

Symbolic resources of the Russian North in the global experience economy

This Policy Brief gives recommendations for the development of cultural products and creative entrepreneurship in the Russian North through the conceptual lenses of symbolic resources and the experience economy. The global experience economy has changed the value chain logic of the cultural market from the traditional production and consumption of creative products and services into co-creation of cultural experiences. This co-creation implies that symbolic resources, such as the cultural heritage, are interpreted in a novel way that transforms them into experiences connected to time and place. Cultural projects, which started in the Russian North-West in late 1990s and follow the logic of the experience economy, have proved their sustainability on the regional and global cultural scenes. Their success is explained by common features of the artistic content and organizational models. These features include the artistic interpretation of Northern cultural symbols and the formation of comfortable spaces for creative interaction of actors with different backgrounds.

- **Recommendation 1.** New visions of the Northern Russian heritage as the valuable resource for cultural innovation should be promoted and supported in the spheres of service design, creative tourism and event management.
- **Recommendation 2.** Creative places of the Russian North hosting experimental art activities, as well as traditional cultural and commercial events need to be promoted as powerful territorial brands.
- **Recommendation 3.** Applied research on management and organizational issues of the “unorthodox” cultural products development and on the implementation of hybrid symbolic meanings to the traditional landscapes will help to share the best practices of cultural entrepreneurship.

Value chain perspective on symbolic resources in the experience economy of Russian North

The experience economy approach shifts attention to the role of the consumer on the cultural market, thereby contrasting the creative industry view that stresses the diversity of producers and suppliers of cultural goods. In the experience economy, boundaries between distributors, producers and consumers become blurred, which transforms the traditional production-consumption value chain into co-creation of cultural experiences in social networks.

Symbolic resources is a concept that highlights the importance of the symbolic basis of a creative product in defining its distinctiveness, competitive position, and sustainability of its competitive advantage on the cultural market. **Semiotic codes** and **material base** of creative products form the two dimensions of the symbolic resources. **Semiotic codes** give meaning to both traditional collective and innovative individual artistic work, and shape how audiences interpret it. **Material base** includes materials, technologies and socio-technical systems that give form to creative products and enable their production and consumption [1].

The image of the North, represented on the global cultural scene, demonstrates several universal features: expansive landscapes, severe climate, premodern roots of sustainable relations between man and nature, solitude and introspection.

The “**Russian North**” refers to the European North located in Northwest Russia on the cultural map of Russia [2]. Its symbolic capital centers around cultural landscape (architectural monuments, historic look of cities and villages, folk crafts, folklore, rituals and festivals) that provides building blocks for attractive and sustainable local cultural projects. Preservation, popularization and state protection of the cultural heritage objects of the Russian North, and provision of diverse cultural services to the local population (offered by cultural, educational and artistic institutions) are set as priorities in the Russian state-level cultural policy.

The value of the cultural market for regional development in Russia is difficult to analyze quantitatively, even from a traditional value chain perspective, as the statistics on cultural institutions and enterprises do not recognize “creative industries” either at national or regional level. Moreover, as the sector combines heterodox commercial, non-commercial and state supported activities, the impact of creative industries on regional development is better to analyze qualitatively in terms of the enrichment of local cultural atmosphere or of the formation of new public spaces. The value chain model for the experience economy provides a framework for this.

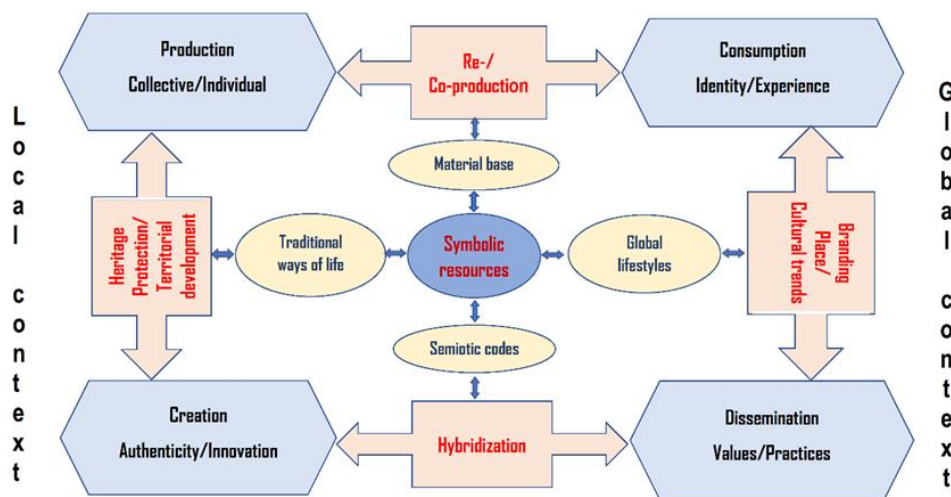


Figure 1: The value chain model for the symbolic resources is used to assess how geographically localized production uses the advantages of the global experience economy

Global reproduction of local cultural symbols: authenticity at risk?

Construction and promotion of the “Northern” myths, which reflect the local folk knowledge, plays an important role in the creative business development in the Russian North. The archaic ethnic symbols, traditional aesthetic conventions, hand-made technologies and natural materials form the prototypical heritage objects, which represent the local cultural authenticity. Authenticity is the most valuable asset of local products on the global art market. At the same time, individual entrepreneurs and enterprises who craft products based on unique local traditions compete with the mass replication of ethno-goods (souvenirs, popular spectacles, etc.) on the Russian national and global markets.

Furthermore, creative interpretation of the authentic content often results in niche or specialized cultural goods that seldom find their art markets at the regional level.

Therefore, local producers of authentic cultural goods would need support at the later stages of creative business development to introduce them to the global lifestyles market. This includes branding, where authentic symbolic resources are labeled into local brands to make them distinctive from kitsch and mass reproduction.

Combining local and global in the experience economy of the Russian North

The symbolic resources that make the Russian North distinctive on the global cultural market include the **semiotic codes** that blend modern global (“western”) and traditional Russian themes. Local producers have successfully adopted the logic of the experience economy and created new meanings to the area’s folk lifestyles and crafts to reflect contemporary cultural trends.

- Producers of cultural goods combine features of the global “ethno”, “eco” and “slow life” cultural trends (for example, brand “Bronskitea”, fashion designer Nikolay Teryuhin) to make them distinctive on the global experience market.

The **material base** that gives form to local creative products and enable their production and consumption include

- Emerging creative clusters (for example, Karelian crafts cluster) that establish cooperation platforms for local producers of traditional goods, innovative designers, heritage managers and cultural promoters.
- Multicultural and democratic creative platforms, such as land-art and community art museums, open-air festivals and artistic residences at heritage sites (“Taibola” festival, “Zvozland”, “Maryin Dom” and “Taf Oshevsk” art residences).

Participatory creative activity on these platforms fosters art professionals’ dialogue with the audience. Multicultural audiences (including tourists, amateur actors, musicians and artists, students etc.) enrich universal art language with local and subcultural symbols.

Multidisciplinary and multilateral cultural platforms are open for equal participation of all social groups. Therefore, they should be used strategically to connect art professionals, creative entrepreneurs and societies, and thereby foster local development.

Further information

The analysis of the sustainable creative projects which articulate the Northern Russian symbolic resources on the global market is available in:

Soloviova A. (2017) Local stories in the context of creative industries internationalization (Arkhangelsk region case) // *Joining Creativity.* / Ed. by K. Shumak NP «Karelsky resursny tsentr obshestvennih organizatsiy» Petrozavodsk: Ostrova, pp. 35-52 (<http://joiningcreativity.com/ru/node/313>)

For more information about Northern Russian creative enterprises visit:

Creative industries of the North database

<http://arcticartinstitute.com/en/creativeindustries/>

Karelian stories. Karelian crafts cluster <http://karelianstories.ru/>

Nikolay Teryuhin <https://terjuhin.ru/>

Taf.oshevensk <https://www.instagram.com/taf.oshevensk/>

Notes

[1] Candace J., Lorenzen M. & Sapsed, J. (2016) *Creative Industries: A Typology of Change* <https://www.oxfordhandbooks.com/view/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199603510.001.001/oxfordhb-9780199603510-e-030>

[2] The **Russian North** includes the territories of Vologda, Arkhangelsk and Murmansk regions (oblast), republics of Karelia and Komi that demonstrate similarities of the Russian cultural traditions and share the cultural links with the diverse Northern European ethnic groups. During the XIX – XX century the “Russian North” gained appraisal as a preserved heritage area, the monument of the Russian and the world culture.



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