

# Urban Regimes in Russia’s Northern Cities: Testing a Concept in a New Environment

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**ABSTRACT.** At a time when urbanization represents a major trend in human history and when the majority of the world’s population lives in an urban environment, the urban regime theory, developed by Clarence Stone in the 1980s, offers an insightful framework for discussing how urban stakeholders are compelled to work together to achieve their goals. While research on urban regimes has historically focused mainly on democratic contexts, this article argues that it is time to use urban regime theory in authoritarian or semi-authoritarian countries in order to better understand how urban politics develop. With growing urban activism and huge territorial contrasts, Russia offers a good case study for testing the notion of “urban regime.” This article focuses on three cities in Russia’s Far North—Murmansk, Norilsk, and Yakutsk—that face common sustainability challenges in Arctic or subarctic conditions; it delves into the mechanisms of their urban regimes and categorizes them by type: instrumental, organic, and symbolic.

**Key words:** Russia; Arctic governance; urban regimes; governmentality; Murmansk; Norilsk; Yakutsk

**RÉSUMÉ.** À une époque où l’urbanisation représente une tendance majeure de l’histoire humaine et où la majorité de la population mondiale vit en milieu urbain, la théorie du régime urbain élaborée par Clarence Stone dans les années 1980 présente un cadre de discussion intéressant sur la façon dont les intervenants urbains sont incités à travailler ensemble pour atteindre leurs objectifs. Depuis longtemps, bien que la recherche sur les régimes urbains se concentre principalement sur les contextes démocratiques, le présent article soutient que le moment est venu d’utiliser la théorie du régime urbain dans les pays autoritaires ou semi-autoritaires afin de mieux comprendre comment se développe la politique urbaine. En raison de l’activisme urbain croissant et des énormes contrastes territoriaux, la Russie constitue une bonne étude de cas pour mettre à l’épreuve la notion de « régime urbain ». Cet article porte sur trois villes du grand nord de la Russie, Murmansk, Norilsk et Yakutsk, aux prises avec des défis communs en matière de durabilité dans des conditions arctiques ou subarctiques. Il explore les mécanismes de leurs régimes urbains et les place dans des catégories selon les types suivants : instrumental, organique et symbolique.

**Mots clés :** Russie; gouvernance de l’Arctique; régimes urbains; gouvernementalité; Murmansk; Norilsk; Yakutsk

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## INTRODUCTION

The concept of governance has been widely used by both scholars and policy makers in the study of the Arctic region. It is understood as the way that different Arctic states negotiate their relationship and interaction, prevent conflict, and develop new legal and institutional instruments to increase regional cooperation (Pelaudeix, 2015; Wilson Rowe, 2018). Yet governance also has a second meaning—that of the “governmentality” of a public space, defined by Michel Foucault (2008) as diverse processes or practices by the state to increase individuals’ willingness to participate in their own governance. While governmentality has mostly been studied at the state level and during a certain historical period (see Albert and Vasilache, 2017; Tennberg, 2018), the notion has been broadened to include all forms of public space, ranging from individual cities, to institutions and corporations. Now that the majority of people live in urban

environments, urban governmentality has become a critical component of urban studies, as well as of urban policy making: cities are the main laboratories of new forms of living together. The notion of the urban regime, developed by Clarence Stone (1987, 1989) in the 1980s and since applied in many different contexts, offers an insightful framework for discussing how urban actors with different goals find ways to regulate their potential conflicts and act together to improve the governmentality of their city.

While research on Arctic urbanization and the development of cities in this harsh polar climate is growing (Dybbroe, 2008; Dybbroe et al., 2010; Nyseth, 2017), the concept of urban regimes has not, to the best of this author’s knowledge, been applied to explore these Arctic cities’ management strategies and sustainability challenges. Those cities largely dependent on single resources (often energy and minerals, but also marine) need to plan for changing the nature of their economic focus as these resources become

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depleted. Those reliant on administrative and educational resources, mostly regional capitals, are experiencing rapid growth, with all the urban infrastructure challenges that this growth entails. Broadly speaking, as small towns are shrinking, big cities are increasingly seen as the main, if not the only, urban model capable of offering a minimum standard of living: good public services and infrastructure, connectivity with the rest of the country, and sufficient cultural life and educational opportunities (Hansen et al., 2013). In an Arctic context, “big” means between 50 000 and 300 000 inhabitants.

The main Arctic cities are located in Russia: eight of the 12 Arctic cities with populations greater than 100 000 people, several of which have populations around 300 000, are there. In Russia, urban regimes are shaped by the broader political context, with growing centralization and a lack of institutional and financial autonomy. Nevertheless, Russia’s cities, including those located in the Far North, have developed specific governmentality mechanisms to forge consensus between state structures and different urban constituencies, mechanisms that this paper explores. This research is based on fieldwork conducted in 2013, 2015, 2016, 2017, and 2018, with the support of two National Science Foundation grants, in the main cities of Russia’s Far North (Murmansk and the surrounding Kola Peninsula mining cities, Arkhangelsk, Severodvinsk, Naryan-Mar, Vorkuta, Salekhard, Norilsk, Dudinka, Yakutsk, and Mirnyi). The article first discusses how the notion of urban regimes applies to Russia’s governmentality, then presents the three selected cities, Murmansk, Norilsk, and Yakutsk, before delving into the mechanisms of their urban regimes and typing them, respectively, as instrumental, organic, and symbolic regimes.

#### URBAN REGIMES AND RUSSIA’S GOVERNMENTALITY

Mossberger and Stocker (2001:812) summarize the main theoretical assumption of the concept of regime as follows: “Regime theory sees power as fragmented and regimes as the collaborative arrangements through which local governments and private actors assemble the capacity to govern.” Two notions included in this definition are important to this study: first, that power is fragmented, and second, that it requires collaboration—a reminder of Foucault’s (2008) notion of biopower and the internalization of power relations by individuals. As stated by Stone (1989:7), “to be effective, governments must blend their capacities with those of various nongovernmental actors.” In the context of a city, power is a combination, in varying amounts, of several actors’ influence: the municipal authorities, which represent the state and its regal powers, such as tax preemption and law enforcement; the business sector, public or private, which generates jobs and revenue; and a broader set of civil society actors with more limited yet non-negligible outreach, organized by aims or

grievances, which can accept or contest the symbolic power exerted by the municipal authorities.

Because all these actors lack sufficient resources to pursue their agendas single-handedly, they must come up with a set of tacit rules, applied with regularity, that the other city actors also recognize as valid. The type of coalition—the regime—that then emerges in each city represents a relatively enduring understanding of power, one that does not change each time a new mayor is appointed. Each city has its own local political culture that is simultaneously quite stable and capable of adapting to new contexts. This local identity should not be understood as detached from broader, national-level, trends, but as a way to mediate them at the local level. As Stone (1987:4) explains, “local decision makers do not simply follow the imperatives that emanate from the national political economy; they must also interpret those imperatives, apply them to local conditions, and act on them within the constraints of the political arrangements they build and maintain.”

Historically focused on U.S. cities, researchers have progressively detached the concept of urban regimes from its North American context to study Europe and then more distant regions. To develop frameworks capable of embracing substantial variation in coalitions, Stoker and Mossberger (1994) proposed a typology of urban regimes that included three broad categories and further subdivisions within each. The first is instrumental regimes, which are short-term and project-oriented systems that are aimed at accomplishing specific goals. The second, organic regimes, are present in cities with tight-knit social fabrics, homogenous populations, and high degrees of social consensus; these systems are oriented toward sustaining the status quo, with little aspiration to growth or change. The third, symbolic regimes, attempt to change a city’s ideology or image and advance a specific set of beliefs to be shared with the population, usually in urban revitalization, conserving architectural heritage, developing urban aesthetics, and moving the city toward new resources.

Thus far, the notion of urban regimes has mostly been applied to democratic contexts and has not been assessed in authoritarian settings. Russia is an appropriate test case for examining the concept outside a classic Western representative democracy. For decades, the Soviet regime was authoritarian (even totalitarian during Stalinism) and the country was highly centralized. City development was conducted in a relatively unified manner, even if some local conditions were also taken into account, especially in the national republics (French, 1995; D’Hooghe, 2005; Bodenschatz et al., 2015). Population management was controlled by state authorities: from the 1920s to the mid-1950s, millions of gulag (Soviet forced labour camp system) prisoners played a driving role in developing Arctic resources (Applebaum, 2004). The system softened in the mid-1950s, yet for the two following decades, young people who graduated from higher education institutions were still sent to their first job by a centralized mechanism

(*raspredelenie*), and only after several years could they decide to move elsewhere.

Today, many world indexes consider Russia an authoritarian country. Its Freedom House ranking for instance, declined from 4.5 in 1999 to 6.5 in 2017 (the ranking is based on a scale of 1–7, where the lower the number, the more free the people) (Freedom House, 2020). Yet this normative, Western-centric framework does not help us capture on-the-ground realities that are more complex and nuanced. After a decade of state collapse and huge social traumas in the 1990s, Vladimir Putin rebuilt what has been called “the power vertical.” First, the government stopped decentralization trends that could have endangered the country’s territorial sovereignty. Second, it rebuilt the state and its functions of raising taxes and providing public services (mostly by manual control (*ruchnoe upravlenie*), meaning that the federal state and its main actors take decisions and then apply them with little cooperation with lower administrative levels). Finally, it reasserted Russia as a great power (or at least an aspiring one) on the international scene (Sakwa, 2014). These three trends deeply impacted all of Russia’s regions, as they lost many of the financial and political prerogatives they had acquired in the 1990s, but improved their public service delivery and everyday governance. However, beyond this trend of recentralization, diverse governmentalities function on the ground: Russia’s cities remain highly diversified and each has its own coalition of power. Several elements explain this diversity.

First, Russia is no longer behind the Iron Curtain; it is an open country whose citizens can travel freely abroad. They can also move freely inside the national territory, even if some cities with strategic resources or located near borders are “closed,” meaning that citizens need to obtain an invitation from someone living there to enter the city. However, as Stone (1989:229) noted in his research on urban regimes, political power sought by the regime is the “power to” rather than the “power over”—meaning the regime seeks the capacity to act. Indeed, the Russian regime no longer controls the mobility of its citizens and, in the case of northern cities, cannot stop the flow of people leaving the cities or the smaller flow of people entering them. Over the past 25 years, Russia’s Far North has lost about one-third of its population (Heleniak, 1999, 2009, 2010). This is an important element limiting the power of federal authorities: if they do not work to offer good living conditions in northern cities, their populations will simply leave for the more European parts of the country.

Second, the Russian regime is a hybrid one, combining democratic and authoritarian elements with patronal mechanisms that make the state a business to be shared by different vested-interest coalitions (Hale, 2011, 2014). The difficult-to-achieve balance between these three elements—democracy, authoritarianism, and patronalism—necessitates regular ad hoc adjustments to avoid mass repression and societal backlash (Petrov et al., 2014). It means that federal, local, and regional authorities

are engaged in a permanent process of renegotiating the social contract with citizens, distributing rents, developing megaprojects, improving the quality of public services but also privatizing them through neoliberal reforms, and inventing new symbolic repertoires to legitimate the status quo. This explains the apparent contradiction between non-federal state actors’ room for maneuver declining quite dramatically in recent years and the dynamic renewal of urban politics in many of the country’s cities, with new forms of urban activism emerging to contest existing policies and give voice to civil society actors (See IU Global Gateway Network, 2018, for ongoing research on that question.)

Russia’s regions and the majority of cities lost their right to vote for governors and mayors in the 2000s. Today, only around a dozen cities still have an elected mayor, and gubernatorial elections have been re-introduced in few regions. Equally important, the financial flows generated by the country’s main energy and mineral extraction giants—the high mineral extraction tax (MET)—have been recentralized. In the 1990s, taxes collected from MET were divided, with 40% going to the federal government, 30% to the regional government, and 30% to the local government of the resource-producing district (Kryukov et al., 2011:265). But a new law allowed Russian corporations to pay taxes in Moscow, where their headquarters were located, rather than in the regions, drawing money out of them. Once Putin came to power, tax and budget legislation gradually evolved to favor the federal government. In 2002, the federal government’s share of MET taxes went up to 80% and since 2010, 100% of them have gone to Moscow in exchange for which the federal state provides subsidies to regions (Orttung, 2017). Local authorities’ lack of accountability to the population—since the majority are no longer elected—and their lack of autonomous funds dramatically impacts the potential of local self-government at the city level.

Yet even in such a challenging context there are different urban regimes. Looking at them allows us to explore the governmentality mechanisms of the Russian regime by moving away from the simplistic description of a top-down pyramid with Vladimir Putin at its apex, to show on the contrary, how each city can adapt and renegotiate the social contract to suit its own purposes.

### THREE CASE STUDIES: MURMANSK, NORILSK, AND YAKUTSK

For case studies, I use Russia’s three main northern cities: Murmansk, on the Kola Peninsula; Norilsk, on the Taimyr Peninsula; and Yakutsk, capital city of the Sakha (Yakutiya) Republic. They are among the largest Arctic and subarctic cities in terms of population: 295 374, 180 239, and 328 493, respectively (Rosstat, 2018). Murmansk and Norilsk are located above the Arctic Circle (68° N and 69° N, respectively); Yakutsk is just below the Arctic Circle

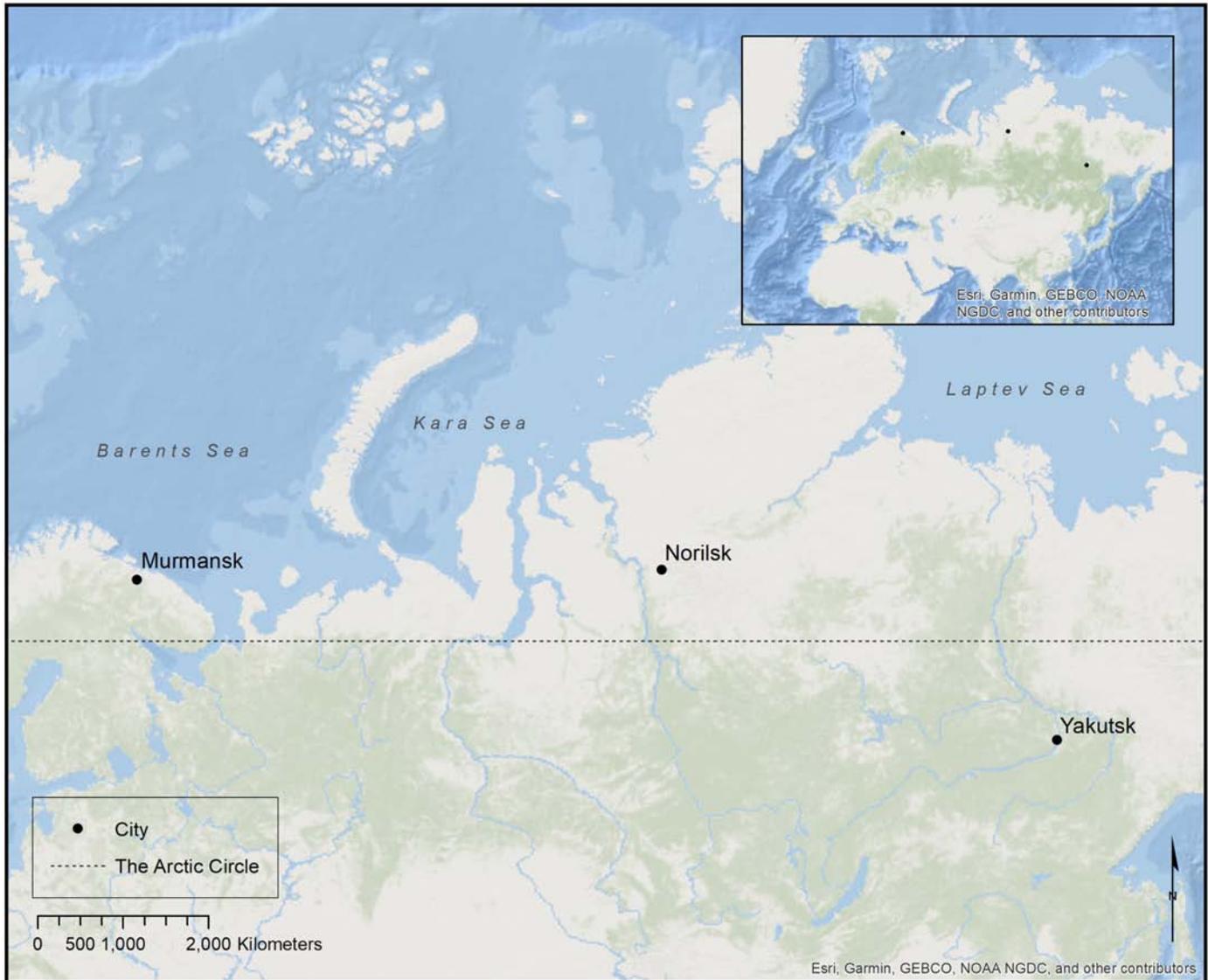


FIG. 1. Murmansk, Norilsk, and Yakutsk. Source: Emily Zhang for @PIRE.

(62° N), but its remoteness from any ocean except the Arctic Ocean gives it a very harsh climate similar to the Arctic. The three cities accumulate superlatives: Murmansk is the world's largest city above the Circle; Norilsk, the largest built entirely on permafrost and Russia's most polluted city; and Yakutsk, the largest subarctic city in terms of Indigenous population and the capital of the largest territorial unit of the Russian Federation, with 40% of its territory above the Arctic Circle (Fig. 1).

In terms of history, the three cities offer a striking diversity. Yakutsk, founded in 1632 during the Russian expansion into Siberia, had a centuries-long history, but faced mass development during the Soviet twentieth century. Murmansk (at that time Romanov-na-Murmane) was dedicated in 1916, making it the last town founded by the Tsarist regime (Fedorov, 2009). Norilsk was founded in 1935 as a soon-to-be-infamous gulag, whose prisoners were sent to labour at the mines. During Soviet times, Yakutsk

remained a modest and sleepy provincial capital, while Norilsk became the USSR's main producer of copper and nickel, and Murmansk became one of the main fishing ports and host of the Northern Fleet. Both Norilsk and Murmansk experienced a golden age in the 1970s that caused their populations to peak in 1985 (195 000, Norilsk) and 1991 (473 000, Murmansk), while Yakutsk is enjoying its own golden age now, in the 2000s to 2010s, with a population growing rapidly as of 2019.

The three cities also have sharply divergent economic outlooks (Pilyasov, 2017). Murmansk benefits from a relatively friendly environment: just 50 km from the Barents Sea, the city hosts the only Arctic warm-water port thanks to the Gulf Stream. Even if life is regulated by polar nights and days, Murmansk's mild winters and its relative proximity to central Russia make it a unique place on Russia's Arctic coasts and less remote than Norilsk or Yakutsk. While the rest of the Kola Peninsula is dominated

by mining cities, Murmansk benefits from a quite diverse economy, including a fishing industry and a commercial port dominated by the Murmansk Shipping Company, a leader in oil transportation and transshipment in the Arctic thanks to its partial ownership by Lukoil. In addition, there are some agribusiness-related industries and transport and logistics companies that take advantage of the port and railway. The city's status as a regional administrative center for the Murmansk region secures state administration jobs and a developed retail sector (author's interview with local researchers working on the city's economic development, Murmansk, July 2015). As host to the Northern Fleet, Murmansk also benefits from a large contingent of military personnel. The neighboring city of Severomorsk, less than 20 km away, with more than 50 000 inhabitants, functions as Murmansk's military suburb (Revich et al., 2014:202). However, there has been little progress in technological innovation and the city's student population, which declined by several thousand students per year in the late 2000s (going from almost 40 000 in 2006 to 32 000 in 2010), continues to diminish as students are lured away by the universities of central Russia. The failure to develop the gigantic Shtokman gas deposit cut short promises of major energy developments in the Barents Sea, which would have created a new economic sector for the city.

Norilsk can be considered the biggest Arctic monocity, a designation that indicates that 25% of the population works in the city's primary industry, more than 50% of total town production is generated by this industry, and more than 20% of the municipal budget is dependent on it (Didyk et al., 2014:11–12). Its main firm, Norilsk Nickel, is Russia's largest mining company and the world's largest and lowest-cost producer of nickel. It accounts for 20% of global nickel production and, in Russia, 90% of nickel, 55% of copper, and 95% of cobalt. Since the 1990s, the city's population has been shrinking, first in a very disorganized way and now in a more managed way (Laruelle and Hohmann, 2017). The drop in global mineral prices, combined with environmental pressures—Norilsk is one of the most polluted cities in the world and the most polluted in Russia—pushed the firm to close its main nickel factory and contributed to a radical overhaul of the company's nickel operations that refocused refining on the metallurgical complex of the Kola Peninsula and the Harjavalta site in Finland (Staalesen, 2016). If the Norilsk transformation and extraction factories close down, the future of the city, or at least its current size, will be called into question.

Yakutsk presents a much more diversified profile, with a mostly services-based economy related to the republic's public administration, which is based in the city, and limited industry and agriculture. It benefits indirectly from the fact that the republic produces, through the state firm Alrosa, 30% of the world's diamonds and almost 100% of Russia's diamonds. But since the mines are located in cities far from Yakutsk, the capital has been able to avoid becoming an industrial monocity. In addition to diamond mining, the republic has significant resources, including gold, gas, oil,

precious metals, coal, and timber. It also has a lively private sector of small- and medium-size enterprises specializing in everyday services and retail and hopes to develop its transportation infrastructure to become a hub turned toward a dynamic Asia-Pacific region. The municipal authorities have chosen to promote small and medium private enterprises, as well as some science and innovation infrastructure and higher education institutions, a move that has set the republic apart in Siberia. It has a better investment climate than many neighboring regions, attractive universities, an extensive network of cultural institutions, and a booming construction sector (Deloitte, 2014).

A byproduct of these diversified economic outlooks, the three cities' migration trends likewise diverge, showing the diversity of patterns of mobility in the post-Soviet period (Table 1). Norilsk and Murmansk have both seen their populations decline by about one-third, deeply impacting the social fabric and residents' everyday life. The population balance has since stabilized: Murmansk lost only 12 000 people and Norilsk gained 3000 in the 2010s. Yakutsk finds itself in a completely different situation: it is one of the fastest-growing cities in the whole Arctic. Between 1989 and 2018, the population grew by 67%, a rise explicable by a phenomenon known as “replacement migration.” As in Murmansk and Norilsk, many people who were settled in Yakutsk during Soviet times left for European Russia, but in Yakutsk they were replaced by a massive influx of rural residents from the Sakha Republic (Sukneva and Laruelle, 2019). This influx has impacted the ethnic fabric of the city: Yakutsk can now present itself as a genuinely Indigenous city, with Yakuts representing half of the inhabitants, while Norilsk and Murmansk remain dominated by ethnic Russians and other Slavic populations, such as Ukrainians. In all three cases, a new category of actors has also emerged: foreign labor migrants coming from the southern former Soviet republics of Azerbaijan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan. For these labor migrants from deeply impoverished countries, finding a job in one of Russia's Arctic cities is considered a professional and personal accomplishment (Laruelle and Hohmann, 2019).

## THE ACTORS OF RUSSIA'S ARCTIC URBAN REGIMES

Each city offers a different combination of interactions between the main urban stakeholders, contributing to the creation of specific urban regimes. The main actors include the federal authorities, the municipal authorities, and big firms (whether state or private), as well as several smaller civil society actors, who are less powerful but are nevertheless influential in negotiating the city's regime.

### *Federal Authorities*

The three cities have different relationships to the federal authorities. Yakutsk is the capital of one of the most

TABLE 1. Main economic and demographic indicators for Murmansk, Norilsk, and Yakutsk in 2017.

Economic profile		Municipal budget in billion rubles	Amount transferred from other budgets	Inhabitants	Demographic trends (migration and birth rates)
Murmansk	Concentration in some sectors (commercial port, military, transport hub)	12	4.9 (41%)	298 096	Declining
Norilsk	Industrial monocity	17	9.4 (55%)	178 106	Declining
Yakutsk	Diverse	14.7	7.5 (51%)	324 651	Growing

Source: Federal State Statistics Service, 2017a–c.

important republics of the Federation—after Tatarstan, Chechnya, and Dagestan—and therefore enjoys more autonomy, both legally recognized in the Constitution and applied on the ground (Gorenburg, 2001; Giuliano, 2006). While the republics’ room for maneuverability has declined with recentralization (Gorenburg, 2010), it has been retained in some sectors; for example, republics have the right to do their own branding abroad—a right that Sakha is maximizing. Because Siberian Indigenous populations are perceived as less threatening to Russia’s overall identity than the Muslim and north Caucasian populations, Moscow is comparatively unconcerned by Sakha’s modest autonomy.

Murmansk is the regional capital of the Murmansk region, part of the Northwestern Federal District. It is closer to Moscow not only geographically, but also politically, as it is considered an integral part of European Russia. As host to the Northern Fleet, it is central to Russia’s defense and occupies a strategic location at the forefront of the tension line with NATO countries (Flake, 2017; Zagorski, 2018).

Compared to the other two cities, Norilsk finds itself in a particularly subordinate position in relation to federal authorities. Being at the heart of one of Russia’s most strategically important industries, mineral extraction and production, Norilsk does not benefit from any autonomy. It answers to the regional capital, Krasnoyarsk, but also on some questions, directly to Moscow. This political proximity to the Kremlin offers advantages in terms of getting things done and securing state subsidies, but it also deprives the city of the right to have a say in its own internal affairs (Humphreys, 2011).

### *Municipal Authorities*

The Regional Democracy Index developed by Nikolai Petrov first at Carnegie Moscow and then at the National Research University Higher School of Economics is the only existing tool for measuring the democracy of regional politics in Russia. It takes into consideration levels of voting in local (regional and municipal) elections, the diversity of candidates, votes “against all,” leadership alternations, protests, irregularities and fraud during elections, corruption cases, freedom of media, and social activism, for example (see Petrov and Titkov, 2013). The index is measured at the level of the region, not of the city, and therefore does not capture the municipal echelon. Since Murmansk and Yakutsk are the main cities of their respective region or republic, the regional picture may

nevertheless be considered fairly representative, whereas this is less clear in Norilsk given that the main city of the Krasnoyarsk Krai, Krasnoyarsk, has a livelier political landscape. That said, the index still gives us some insights into broader regional trends in the 1990s and 2000s (data collection stopped in 2010, so we cannot rely on it to identify the tendencies of the last decade), showing Sakha at the lowest level for our three regions, Krasnoyarsk Krai at the highest, and Murmansk in the middle (Table 2).

At the municipal level, the diversity between the three cities is likewise striking. Yakutsk is the only one of the three cities whose mayor is still elected by the population. In September 2018, its residents elected Sardana Avksentieva, a Sakha female politician well integrated into the city’s fabric where she has spent her entire career in the local administration and in big city firms such as the airport (SakhaLife, 2018). A representative of the leftist (social-democrat) Party of Rebirth of Russia, led by Gennadii Seleznev at the national level, Avksentieva defeated the candidate from the presidential party, United Russia—a sign of the openness of the Yakutsk political landscape. The city’s political life is characterized by competition and pluralism, with a complicated balance between different clans, both territorial and corporate. The republic as a whole was among the most democratic at the end of the 1990s, then declined to fall below the national average before rebounding. The 2014 election for the regional head, for instance, was among the most competitive in Russia (Petrov, 2017).

In Murmansk, as in Norilsk, the mayoralty has been replaced by a head of the city council, a position elected by the city’s Council of Deputies and perceived as more managerial than political. In Murmansk, the new head of the city, Tatiana Priamikova, represents United Russia. A teacher by training, she entered local political life in the 1990s and has occupied several high-level positions in the municipality over the past decade (Murmanskii vestnik, 2018). The election and nomination of high-level civil servants like Priamikova is typical, confirming the deputies’ control of administrative resources.

The new head of Norilsk’s city council, nominated in 2017, is Rinat Akhmechin, a Tatar who has worked in several Norilsk Nickel subsidiaries (City of Norilsk, 2018b). The fact that the head of the city council comes from the industrial realm typifies the “company town” identity of Norilsk. Yet contrary to what one might expect, the city has its own political culture, with developed protest

TABLE 2. Level of democracy by region according to the Regional Democracy Index (higher number = more democratic).

	2001–10 Level of democracy by data	2006–10 Level of democracy by expert rating
Murmansk region	30–35	35
Krasnoyarsk Krai	26–30	40
Sakha (Yakutiya)	21–28	27

Source: Petrov and Titkov, 2013.

sentiments—probably a legacy of Soviet-era industrial workers. The city is infamous for its extremely low turnout on election days, yet in 2003 the residents elected rebellious trade union leader Valerii Melnikov despite the local administration's efforts to disqualify him. Since 2007, the city has been governed by a hired city manager. Nonetheless, on the regional democracy index, the city is rated “more democratic than Taimyr and almost as democratic as Krasnoyarsk Krai as a whole, despite being a closed company town” (Petrov, 2017:23).

The three cities' municipal authorities also rely on quite distinct budgets. Despite being the smallest city of the three, with half the inhabitants of the others, Norilsk has the highest budget (17 billion rubles), followed by Yakutsk and then Murmansk. This difference is accentuated by the share transferred from other budgets: central state subsidies comprise 55% of Norilsk's budget, 51% of Yakutsk's, and 41% of Murmansk's. These numbers reflect Moscow's protective policy toward Norilsk compared to other cities. A look at municipal expenditures for 2017 illustrates the diverse status of the three cities: Norilsk spends four to five times more on law enforcement agencies and national security than the other cities; it spends five times more than Yakutsk and 12 times more than Murmansk on transport and infrastructure management and repair. However, it lags somewhat behind the two others in promoting culture (except sport activities, where it predominates). Murmansk is the only city of the three to have a budget (albeit small) for environmental defense, but it spends less than the other two cities on education and on housing. Yakutsk spends more than the others on social policies and housing, a sign of its booming demography (Federal State Statistics Service, 2017a, b, c).

### *Big Firms*

The third stakeholder in urban regimes is the economic sector, embodied by big private or public firms. In the Russian context, the main energy firms have been renationalized, while the majority of mineral extraction industries remain in private hands. Nonetheless, the proximity of the main mining oligarchs to the Kremlin is such that big extraction firms can, in many respects, be considered public firms, in the sense that they remain under state influence in deciding many of their policies and continue to provide public services in the regions where they operate. As in Soviet times, but now under the more neoliberal labels of “corporate social responsibility”

or “social license” (Wilson, 2017), big firms are pushed to invest locally in new infrastructure (transport, sport complexes, health care, and education) that the municipal budget cannot cover, to subsidize energy and employ local workers (Gaddy and Ickes, 2010, 2013).

As a company town, Norilsk embodies this symbiotic relationship between the municipal authorities and the firm Norilsk Nickel. The firm provides for 90% of the municipal budget (City of Norilsk, 2018a). The corporate identity of the city is evidenced by Norilsk Nickel's main administration being hosted in the most prestigious and imposing building in the city's downtown; the streets are also lined with billboards celebrating Norilsk Nickel's production. The firm funds the expensive repairs required by the city's airport—lacking road or rail links, the city is only accessible by air or in summer, by transportation along the Yenisei River. It also supports many of the cultural and charitable activities offered in town in the name of its social corporate responsibility (Norilsk Nickel, 2018b), works closely with the Orthodox Church, and in the early 1990s, funded a small commemorative monument on the site of the erstwhile gulag (author's fieldwork and interviews with local associations and the city council, Norilsk, July 2013 and July 2015).

Norilsk Nickel also controls the demographics of the city by gradually shrinking its workforce: the number of its employees has plummeted from 140 000 during the Soviet period to 122 000 in 1996, 84 000 in 2001, and 78 000 in 2017 (Norilsk Nickel, 2018a). To attract qualified engineers and their families, the firm has built new fully-furnished apartment complexes, but it also tries to optimize population management by offering retirees incentives to leave, thus allowing the company to avoid expenses associated with aging (Parente, 2012; author's fieldwork and interviews with Norilsk Nickel representatives, Norilsk, July 2013 and July 2015). In the first decade of the 2000s, the firm cut several entitlement programs inherited from the Soviet system (pensions, health care, public transportation, and other services), shifting costs to the municipality. As early as the end of the 1990s, it was undertaking (unsuccessfully) large-scale resettlement programs to reduce the city's population (Glazunov, 2010); further, between 2011 and 2015, it invested 128 million rubles in resettlement programs with the goal of sending “populations from Norilsk and Dudinka to regions of the Federation that have more suitable living and climatic conditions” (Godovoy otchet Noril'sk Nickel'a, 2015). Norilsk Nickel is thus the central actor of urban politics in Norilsk.

In Yakutsk, the situation is quite different because the state diamond extraction firm, Alrosa, operates mostly outside the city, in other regions of the republic. It has two headquarters, in Moscow and Mirnyi (Russia's "diamond capital," 800 km from Yakutsk), and only a representative office in Yakutsk. Most of its social programming is thus focused on Mirnyi, not Yakutsk (Alrosa, 2015). The city therefore lacks a Norilsk-style symbiotic relationship with Alrosa.

The case of Murmansk stands out, as the city is not home to any large extraction or energy firm. The commercial port still plays a key role, especially the private Murmansk Shipping Company, which, with 300 vessels and its headquarters in Murmansk, is the city's largest enterprise. It funds about 100 million rubles in social and charitable programs for the city, as well as subsidizes housing for its employees with young families (Murmanskii Morskoi Torgovyi Port, 2018). In terms of influence, the shipping company is followed by the state-controlled Atomflot (part of the Rosatom corporation), the service company in charge of maintaining Russia's nuclear-powered icebreakers. Some major transport logistics companies such as PEK, which moves furniture all over Russia, post-Soviet countries, and China, are second-tier yet important actors that employ local workers.

#### *Civil Society Actors*

The fourth actor category encompasses all the components of "civil society," a term that includes labor unions, charitable associations, community groups, and individual entrepreneurs. Obviously, the term should be used with caution given that the broader Russian political context does not favor citizens' engagement in politics (Evans et al., 2005). Labor unions are aligned with the authorities and limit their claims to specific grievances (salaries, incentives, working conditions). The non-profit sector can develop only when it does not exhibit any political agenda that would challenge the official line (Clarke and Pringle, 2009) and is better described as GONGOs (government-organized non-governmental organization [NGO]) than as NGOs. None of the civil society actors can thus be considered fully-fledged stakeholders in the city's decision making, yet they play a non-negligible role in developing co-creational mechanisms that allow residents to feel like an integral part of the city's social fabric.

A good indicator of the state of the social fabric of each city is the distribution of the workforce. Norilsk is a city for working-age people, with few young people and few retirees: of a population of 176 000, 85 000 are in the workforce. The workforce is approximately the same size in Murmansk (90 000) and in Yakutsk (83 000), which have almost twice as many residents as Norilsk. The division of the workforce is most balanced in Murmansk where 30% work in public services (e.g., local administration, education and culture, health care), 27% in the transportation and

storage sector, 15% in the military, 10% in industry, and 9% in the retail sector (MurmanskStat, 2018). These numbers confirm Murmansk's commercial and military function. In Yakutsk, the picture is quite different: 60% of the workforce (50 000 of 83 000) works in public services, with only 22% in the retail sector and 18% in industry (Federal State Statistics Service, 2017c). The dominance of public services results from the city's status as the capital of the republic. Norilsk is a much more diversified city, with quite developed consumption and public service sectors. One-third of the city's workforce works for the mineral extraction sector (Norilsk Nickel and its subsidiaries), with the rest divided between the private consumption sector, including retail and leisure, and public services (Federal State Statistics Service, 2016; City of Norilsk, 2017).

However, once one explores the number of small and medium enterprises, the picture looks different: Norilsk has three times fewer microbusinesses (around 5000 compared to 15 000 for Murmansk and 18 000 for Yakutsk) and even fewer small businesses (164 compared to 660 and 519, respectively) (Federal Tax Service, 2018). These data should be taken with some caution, as they do not capture the shadow economy. Fieldwork observations confirm that Norilsk is much more entrepreneurial than the official numbers suggest, but this entrepreneurship is partly hidden (author's fieldwork and interviews with local entrepreneurs from ethnic minorities, Norilsk, July 2013 and July 2015). That said, the difference between the three cities is striking. In terms of spending to develop and support small and medium entrepreneurship, in 2012 Yakutsk spent 252 rubles per resident, Norilsk spent 39, and Murmansk, 17 (Federal State Statistics Service, n.d.). Small and medium entrepreneurship deeply shapes the urban landscape, especially in terms of retail and leisure places. As we can see from Table 3, Yakutsk has a thriving retail and consumption sector with a proliferation of small businesses selling ethnic clothing, kitchenware, jewelry, souvenirs, and films and music, as well as traditional subsistence (e.g., hunting, fishing, reindeer herding) products. It is followed by Murmansk, while Norilsk faces a deficit of retail infrastructure (Zamyatina, 2007).

If one looks at the number of nonprofit organizations registered by the Ministry of Justice at the city level, a similar trend is noticeable: Norilsk has only 213, compared to 569 for Murmansk and 753 for Yakutsk (MinJust, 2018). Even with their limitations, the data illustrate the very limited civil society sector in Norilsk and in contrast to the dynamism of urban entrepreneurship in Yakutsk and, to a lesser extent, in Murmansk. The more diversified the city's economic outlook, the more diversified and dynamic the social fabric, leaving more room for private initiatives, whether economic or social. Norilsk also found itself at the bottom of the "fate control" (the ability to make and implement its own decisions) index developed by Andrei Petrov for 12 Arctic cities (Larsen et al., 2015; Petrov, in press).

Yakutsk appears to be the richest of the three cities in terms of cultural institutions (libraries, museums, music and

TABLE 3. Retail infrastructure in Murmansk, Norilsk, and Yakutsk in 2017.

	Number of shops	Surface area of shops (m <sup>2</sup> )	Number of restaurants, cafes, and bars
Murmansk	1543	291 342	167
Norilsk	550	130 078	101
Yakutsk	1414	387 969	294

Source: Federal State Statistics Service, 2017a–c. Entries “magaziny,” “kolichestvo ob”ektov roznichnoi torgovli i obshchestvennogo pitaniia,” “ploshchad’ torgovogo zala ob”ektov roznichnoi torgovli,” and “restorany, kafe, bary.”

art schools, theaters, cinemas, circuses, “parks of culture”), with 74 entities, compared to 61 for Murmansk and just 29 for Norilsk (Federal State Statistics Service, n.d.). The educational sector looks fairly similar: Yakutsk dominates with 68 establishments, followed by Murmansk with 48 and Norilsk with 43 (Federal State Statistics Service, n.d.). This has allowed Yakutsk to set itself apart due to its rising “creative class:” a whole generation of young and educated people, mostly Indigenous, who want to become active citizens of their city, mostly through cultural initiatives. The city benefits from a whole class of Indigenous cultural cadres who have created a bottom-up dynamic (Kuklina et al., 2019). In Norilsk, cultural life is mostly a top-down process, with public institutions (theater, dance, museums) supported by the municipality or by Norilsk Nickel. Murmansk finds itself in the middle; because it competes with other regional capitals such as Arkhangelsk and Petrozavodsk, and obviously St. Petersburg, it has trouble keeping its cultural elites, who tend to leave, although it does have a large enough municipal budget to provide consistent top-down support for cultural production (author’s interviews with city council members, association representatives, and university professors, Murmansk, July 2016).

#### *Interaction with Foreign Actors and Branding*

Branding is now a constitutive part of the city used to communicate a local identity to its own population as well as to external observers. In a neoliberal economy, cities have to market themselves like any other commodity in order to attract investors as well as tourists: the goal is to look global, creative, and smart. But branding is much more than just a product of neoliberal thinking to stimulate consumption. It gives cities the opportunity to produce a symbolic power that will impact their residents in their interaction with the authorities and therefore in the creation of an urban regime that is also an affective geography and urban imaginary (Dinnie, 2011; Vanolo, 2017; for the Russian case, see Makarychev and Yatsyk, 2015).

In terms of city branding, Murmansk stands above Yakutsk and Norilsk. The city promotes itself as separate from the region—the Murmansk region’s other cities being declining mining monotowns, they are less attractive than the regional capital—even if it plays on some appealing elements of the surrounding nature, such as ski resorts and forests. In its branding, Murmansk orients itself

mostly toward Scandinavian countries that are seen as key partners for investments and progressive neighbors, and targets Scandinavian tourists by offering winter sports cheaper than in Norway, for instance (Murmansk Regional Government, 2018; on Arctic tourism, see Pashkevich, 2013; Stepanova and Shulepov, 2016). It also tries to cultivate its status as both an industrial and a military port, the host of the Northern Fleet, and the point of departure for the Northern Sea Route and the booming Arctic cruise industry (Nilsen, 2016). In that respect, Murmansk competes intensely with Arkhangelsk, which it has been battling for the title of Russia’s Arctic Capital. Arkhangelsk benefits from a rich historical and architectural legacy, as well as an Arctic Federal University (the status of “federal university” is the highest in Russia, bringing guaranteed state subsidies and privileged recognition), while Murmansk appears more industrialized and less charming, but is economically more dynamic and better connected to Nordic Europe.

For Yakutsk, branding itself as a city outside of the republic framework presents some challenges. The majority of branding efforts have been done at the republic level, emphasizing Sakha’s wilderness (e.g., tourism to the Lena River Pillars), its richness in terms of prehistory (e.g., preserved mammoths), permafrost, and ethnic identity (celebrated through festivals and handicrafts, especially jewelry) (author’s fieldwork, Yakutsk, July 2017). Cultural tourism therefore constitutes a central element of this branding, even if the city is not a tourist destination and has little to offer besides being the point of departure for the rest of the republic. Nevertheless, it operates a techno-park for start-ups and hosts several important festivals, including one around the Olonkho epic, recognized by UNESCO as a Masterpiece of Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity (Kuklina and Shishigina, in press). Moreover, the massive rural exodus of young Yakuts to Yakutsk reveals that the city is seen as “the place to be” for all those hoping for upward social mobility. Indeed the city’s aspiration to become Russia’s Arctic capital is not unfounded.

Branding is more difficult for Norilsk. While it is no longer a closed city that once required Russian citizens to get a permit to visit it, its legacy as a place that limited the flow of non-residents endures. Its high level of pollution, its gulag past, and its partly abandoned Soviet suburbs do not constitute fertile ground for innovative branding, although post-industrial tourism could be an option if the city were interested in attracting foreigners. However, this lack of branding does not mean that the city lacks a strong local

identity. Residents show a high level of local patriotism and pride in the city's industrial successes and its pioneering status, a pride that is also shared by foreign labor migrants (Laruelle and Hohmann, 2017).

### ORGANIC, SYMBOLIC, AND INSTRUMENTAL REGIMES

The three Arctic cities discussed above represent the three categories proposed by Stone (1987, 1989), and Mossberger and Stocker (2001) in their typology of urban regimes.

Norilsk belongs to the category of organic regimes. The city's closeness allows for a tight-knit social fabric that is not welcoming to outsiders. It has a fairly homogenous population oriented around the Norilsk Nickel firm and is focused on sustaining the economic and social status quo. The population is highly supportive, for instance, of a new closed status for the city (author's interviews with city council members and association representatives, July 2013 and July 2015), which many see as a way to guarantee the preservation of its status as a stable place. Securing public order is thus seen as a key component of the social consensus. The firm constitutes a hegemonic stakeholder—the other actors can only act at the margins of Norilsk Nickel decisions, trying to influence minor sectors of the city's life, but unable to challenge the firm's dominance.

The city displays nostalgia for the 1960s–70s, when it was a privileged cultural microcosm (Limonier, 2018), and celebrates its glorious Soviet past, with almost no vision of a transformative future. Very few projects try to reinvent Norilsk beyond its extractive industry past and present. Only Norilsk Nickel itself could one day, for profitability reasons, decide to dramatically reduce its activities in Norilsk (by moving them to other regions, as it has already begun to do) and thereby have a life-changing impact on the future of the city. Without this impulse, all the other actors will continue to push for a status quo policy. Due to its status as a provider of strategic resources to the Russian state, Norilsk does not display some of the features of organic regimes in different political contexts, such as a high level of autonomy from external actors. The city functions in a symbiotic relationship with the firm that protects it from overly abrupt changes, but also hampers the development of any post-extractive future.

Yakutsk belongs to the symbolic regime category. Even if the city's identity is consubstantial with that of the republic, it has a clearly forward-looking agenda of transforming the city's image and functionality. It aims to revitalize it not through preserving its architectural heritage (which it did not have), but through cultural Indigenous activities, the production of knowledge and human capital (investing in higher education has been one of the city's main successes), and science and technology (this domain remains more aspirational, given its remoteness and Russia's general business climate).

Contrary to Norilsk, the equilibrium between stakeholders is more balanced in Yakutsk, with no single stakeholder particularly dominant, and certainly no big firm with its own agenda. The main impulse comes from the municipal authorities and the republic administration, whose goal is to make the city demographically and economically prosperous, as well as internationally visible. Again, unlike Norilsk, the municipal authorities are fairly welcoming of resident involvement. Public participation is motivated by symbolic meanings offered to the growing share of the Indigenous population, for whom urbanization is a sign of upward mobility. Yakutsk offers its residents a new urban paradigm founded on identity entrepreneurship: promoting “Sakha-ness” in an urban environment to dissociate Indigenous identity from a rurality partly seen as a lost cause, developing a strong local identity—both local in celebrating its Indigenous roots and global in its will to integrate world trends—and becoming Russia's most famous Indigenous northern city.

Murmansk belongs to the category of instrumental regimes and finds itself, in many respects, halfway between Norilsk and Yakutsk. Like Yakutsk, it does not have a hegemonic stakeholder, yet contrary to it, it features some strong economic actors that play a key role in the city's urban regime. Unlike Yakutsk and similar to Norilsk, it depends on a strong relationship with Moscow because of the city's status as a strategic Russian port. Its urban actors exhibit different agendas, yet they all aim to counter the city's decline since its Soviet golden age by applying concrete policies in different economic sectors: port activities, transport hub, military revival, and winter and Arctic tourism. To that end, a multiplicity of actors with different agendas work together to build functional coalitions: the military lobbies Moscow for more funding for the Northern Fleet; Arctic transport actors compete with Arkhangelsk to secure the city's status as Russia's main Arctic port for the Northern Sea Route; the fishing industry tries to reinvent itself in partnership and competition with Norway; the transport and storage realm tries to improve the city's connectivity; and the municipality makes the most of its proximity to Scandinavia.

In such a context, urban coalitions demonstrate a growing public-private partnership as well as the involvement of foreign investors, often from neighboring Scandinavian countries, and see their value in delivering tangible results to the population. The city has a multifaceted image that performs different functions for different constituencies. Public participation finds itself somewhere between the “closed” Norilsk and the “open” Yakutsk: residents are welcome to engage in the city's everyday functioning but in a much more managed and controlled way, with limited scope for innovation and no ability to propose alternatives to the future outlined for Murmansk by the main local actors and by Moscow.

## CONCLUSIONS

The notion of urban regime offers a comprehensive set of tools for capturing the diversity of social contracts in place in the urban context and should not be reserved only for democratic environments. More authoritarian regimes likewise need to find a common language with their populations: they cannot function purely through repression, but have to favor co-optational and co-creational mechanisms, even if the number of stakeholders participating in decision making is limited. The rise of urban activism in Russia's big metropolises illustrates how much the city level now epitomizes a new way for citizens to "do politics" and display a plurality of opinions and competition that the national level has yet to allow. Because of its size, Russia offers a unique context in which to look at the diversity of urban regimes in a region too often viewed through the prism of authoritarianism, uniformness, and centralization.

Northern cities, built in a challenging climatic environment and consequently facing connectivity challenges, offer an insightful case of urban regime diversity. With the mass exodus of populations from Russia's Arctic regions since the 1990s, cities have had to reinvent themselves by investing in local patriotism, by inculcating a feeling of belonging, and, in some cases, by imagining a new economic future that moves away from resource extraction toward more sustainable innovation and human capital-based sectors. Northern cities' urban regimes are limited in their autonomy due to tax and non-tax systems of income redistribution that primarily benefit the federal center. Yet they still display different coalitions of power that represent the three main categories or urban regimes defined by Mossberger and Stocker (2001): organic, symbolic, and instrumental. This brief exploration of three northern cities hopes to open the path to a more in-depth comparative study of circumpolar urban regimes. With the rapid urbanization of the Arctic in the decades to come (Rasmussen, 2011; Larsen and Fondahl, 2014), Arctic governmentality will be centered not only on preserving traditional ways of life, but on improving ways of living together in an urban context and on taking into consideration the growing Indigenous population as one of the city's main stakeholders.

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