DOI: 10.25515/PMI.2017.5.603

UDC 908:[950.85+304.444]

MINING PROVINCES: MEMORY DISCOURSE AND LOCAL IDENTITY

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The phenomenon of industrial provinces is of particular interest for cultural analysis, since the realities of post-industrial society devalue the images of progress generated by the industrial era. The devaluation leads to a systemic crisis of cultural meanings that have shaped the region's image and its inhabitants' cultural self-identification. The study aims at discovering cultural representation features of mining regions' historical heritage. The paper analyzes the role of industrial images in the modern culture, investigates how the industrial heritage is being exploited, examines how regional cultural identity has been built throughout the Russian industrial provinces' development, and singles out some stereotyped images and discursive models. The research is based on local history literature, mass media publications, museum collections, and private interviews. A comprehensive cultural approach based on the methodological principles of the semiotics of culture and discursive analysis is used to interpret the collected materials.

***Key words*:** industrial cities, local identity, historical memory, local history, branding of a territory (region)

***Hot to cite this article*:** Rassadina S.A. Mining Provinces: Memory Discourse and Local Identity. Zapiski Gornogo instituta. 2017. Vol. 227. P. 603-607. DOI: 10.25515/PMI.2017.5.603

Introduction. The subject matter for the research was chosen because of several factors. First of all, it is the increasing demand for regional branding that requires that the local identity, historical and economic features of the region should be studied beforehand. My academic experience at the Mining University encourages to reflect on perception of the industrial heritage in the national culture and impact of the local historical discourse on future engineering professionals' motivation. Accordingly, I focus on regions that feature extractive and processing industries that belong to the realm of the Mining University.

Discussion. In the 19th and 20th centuries' culture, progress used to be identified with industrial development. In the post-industrial society, we are witnessing a shift in the semantic emphasis. Industrial landscapes have become a recognizable feature of the post-apocalyptic aesthetics. Abandoned industrial facilities attract photographers, filmmakers, and adepts of various subcultures. A characteristic phenomenon of the modern culture is the global enthusiasm for the «industrial tourism». The concept denotes a type of the subcultural «urban exploration» when abandoned factories and ghost cities become objects of special interest. In the post-Soviet area, visiting such places relates to the subculture of «Stalkers» (extreme urban and alienated zones' explorers) [3].

Although many objects that used to symbolize the power of industrialization have given a stage to artists' projections of imaginary post-apocalyptic worlds, the industries keep running and require new resources: human, intellectual, and semiotic. We should ask ourselves what cultural strategies can help build a common cultural outlook on the live industries.

Along with the subcultural «industrial tourism», there is the institutional one – factory tours to operating industrial sites. Its concept is focused on average bearers of culture, laymen who belong to no specific industry. Generally, there are more companies that offer tours to attract more customers than those that basically use them to get acquainted with their production systems. E.g., organizers of the annual Diamond Week in Yakutia have followed the trend and used some elements of the industrial tourism. In 2016, the tour program included visits to the Irelyakh mine in Mirny, Kimberlites Museum, ALROSA Production History Museum, and Mir kimberlite pipe.

Industrial tourism can help draw young people's interest to engineering and industrial professions. In the Urals, local mass media discuss the region's development within this trend. Today, Russia's oldest mining region can offer only some historical industrial tourism, i.e. tours to the sites that are no longer functioning. The only exception is the ChelPipe (Chelyabinsk Pipe-Rolling Plant)

DOI: 10.25515/PMI.2017.5.603

Group, which has been holding factory tours to their active workshops for general public since 2010. Other production companies organize career-oriented tours for high school students, considering the industrial tourism as a tool to help «dispel the myth that Russian factories use ancient technologies» [1].

Industrial tourism's success stories show where cultural identity of an industrial province can crystallize. In his monograph *City Branding*, D.V.Vizgalov points at the importance of the experience economy for the modern society. He believes that even dying industrial cities can find efficient solutions for their survival in the experience economy [3, p. 134-135] (the fact being confirmed by the people actively looking for post-apocalyptic images). He also speaks about the «market of cities» that features both external consumers (tourists) and internal ones (local residents), which is especially important in the situation of depopulation and growing competition for people. The author considers it rational and practical – along with solving social and economic problems – to work on local branding with the experience economy in mind. According to him, that is especially important for industrial cities and towns, since Russia's industrial provinces are characterized by depressing monotony, «and the problem of [...] no difference is not so much that of the cities' external image than of their own inhabitants' perception» [3, p. 30]. Therefore, when developing a local identity concept, it is most important to search for a «theme niche» – a distinctive set of recognizable images, concepts, stories that help express the local identity, distinguish its uniqueness, and present it in an attractive way to the target audience.

Studying local lore can help identify industrial provinces' semantic resources to build their local identities on. I deliberately exclude the oldest «mining civilization» in the Urals from the consideration, as it is characterized by a distinct historical identity, whose dynamic development has been comprehensively studied in recent years [5, 6]. A special attention should be paid to the industrial cities built around production sites in the 20th century – partly due to the fact that their creation and development was accompanied by purposefully forming historical discourse and elaborating cultural identity [8].

The materials studied show an important feature of the historical discourse – the time vector bridges the milestones starting from the «absolute zero» of industrialization till the present. The starting point lies where prospecting, exploration, and first production experiments were carried out, and the decision to build the city-forming site was made. Further development of a typical industrial region is represented as the region's industrial growth, with milestones being arrival of the first train, erection of the first house, start of production, etc.

Discourse about pre-industrial realities does not go into details, which creates the local historical consciousness's fundamental paradox – the regional identity is built without any connection to the local ethno-cultural tradition. E.g., here is how the city of Monchegorsk is described to emerge around a copper and nickel production site in the Kola Peninsula in the 1930s: «More than half a century separate the modern multi-storey Monchegorsk, the most beautiful city in the Arctics, from the first pioneers' and explorers' tents and shelters in the Moncha-Guba settlement of the Kola-Lopar District» [10, p. 5] Similarly, the city of Kirovsk around the apatite-nepheline mines in the Khibins appeared as a brand-new city in an uninhabited area of the Russian Lapland. In the fall of 1932, the *Khibinogorsky Rabochiy* newspaper wrote, «Following the [Communist] Party's policy, we are transforming this wild-bird land, this deserted, no-man tundra into an industrial center, an outpost of the future classless society» [9, p. 26].

The industrialization epoch's ideological discourse from the last quote is easily recognizable and has been well studied. Yet, a special attention should be paid to how the structure of that discourse has shaped collective memory patterns and is reproduced in the local lore literature. Although pioneers' personal diaries and memoirs prove their intensive contacts with the native population, and elders love to share their memories of Lappish holidays they witnessed when they were kids, ethnography was not featured by the local museums in Monchegorsk and Kirovsk, and did not become a significant or widespread subject of the historical narrative.

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It is important to show that the idea of a «historical starting point» is not caused by the cultural rejection of the ethnic «Other», but is an important component of the Soviet industrial discourse. For this purpose, let us take an industrial city built in the territory long inhabited by the Russian population. In January 1962, a *Za Kommunisticheskiy Trud* newspaper's correspondent was inspired by an oil refinery and a new city around it being built in the Leningrad Region, «What was Kirishi like a year ago? Deserted and uninhabited. But once upon a day, the first small handful of people who were to erect this city got out of a train…» Although the local museum's exposition and publications comprehensively study the region's pre-industrial history (starting from Staraya Ladoga's archaeological findings), the «new birth» concept is emphasized by an anaphora, «The first school, first apartment building, first canteen, first kindergarten… Everything in this city was then for the first time» [7, p. 101].

The Soviet-era «new man's» universal image has been widely used in the industrial discourse, and contradicting historical realities accompanying the formation of industrial provinces are excluded from the common memory. That image is cleaned of builders' social diversity, of anything to hint about their individual destinies, while some industrial cities were born behind barbed wire as special settlements for the repressed. Neutralization of any social or ethnic diversities, their wiping from the «new man's» universal image flying high over the commonness have created a generally accepted historical discourse reproduced by my informants, although their individual narratives may dissonate with it.

Professional identity dominates in the regional one. Newspapers write about «cities of metallurgists», «cities of oilmen», «cities of miners». A collective image of the «pioneer» – geologist, builder, metallurgist, etc., who started the industrial life of the region – plays an important role in the local history representation and gets embodied in a heroic monumentalism. The «industrializationalist Adam» would personify strength and determination – the qualities that allow him to win over the region's «wildness», overcome resistance (which makes the victory even more precious), and give the nature a cultured form. This kind of a cultural hero, typical for the 20th century's urban industrial environment, is still in demand in the 21st century. Opened in 2003, the monument «In memoriam of Kuzbass miners» was described by its sculptor Ernst Neizvestny as follows: «This monument is not to victims. Selfless, sacrificial work? Yes. But the main pathos here is resistance. The heroics of a hardest and most dangerous work, no less that than the military service» [11]. One of the newest monuments of the kind was opened in 2016 in Surgut – a composition of a symbolic oil fountain with 11 figures representing different professions around it; the inscription reads, «To the generations of Surgutneftegaz oilmen's labor feat».

However, the artistic imaginary's continuity does not imply that of historical discourse in general. At the end of the 20th century, the victorious discourse of titanic nature transformations is gradually being replaced by the environmental one, colored with alarmist, apocalyptic notes. At the same time, the eschatological motives are rooted in the very principle of linking historical narratives to the city-forming production sites' lives. The threat of exhaustion and depletion of resources, even if distant, foreshadows the city's death. Moreover, the global economic and cultural changes termed as the «post-Fordism» in foreign literature [15, p. 15] coincided with Russia's political and economic reforms in the 1990s. Industrial regions were feeling like the «end of history» was coming when they faced an especially striking contrast between the idealist poetic image of an eternally young, constantly growing and revitalizing city they used to in the industrial era with what was in fact going on in the city. Whereas the decrepitude and decay might be aesthetically perceived as an evidence of a long history in another cultural context, the industrial cities' poetics of creation was transformed into the discourse of loss of Socialist paradise and apocalyptic premonitions.

An interesting example of the artistic introspection and emotions is the documentary project «Invisible Cities», an ongoing series of photo exhibitions. The project shows life in Russian «monocities», cities built up around production sites to serve them: Pikalevo, Satka, Asbest, etc. The project authors write, «In Soviet times, any story about industrial cities was an illustration to the construction of a new world, and now, when we don't talk about the 'bright future' anymore, those ter-

DOI: *10.25515/PMI.2017.5.603*

ritories have been left unattended» [12]. It is significant that it is not only about economic difficulties, but also about the absence of a language that would allow articulating existence in a changing cultural discourse. And just like the urbanist D.V.Vizgalov, the «Invisible Cities» creators emphasize the problem of monotony and absence of individuality. Photo artists hope that their creative vision can allow «discovering a some valuable reality with development potential behind the external monotony» [12].

Such projects are very practical from the experience economy's perspective. For cultural studies, «Invisible Cities» is also an interesting project – it looks for a new language to present industrial provinces; the authors focus on various aspects of everyday life and people's stories representing individual life scenarios. In her article on urban heritage as represented in modern culture, O.V.Bezzubova links the high interest in the everyday urban life to the dissatisfaction with the official discourse [2, p. 337]. She develops G.Kavanagh's ideas about the individual history images («histories») associated with personal or collective past experiences («memories») and different from the institutionalized official historical discourse («history») [14]. From this point, the phenomenon of industrial cities sets an interesting problem because their history has been represented solely within the industrial development's ideological discourse, which may be inadequate to modern realities. Thus, there is a demand for a semiotic catalyst that could activate individual historical statements, voice individual memories that emerge in private interviews, but cannot correlate to the monothematic industrial narrative because of their very personal, everyday-life contents.

Conclusion. To sum up, here are some shortcomings of the previous era's historical discourse: 1) it is uniform and does not allow forming an idea of a unique cultural value; 2) it creates stereotyped historical ideas, forcing to ignore nuances of individual memories; 3) it is limited to the pattern of creation and does not contain semantic resources for mapping further development, the need for change is perceived as a fundamental cultural project's collapse. As a result, the discourse cannot adaptively react to modern challenges. Modern journalism keeps using and mechanically reproducing the industrial era's cliches, although they express nothing but nostalgia for old cultural models and do not allow reflecting current processes where industrial development continues.

In Russia's national culture, there is a demand for a multi-dimensional discourse that would allow representing industrial realities in the post-industrial world. Some companies are trying to use this approach by partially implementing it in their corporate culture [13]. In that context, the logic of «effective solutions» is to replace the excessive emotionality of the «heroic overcoming». However, representation of industrial heritage is important not only in the context of corporate culture and career-oriented work. The aesthetic interest in man-made landscapes, the subcultural and institutionalized industrial tourism indicate that the industrial subject is attractive and can be used in the experience economy. Our society needs to create a new cultural discourse for industrial provinces that can exist in the forms of artistic introspection, media content, popular educational projects, etc. Such a discourse should help industrial regions create their new images and position themselves in terms of both preserving (or losing) their Soviet era's industrial legacy and living in the potentially culturally valuable modern realities.

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The paper was accepted for publication on 16 February, 2017.