as a dominant but not exclusive organizing principle of identity transposition. Within this framework, regions function not as fixed containers of belonging but as dynamic and situational reference points that are activated depending on social position, life stage, and context of interaction. The identified models of identity transposition suggest that regional identity increasingly resembles a form of internal transborder identity, conceptually close to processes described in the literature on translocalism and transnationalism [Vertovec, 2001; Abashin, Brednikova, 2021] although developed in a rather different context.

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Unlike classical transnational migration, the boundaries crossed in this case are not state borders but symbolic and territorial divisions within the nation-state. The metropolis and the region of primary socialization most of the times constitute two coexisting regimes of belonging that generate hybrid, intermediate, and situational identities rather than a complete shift from one identity to another.

A key contribution of this research lies in demonstrating that political identification does not merely follow spatial relocation but is reshaped through the interaction of physical mobility, social embeddedness, and subjective experiences of belonging. Depending on the configuration of these factors, political identity may be intensified, rearticulated, or, conversely, temporarily suspended. More broadly, the study shows that youth mobility in contemporary Russia produces not the erosion of of regional and political identities but rather renders their configuration more complex. Translocality emerges as a durable mode of social existence in which belonging, solidarity, and political subjectivity are constructed between regions, communities, and temporal horizons. This perspective opens new avenues for research on identity formation beyond territorially bounded and nationally centered frameworks, highlighting the need to reconceptualize regional and political identities in societies characterized by sustained internal mobility.

This study is subject to several limitations inherent to its phenomenological design. As a qualitative inquiry based on Moustakas' approach, it does not seek generalization; rather, its findings aim at intersubjective validity through the reconstruction of shared experiential meanings. The dialogical nature of in-depth interviews implies that some interpretations may have emerged as performative products of joint reflection between interviewer and participant; however, in most cases, the questions did not pose difficulties for informants and were experienced as meaningful prompts for narration rather than as intrusive or constraining interventions.

In addition, political identity represents a sensitive topic in the contemporary Russian context and, for some informants, it became a point of narrative closure, despite the interviewer's shared socio-demographic background, which facilitated trust. An important limitation of this study is that, for many informants, migration coincided with processes of growing up and separation from the family of origin, which may have intensified or accelerated some of the observed changes. Empirically, the study is limited by challenges in participant recruitment due to specific selection criteria, resulting in a non-exhaustive sample. Future research may expand the proposed framework by including migrants from ethnically defined regions, as ethnic self-identification may play a significant role in processes of identity transposition, and by adopting comparative or longitudinal research designs.

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Appendix. Socio-demographic Characteristics of Informants

No.	Gender	Age	Education level	Occupation	Main motivation for migration	Region of origin	Metropolis	Duration (years)
1	F	20	Incomplete Higher Education	Education (teaching)	Education	Kaliningrad Oblast	Moscow	2,5
2	F	22	Incomplete Higher Education	Student (not employed)	Education	Kamchatka Krai	Moscow	2,5
3	F	20	Secondary School	Industrial production	Career and career prospects	Kaliningrad Oblast	Saint Petersburg	2,5
4	F	20	Incomplete Higher Education	Service sector	Education	Kaliningrad Oblast	Moscow	1,5
5	F	20	Incomplete Higher Education	Medicine	Education	Kaliningrad Oblast	Saint Petersburg	2,5
6	F	21	Incomplete Higher Education	Student (not employed)	Career and career prospects	Kaliningrad Oblast	Moscow	2,5
7	F	21	Secondary School	Service sector	Negative reason for migration	Kamchatka Krai	Saint Petersburg	4
8	F	23	Specialist Degree	Medicine	Education	Kamchatka Krai	Moscow	5
9	M	20	Incomplete Higher Education	Analytics / Consulting	More opportunities	Kaliningrad Oblast	Moscow	3
10	F	23	Bachelor's Degree	Corporate services	Education	Kamchatka Krai	Saint Petersburg	4,5
11	F	30	Secondary vocational education	Temporary / Casual work	Negative reason for migration	Kamchatka Krai	Saint Petersburg	2,5
12	M	21	Secondary School	Industrial production	More opportunities	Kaliningrad Oblast	Moscow	2,5
13	F	20	Incomplete Higher Education	Student (not employed)	Education	Kamchatka Krai	Moscow	2,5
14	F	21	Secondary vocational education	Service sector	Negative reason for migration	Kaliningrad Oblast	Saint Petersburg	3

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No.	Gender	Age	Education level	Occupation	Main motivation for migration	Region of origin	Metropolis	Duration (years)
15	M	22	Bachelor's Degree	Analytics / Consulting	Education	Kamchatka Krai	Moscow	5
16	F	20	Secondary vocational education	Civil service	More opportunities	Kamchatka Krai	Moscow	5
17	F	20	Basic General Education	Unemployed	Other	Kamchatka Krai	Saint Petersburg	3
18	M	20	Incomplete Higher Education	Student (not employed)	Career and career prospects	Kaliningrad Oblast	Moscow	3
19	F	20	Secondary School	Temporary / Casual work	Other	Kamchatka Krai	Saint Petersburg	3,5
20	M	21	Incomplete Higher Education	Academy	Education	Kaliningrad Oblast	Moscow	3
21	M	23	Master's Degree	Retail	Career and career prospects	Kaliningrad Oblast	Moscow	1,5
22	M	25	Secondary vocational education	Service sector	Career and career prospects	Kamchatka Krai	Saint Petersburg	6
23	F	21	Basic General Education	Service sector	Negative reason for migration	Kamchatka Krai	Saint Petersburg	3
24	M	27	Master's Degree	IT	More opportunities	Kaliningrad Oblast	Saint Petersburg	5
25	F	22	Secondary School	Service sector	More opportunities	Tula Oblast	Moscow	4
26	F	22	Bachelor's Degree	Analytics / Consulting	Education	Tula Oblast	Moscow	4,5
27	F	23	Bachelor's Degree	Marketing	Career and career prospects	Tula Oblast	Moscow	6
28	F	23	Bachelor's Degree	Education (teaching)	More opportunities	Karelia	Saint Petersburg	5,5
29	M	23	Secondary vocational education	Service sector	Negative reason for migration	Karelia	Saint Petersburg	6
30	F	23	Secondary School	Temporary / Casual work	Other	Karelia	Saint Petersburg	5
31	F	24	Bachelor's Degree	Not employed	Other	Karelia	Saint Petersburg	6,5
32	M	26	Secondary vocational education	Industrial production	Other	Karelia	Saint Petersburg	8
33	M	22	Master's Degree	Creative industries	Education	Tula Oblast	Moscow	6

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No.	Gender	Age	Education level	Occupation	Main motivation for migration	Region of origin	Metropolis	Duration (years)
34	M	29	Specialist Degree	Marketing	Negative reason for migration	Tula Oblast	Moscow	10
35	M	24	Bachelor's Degree	Service sector	More opportunities	Karelia	Saint Petersburg	7
36	M	28	Master's Degree	Civil service	Education	Tula Oblast	Moscow	10
37	M	22	Incomplete Higher Education	Legal services	Education	Tula Oblast	Moscow	4,5
38	F	18	Secondary School	Not employed	Other	Tula Oblast	Moscow	3
39	M	24	Master's Degree	Corporate services	Negative reason for migration	Tula Oblast	Moscow	6,5
40	M	22	Incomplete Higher Education	IT	Education	Tula Oblast	Moscow	4
41	F	29	Bachelor's Degree	Education	More opportunities	Karelia	Saint Petersburg	4
42	F	23	Bachelor's Degree	Corporate services	Negative reason for migration	Karelia	Saint Petersburg	6
43	M	29	Secondary School	Service sector	Negative reason for migration	Karelia	Saint Petersburg	1
44	F	22	Incomplete Higher Education	Student (not employed)	Education	Tula Oblast	Moscow	3,5
45	F	19	Secondary School	Not employed	Other	Tula Oblast	Moscow	1,5
46	F	20	Incomplete Higher Education	Student (not employed)	More opportunities	Karelia	Saint Petersburg	1,5
47	M	28	Secondary vocational education	Service sector	More opportunities	Karelia	Saint Petersburg	5,5
48	M	25	Specialist Degree	Medicine	Education	Tula Oblast	Moscow	1,5
49	F	19	Incomplete Higher Education	Student (not employed)	Other	Karelia	Saint Petersburg	1,5
50	F	23	Bachelor's Degree	Service sector	Negative reason for migration	Karelia	Saint Petersburg	4,5