





RUSSIA'S SPATIAL DEVELOPMENT AND THE EMERGING GREATER EURASIA: FACTORS, TRAJECTORIES AND PRIORITIES

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Contemporary Russia's spatial development is markedly affected by profound geoeconomic and geopolitical shifts, progressively more visible in terms of magnitude and repercussions. For Russia, the positive impact of these changes has become increasingly linked to the emergence of the Greater Eurasia macro-structure. This article aims to develop a contemporary conceptual approach to Greater Eurasia as a socio-geographical mega-structure given Russia's opposition to the collective West. Additionally, it seeks to identify, using this approach, the strategic interests, opportunities and limitations of Russia's spatial dynamics on the path towards Eurasian continentalism, which promotes transboundary cooperation and mutually supportive co-development of Eurasian states. The focus of this contribution is on the most crucial contemporary trends and principal contradictions in the transformation of the Russian space. The study provides a picture of the framework of 'greater' Eurasian integration, emphasising its connection to intensifying interregional and inter-municipal interactions. A rationale is outlined for shifting the country's economic activity towards the east and north, with priorities identified given the inertia of spatial processes and the growing significance of Siberia in the Russian space. The potential and efficiency of prolonging the 'Moscow-centric' arrangement of the Russian space are assessed from the perspective of ensuring the multidirectional development of the latter. Special attention is paid to the 'municipalisation' of approaches to the strategic planning of Russia's spatial development in the context of Eurasian continental integration.

Keywords:

spatial development, integration processes, municipalities, Greater Eurasia, Eurasian continentalism, Russia, Siberia

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Introduction and problem setting. The radical exacerbation of the geopolitical situation in 2022, when the world was believed [1] to be on the brink of a new world war, created serious threats to Russia's national security. The confrontation has reshaped the country's priorities in the economy, transport, logistics, foreign trade, spatial development and other spheres. Sanction pressures from the 'collective West' have resulted in the weakening or complete severance of ties with countries deemed unfriendly. Notably, Western countries comprised 65 % of Russia's foreign trade in 2019 [2]. The transit of Russian goods through the territories of EU and NATO member states has become more complex. Maritime transport options in the western direction have become less viable as well due to potential vulnerabilities at exits from the Baltic and Black Seas. Access of Russian company ships to European ports is being denied along with the entry of foreign ships into Russian ports, leading to the cessation of cargo insurance and the halt of services for Russian vessels. These restrictions result in either the disruption or lengthening of logistical chains, growing transportation and transaction costs, reduced efficiency of export-import operations and consequently, risks for the country's economy and its territories.

There are two avenues to mitigate the emerging problems and threats — the developments extensively explored and systematised in the literature, including by Russian social geographers [3—5]. The first is the formation of a powerful autonomous Russian economy. This would require efforts to evolve national raw material processing along with high-tech production, promote import substitution and obtain diversified end products. The second involves refining and strengthening integration with 'friendly' Eurasian states, aiming to reduce dependence on the market of the 'collective West'. This approach aligns with the contemporary trend of economic regionalisation, which is well within the logic of the prevailing cycle of disintegration [6]. These avenues complement each other and should be pursued simultaneously, along with the overall strengthening of Russia's global position. Fortifying the nation's standing would require Russia's full and productive participation in establishing an alternative to the current dominant global 'centre of power'. This way, the global 'poles' will be balanced by creating a union, or bloc, of several 'non-Western' Eurasian countries. Since late 2015-early 2016, this somewhat amorphous, fragmented, asymmetric and externally vague structure has been conceptualised and identified in Russian scientific discourse as Greater Eurasia [7—11].

The relevance of this topic is growing along with scholarly interest: as of December 2023, the RINC database contains 2,459 articles focusing on the issue. However, further research is required to explore the social geographical aspects of the formation of Greater Eurasia and the conditions and consequences of Russia's development within this context. Very few studies have delved into the transformations of Eurasian continental integration, a topic gaining impor-

tance as China, which has become Russia's primary trade partner amid the special military operation, solidifies its economic position. There is an urgent need to evaluate the effect of such integration on the priorities and strategies of Russia's spatial development. Moreover, the interests of Russian regions and their constituent municipalities have not been clearly defined. It is also necessary to investigate the possibilities and limitations of forging complementing economic ties and running major integration projects within the framework of the emerging macro-regional bloc. The key aspects of creating Greater Eurasia need to be further explored, including its composition, boundaries, prerequisites, barriers and territorial and other bonds holding together such large and diverse countries. There is no thorough understanding of the limits, depth and formats of their economic and political integration. Nor is it clear what global transport infrastructure projects should be given priority to open up new opportunities for the parties involved and specific territories. In light of the above considerations, this article aims, on the one hand, to provide an economic-geographical rationale for Russia's Eurasian continentalism strategy, which, as we believe, is a major trajectory and potential catalyst for the country's development. On the other, it seeks to determine the interests, opportunities and limitations of Russia's spatial development within the framework of Greater Eurasia.

It is important to highlight that we will approach the formation of Greater Eurasia through the lens of Russia's spatial development. Thus, along with analysing the phenomenon of Greater Eurasia and the country's position within it, we will examine its influence on the Russian space: the formation of a multidirectional spatial development paradigm, a recent surge of interest in understanding the role of Moscow, its environs and eastern regions in the country's socio-economic development, and the need to pay closer attention to municipalities.

The phenomenon of Greater Eurasia and its impact on the spatial dynamics of Russia: a conceptual approach. When exploring and conceptualising Greater Eurasia as a factor in Russia's spatial development, it is important to bear in mind that this unique phenomenon embraces a multitude of integration structures, processes, and projects, all unfolding simultaneously and concertedly within the main massif of Eurasia. This circumstance leads to Eurasian polycentrism, bringing it into the spotlight and complicating the issue of defining the boundaries of Greater Eurasia. Multiple conflicting demarcations (see [7; 8; 12]) arise as a result. Delimitation of Greater Eurasia can only partly and in the most general way rely on the boundaries of institutionalised associations involved in the Greater Eurasian partnership of states or groups of states. Nor would it be advisable to equate the geographical extent of Greater Eurasia with the combined territory of these countries.

The cohesion of Greater Eurasia, albeit real, may sometimes appear theoretical, notional and elusive. It is shaped not so much by the actual socio-economic proximity and integrity of individual states as by the territorial configuration and geographical circumstances. Although most countries comprising Greater Eurasia remain geopolitically remote from the 'collective west', not all of them are its outright opponents. Moreover, competition among Eurasian states, at times escalating to confrontation, is also present. Neighbourhood is a significant but not decisive factor in the geoeconomy of many de facto actors in Greater Eurasia. For all 12 non-European landlocked states of Eurasia, which account for 6.5 million km² and 160 million population, using the neighbourhood factor to its full capacity is tantamount to gaining entry into the global market, i.e. it is a question of survival.

Both as an idea and an actual economic-geographical construct, Greater Eurasia initially pursued dynamic and sustainable growth characteristics of almost all Asian states due to their demographic landscapes. Another principal growth factor was burgeoning logistics, which has enabled the creation of production and distribution chains connecting Europe and China, as well as other territories. The nascent disintegrative world order trends and geopolitical considerations have made the Greater Eurasia project even more important for Russia (particularly amid the special military operation), adding momentum to the ever more visible shift towards Asia.

From Russia's perspective, Greater Eurasia is significantly Sinocentric in economic terms, which corresponds to reality as the Belt and Road initiative serves as the main driver of Eurasian integration. Typical of this vision is the perception of China as a catalyst for revitalising the Russian economy and accelerating extensive integration within the EAEU [13, p. 65]). In demographic and geopolitical terms, Greater Eurasia is asymmetrically polycentric. It is worth noting that the narrative of a broad Eurasian partnership is largely of Russian origin, circulating and looming large in the country and among its closest allies. This narrative derives from the renaissance of classical Eurasianism, as seen in Pyotr Savitsky's concept of 'landlocked neighbourhoods', and a reincarnated notion of Greater Europe — a single space between Lisbon and Vladivostok [14] — adapted to the post-Crimean situation. Utilising the latter idea not only provides an additional conceptual framework for Russia's turn to the East, whose major precepts were declared as early as the second half of the 2000s [10] but also raises the profile of 'minor' Eurasian integration (Leonid Vardomsky, for example, notes that Eurasian cooperation in the EAEU format lacks 'a discernible trend towards an increase in trade and economic cohesion' [15, p. 113]). Yet, as Leonid Bezrukov writes [7], the economic-geographical purpose of Greater Eurasia is to achieve sustainable continental Eurasian integration by activating international economic ties and creating transport corridors. In other words

(see [16]), it seeks to establish new organisational forms for people, infrastructure and economic activities on vast, heterogeneous and fragmented expanses of Eurasia in response to the drift of the geoeconomic and geopolitical potential towards the east and west. These organisational forms encompass transport corridors, industrial hubs, cross-border cooperation zones, transboundary regions and areas of cross-cultural interactions. Taken together, they can be defined as a dispersed mega-structure comprising the support framework of Greater Eurasian integration, which, in turn, is a product of a combination of multi-aspect multidirectional Eurasian partnerships and alliances. Under the influence of demographic and economic factors, these organisational forms have taken on a transcontinental Asian-European nature, gravitating towards the landlocked areas of Eurasia. These circumstances provide a basis for postulating Eurasian continentalism as a distinct worldview, a unique geostrategy and an integrative region-building socio-geographical process, which significantly impacts Russia by influencing its regions and municipalities.

It is crucial to bear in mind that Greater Eurasia is not so much a 'structure of structure' as a spatial structure superimposed on existent spatial formation. Therefore, the relationship between the Russian space and the area of Greater Eurasian integration should not be viewed as merely that between a part and the whole. It should also be noted that continentalism is primarily interpreted as a set of ideas, approaches, and practices of a state's inland expansion [17; 18], often contrasted with similar endeavours by 'maritime' powers [19; 20]. Although Eurasian continentalism was previously associated exclusively with Russia's interests [21–23], in recent years, China has been increasingly named as the beneficiary of this process [24; 25].

In post-Soviet Eurasia, where various multiscale multidirectional spatial expansions coexist with evolving practices of partnership and cooperation, it is reasonable to distinguish between particular continentalisms (Chinese, European, Russian, Turkish-Turkic, Iranian, etc.) and a unified Eurasian continentalism. The latter carries a meaning that is markedly different from earlier interpretations, one that considers the multi-actor and polycentric nature of Eurasia, focusing on low-conflict, mutually beneficial, and mutually supportive co-development of Eurasian states.

This type of continentalism seems to underpin the formation of the spatial structure of Greater Eurasia, which fulfils three functions in relation to the Russian space. Firstly, it provides a new partly institutionalised external framework and a preferable exogenous environment. Secondly, it represents a prolonged structure shift. Thirdly, Greater Eurasia serves as the 'friendly other' encompassing the Russian territories that are explicitly, latently or potentially involved

in Greater Eurasian integration. This integration is seen as both the impetus for and the outcome of transformations. Driven by external sub-global factors, these changes are linked with additional opportunities, new characteristics, and risks.

Although the trends and innovations associated with Eurasian integration have become visible and tangible, they are not sufficient to overcome the inertia of the Russian space. Nor are they capable of effectively restructuring the country's core-periphery landscape, its natural, economic and settlement zoning or national features of regionalisation. Their potential impact and multi-aspect spatial socio-economic, geocultural and geopolitical consequences largely correlate with Russia's position and role in Eurasia in the processes of shaping its renewed 'greater' boundaries.

The place and role of Russia in the Emerging Greater Eurasia: a socio-geographical aspect. Russian geographers are becoming increasingly aware of the outlines of a new reality, which they will need to conceptualise and explore. A principal aspect of this new reality is the growing duality, instability and ambiguity of Russia's standing in the emerging Greater Eurasia. On the one hand, Russia is potentially the largest member of this integration project, occupying 32 % of Eurasia's territory and holding an advantageous position due to the vastness and configuration of its borders shared with 16 countries, which account collectively for nearly 29 % of Eurasia's population. These circumstances objectively determine not only Russia's trans-Eurasian transport and transit opportunities but also its geopolitical significance as the core of Greater Eurasian integration [8]. On the other hand, for modern Russia, a Greater Eurasian unity highlights the loss of the country's exclusive geostrategic standing once enjoyed by the USSR against the background of the rising influence of other 'centres of power' in the post-Soviet space. Yet another concern is the prospect of forfeiting Russia's core position due to a combination of demographic and economic trends, as well as environmental and climatic characteristics.

The average population density across Eurasia is 12 times that in Russia. The country's demographic contribution to Eurasia (and 'demography is destiny'¹) has been constantly shrinking, amounting to 4.6 % in 1970, 3.7 % in 1990 and 2.7 % in 2022.² Furthermore, the country's economic positions have been extremely unstable throughout the entire post-Soviet period (Table 1).

¹ Zakaria, F. 2024, The Self-Doubting Superpower. America Shouldn't Give Up on the World It Made, *Foreign Affairs*, URL: https://www.foreignaffairs.com/united-states/self-doubting-superpower-america-fareed-zakaria?check_logged_in=1&utm_medium=promo_email&utm_source=lo_flows&utm_campaign=registered_user_welcome&utm_term=email_1&utm_content=20231227 (accessed 09.01.2024).

² Calculated by the authors based on data from *World Population by Country 2024*, database.earth, URL: <https://database.earth/population/by-country/> (accessed 29.12.2023).

Table 1

**The volume and development level of the Russian economy as compared
to the performance of some Eurasian states (Russia = 100)**

State	GDP at official exchange rates				GDP per capita (PPP)			
	1998	2008	2019	2022	1998	2008	2019	2022
China	378	277	843	802	45	38	55	59
Japan	1512	307	302	189	467	175	141	126
Germany	826	226	230	182	463	187	190	175
India	155	72	167	153	34	18	23	23
UK	610	176	168	138	433	182	164	151
France	555	176	161	124	427	174	168	153
Italy	469	145	119	91	458	176	152	145
Republic of Korea	141	63	98	75	247	149	144	139
Indonesia	35	31	66	59	80	38	41	40
Saudi Arabia	54	31	50	49	697	243	163	163
Turkey	102	46	45	40	164	80	93	103
Iran	41	25	17	18	183	86	49	50
Kazakhstan	8	8	11	10	119	89	91	85
Ukraine	15	11	9	7	70	47	44	35

Prepared based on World Bank data (URL: <https://databank.worldbank.org>).

Gradually overcoming the wide post-Soviet disparity between its economy and those of now unfriendly states, as well as Japan, Russia forges alliances within Greater Eurasia with influential states such as China and India, which have experienced faster economic and demographic growth in recent years. This objectively aggravates Russia's positions, limiting its potential influence on other post-Soviet states, including those in the South Caucasus and Central Asia. At the same time, vast Russian territories are turning into double semi-periphery/periphery, with borderlands being the most affected areas.

In these conditions, Russia should develop and reconstruct its own space, aligning with the logic and interests of Eurasian continentalism. To this end, it is essential to initiate and bolster transboundary region-building with the participation of friendly states. Moreover, Russia should uphold its centuries-old territorial model, functional connectivity, hierarchy of urban centres and patterns of interregional interactions. Thus, the country would ensure internal cohesion while preserving a socio-geographic basis for sovereign, geopolitically flexible and multidirectional spatial development.

Unlike China, Russia cannot be victorious in the confrontation with the West if it plays by the rules established by the latter. Aware of this circumstance, the West, particularly the US, tend to radically change these rules to serve its inter-

ests. In this context, Russia is forced to act as Europe's, and the world's, most conspicuous revisionists,¹ challenging the order that was established with total disregard for its interest and experiencing growing pressure from all directions.

The beginning of the special military operation marked a transition to an entirely new period in the country's development, albeit prerequisites for this change had emerged over the previous years. It is the hour of triumph for manufacturing sectors — a fact that Russia's geopolitical opponents could not but acknowledge.² Hi-tech industries are flourishing in the regions that have traditionally been hubs of such activities and expanding into new territories.³ These changes are not only indicative of deglobalisation and localisation of the value chain within the country and friendly nations but also betoken demetropolitanisation, i. e. the transfer of points of economic growth from globalised cities and their agglomerations to revitalised industrial centres.

While the historic feat of the USSR, which was an unfree country, was giving freedom of choice to non-Western nations, as Sergey Karaganov has repeatedly emphasised, China's considerable accomplishment was dispelling the illusion about the absence of alternatives to the liberal development model, which weds a market economy with the Western interpretation of pluralistic democracy. Now, Russia too can reproduce the Soviet achievement by demonstrating to Eurasia and the world an alternative spatial organisation model rooted in reindustrialisation and demetropolitanisation.

One can, and in effect should, await positive changes in Russia's education and healthcare. Ranking 51st on the Human Development Index, Russia outstrips by far almost all of its friendly Eurasian partners.⁴ Yet, there is an urgent need to expand the country's potential in research and technology. In 2022, Russia ranked 47th in the Global Innovation Index, while China, Turkey and India scored

¹ Shuper, V. 2022, Rossiya kak kolybel' revizionizma [Russia as the cradle of revisionism], 25.05.2022, *Valdai international discussion club*, URL: <https://ru.valdaiclub.com/a/highlights/rossiya-kak-kolybel-revizionizma/> (accessed 05.01.2024).

² Prokopenko, A. 2024, Putin's Unsustainable Spending Spree. How the War in Ukraine Will Overheat the Russian Economy, 08.01.2024, *Foreign affairs*, URL: https://www.foreignaffairs.com/russian-federation/putins-unsustainable-spending-spree?utm_medium=newsletters&utm_source=fatoday&utm_campaign=Putin's%20Unsustainable%20Spending%20Spree&utm_content=20240108&utm_term=FA%20Today%20-%20112017#author-info (accessed 08.01.2024).

³ Suntsova, Yu. 2023, Konets fil'mov. V Izhevskye zakryvayut tretiy TTs [The end of movies. A third shopping center is closing in Izhevsk] 15.09.2023, *Novye Izvestiya*, URL: <https://newzv.ru/news/2023-09-15/konets-filmov-v-izhevskye-tretiy-tts-zakryvayut-pod-proizvodstvo-bespilotnikov-419358?ysclid=lo1rl3a1ta758528015> (accessed 23.12.2023).

⁴ Human Development Index (HDI) by Country 2024, *World Population Review*, URL: <https://worldpopulationreview.com/country-rankings/hdi-by-country> (accessed 24.12.2023).

higher: 11th, 37th and 40th, respectively. Buttressed by sustainable socio-economic development, success along these lines can counterbalance the country's peripheralisation, rendering Russia one of the key members in a genuinely, rather than declaratively, polycentric Greater Eurasia.

Multidirectionality of Russia's spatial development: problems and trajectories in the context of the emerging greater Eurasia. A largely coastal country with vast borderlands, Russia is exposed to multiple neighbourhoods (as described by Andrey Treivish [26]). Indeed, 51 regions, accounting for 77.5% of the country's territory, have land or sea borders with other countries. Moreover, its spatial development is increasingly characterised by multidirectionality, which has become ever more pronounced amid the formation of Greater Eurasia.

Much in line with the concept of Greater Eurasian integration, the eastern direction has recently been considered principal, as reflected in Russia's Spatial Development Strategy 2025.¹ Sharing this vision, we nevertheless emphasise the need for a socio-geographical specification of the country's turn to the East. This elaboration would, firstly, help overcome the thinking trap of oversimplified and superficial perception of the issues that do not consider the particularities of the Russian space. Secondly, it would emphasise that the turn to the east does not consist solely in fostering the advanced development of Siberia and the Russian Far East, which, as frequently highlighted in the literature [27–30], is experiencing depopulation, and the relevant cross-border, transboundary and export-related aspects, but it also involves the prolongation and reformatting of Russia's post-Soviet maritime focus, including the efforts to evolve the Northern Sea Route [3]. Eurasian continentalism should be placed within this broader context as an ideologeme and the practice of forming, sustaining and stimulating inland and marine-inland integrative transnational and transboundary structures and processes.

If Russia is considered a leading and sovereign actor in Eurasian integration rather than a semi-periphery/periphery eclipsed by the rapidly developing exogenous cores, the movement of population and the economy towards the south and east, particularly towards the border and coastal areas, seems to be the most logical and geostrategically advantageous response for the Russian space to the Greater Eurasia factor. This process should take place alongside the strengthening of Russia's historical socio-economic core — the Moscow region and its adjacent regions in conjunction with the Saint Petersburg agglomeration. In re-

¹ On the approval of the Strategy for the Spatial Development of the Russian Federation 2025, Decree of the Government of the Russian Federation of 13.02.2019, № 207-р (version of 30.09.2022), *Digital Repository of Legal and Regulatory-Technical Documents*, URL: https://www.consultant.ru/document/cons_doc_LAW_318094/ (accessed 23.12.2023).

cent years (Table 2), southern regions have been gaining prominence within the Russian space, which is explained by the role these territories have in agricultural exports, logistics and geopolitics [31]. Moreover, southern urban agglomerations, coastal areas and the regions of the North Caucasus have been playing a growing role in the country's demographic landscape.

Table 2

**Economic, demographic and settlement shifts
in the Russian space between 2015 and 2021**

Region	Changes in the contribution of a federal district/region to the national total, percentage points		
	Population	GRP**	Capital investment
Central Federal District, including Moscow Moscow region	+ 0.154	- 0.06	+ 8.374
	+ 0.247	- 0.37	+ 6.286
	+ 0.281	+ 0.81	+ 3.149
Northwestern Federal District, including St. Petersburg Leningrad region Kaliningrad region	+ 0.082	+ 2.75	- 1.331
	+ 0.096	+ 2.64	- 0.119
	+ 0.093	- 0.07	+ 0.170
	+ 0.034	- 0.03	- 0.169
Southern Federal District, including Krasnodar Krai	+ 0.100	- 0.49	- 1.043
	+ 0.112	- 0.30	- 0.564
North Caucasus Federal District	+ 0.209	- 0.38	- 0.158
Volga Federal District, including Tatarstan	- 0.371	- 1.38	- 3.188
	+ 0.024	+ 0.01	- 1.411
Ural Federal District, including Tyumen region and the autonomous districts	+ 0.037	+ 0.01	- 4.748
	+ 0.122	+ 0.47	- 4.256
Siberian Federal District	- 0.890	- 0.38	+ 0.952
Far Eastern Federal District	- 0.058	- 0.05	+ 0.945

Prepared based on Rosstat data (Regions of Russia. Socio-economic indicators, Moscow, *Rosstat*, 2023, p. 43–44, 460–461, 477–478).

Although a statistically significant uprise in investment activity in the Far Eastern and Siberian federal districts (Table 2) is indicative of such a shift, positive changes in the demographic situation, manufacturing and residential development have not yet occurred. Sixteen out of 21 regions of these federal districts are experiencing depopulation. They are still greatly outstripped by the Central federal district, whose industry developed the fastest across the country in 2023. Furthermore, home to 17 % of Russia's population, the two federal districts account for a mere 12 % of newly built residential development.¹ Therefore, it can

¹ Calculated based on data from. Regions of Russia. Socio-economic indicators 2023, *Rosstat*, URL: https://rosstat.gov.ru/storage/mediabank/Region_Pokaz_2023.pdf (accessed 29.12.2023).

be surmised that Russia's incorporation into the structures of the emerging Greater Eurasia is concurrent to a considerable extent with the replication of the country's established territorial-economic and settlement architecture. This concomitance reinforces the Moscow-centrism trends [32] and, in a broader context, a general westward orientation.

The complexity of the Russian space is increasing as a result, adding further to the fundamental contradiction between the Eurasian autonomy of this space and the prospect of a new internationalisation of Russian regions and their municipalities — one that is no longer European but specifically Eurasian. The former phenomenon emerges prominently in the dichotomy between Lesser and Greater Eurasia [8], as well as the prevalent perception of Russia as the 'North' [33] and 'Northern Eurasia' [34]) dominated by centripetal, i. e. capital-oriented, trends, while the latter phenomenon acquires geostrategic multidirectionality as socio-economic disparities and geopolitical risks intensify.

The support framework of Greater Eurasian integration: the Siberian phenomenon

The significance of Siberia for positioning Russia in Greater Eurasia and ensuring the existence of Russian statehood encompasses various dimensions, including historical, geopolitical, economic and military-strategic aspects. Yet, the development of Eurasian partnerships, primarily those with China, requires careful attention to the phenomenon of contemporary Siberia. Perceived today as the mid-Russia [35, p. 93], this region is also seen as the 'core' of Russia's new configuration of the system of Eurasian interactions [36]). It is essential to identify the borders of Siberia, which have been variously defined [37], while simultaneously exploring the possibilities of preserving its demographic landscape, boosting its economic development and ensuring more effective incorporation of the region into the Russian economic and settlement space for the benefit of its residents. These tasks need to be addressed in a systematic yet flexible manner while viewing Siberia as a space bonded by shared history, communication lines and mindset. It is equally important to remember that the unity of Siberian territories is undoubtedly growing in Greater Eurasia. The mega-region of Siberia must be understood in conjunction with its complex geographical structure, diverse conditions, and various formats of spatial socio-economic development. Particular attention should be paid to cross-border regionalization, which is currently gravitating towards the Sino-Russian border, namely the Trans-Siberian Railway belt, and the Arctic zone, where the infrastructure of the Northern Sea Route looms large.

The special status of Siberia is accounted for not only by its proximity to Asia's leading socio-economic powers but also by its predominantly inland position, far removed from ice-free seas, oceans, and major internal and external markets. These factors result in higher transportation costs, which in turn increase

the final prices of products. Despite its harsh climate and low population density over much of its territory, Siberia — the planet's largest landmass — possesses unique resources and raw material wealth and is home to powerful industrial centres. Siberia, particularly the Tyumen region and its autonomous districts, which have recently been economically and geographically gravitating towards Ural, is the largest contributor to the country's budgetary and financial system, providing 45% of federal tax revenue. As Dmitry Trenin has noted, control over Siberia makes Russia the largest country in the world and ensures its status as a great geopolitical power [38].

The radical change in the geopolitical situation that took place in 2022 unlocked new development opportunities for Russia's eastern inland macro-regions — the Volga region, Ural, Siberia and the Far East — in response to the need for a relatively independent economy. Moreover, promoted as a 'secure strategic rear', these territories have favourable conditions for new industrialisation. The anticipated eastward shift of the economy and production towards Siberia, Ural and the Volga region and the gravitation of transport and logistics to the coastal zones of Russia's Far East will hopefully encourage the population to move in the same direction, albeit on a smaller scale. This change will, in turn, strengthen Russia's standing within the formats of Greater Eurasian partnership.

New positive prospects for the development of Siberia as part of Greater Eurasia are associated with three lines of action [39].

Firstly, there are new opportunities to benefit from continental neighbourhoods: transport corridors linking Siberia to nearby inland markets will significantly reduce transport costs, compensating for constraints on 'plugging' into the global market, which is dominated by developed coastal countries. For example, rail export distances from the central part of Siberia, the Kemerovo region, to the main domestic seaports are colossal: 4,100 km to Baltic Sea ports, 5,000 km to Barents Sea ports and 5,800 km to those of the Sea of Japan. Meanwhile, distances to the capitals of neighbouring countries are significantly shorter: 1,500 km to Astana, 2,700 km to Ulaanbaatar, 2,900 km to Tashkent and 4,000 km to Beijing. Once the planned meridional transport corridors are established, the distances from the Kemerovo region to inland cities of China — Urumqi and Lanzhou — will become shorter compared to domestic seaports. Additionally, the distances to capitals such as Islamabad, Kabul, and Delhi will be relatively similar. Not only are the shipping distances important but also the transport and logistics schemes have significance. The competitiveness of Siberian exports to neighbouring Greater Eurasian countries will be much higher compared to existing arrangements as far as the key transport cost indicator is concerned: additional costs associated with transshipment, lengthy sea passages and subsequent transfer to land transport will be eliminated.

Secondly, closer international cooperation facilitates the processing of Siberian raw materials on-site through organising internationally competitive

high-value-added production and end-product manufacturing, when economically feasible and resources are sufficient. It is necessary to strive for parity in trade and the efficient division of labour between Siberia and Greater Eurasian countries. Proof of the eastern regions' competitive advantage — a phenomenon that still requires, however, a well-thought-out rationale — is the New Angarstroy project seeking to launch the largest full-cycle metallurgical production in Eastern Siberia [40]. This project involves the production and export of high-value-added bulk products to encourage mutually beneficial cooperation between Russia and China.

Thirdly, new international transport corridors are a powerful tool for the economic consolidation of Greater Eurasia's inland territories. Transport along these corridors would be much cheaper than through the rest of the network, and the zones of their immediate influence have the strongest potential for economic development and urban growth. Evolving the Trans-Siberian Railway into a highly efficient corridor requires the construction of a 'super thoroughfare'. New technology solutions should be used to attain this goal, for example, in building elevated tracks. This way, transport costs will be drastically reduced, and transport capacity will significantly increase. The overwhelming impact of ultra-continuity on the Siberian economy will be largely mitigated, and the region's southern latitudinal belt, adjacent to the now modernised Trans-Siberian Railway, will become a priority for 'new industrialisation' through localising processing industries.

Siberia's development within the emerging Greater Eurasia is not without its challenges. Here we will dwell on two of them, one relating to transport and logistics and the other to international trade. The first problem is the difficulty of diversifying raw material export flows to the 'non-Western' world. The scale of the required export reorientation is so monumental that the existing capacities of the railway networks and Far Eastern ports will not be sufficient for a complete redirection of raw material exports to China, India and other Asian countries. The second problem is associated with the risks of trade competition with neighbouring Eurasian countries. For example, due to the similarity in natural resources and export specialisation, Mongolia and the eastern regions of Russia are starting to compete in mineral raw materials markets as suppliers of coal and copper. Both problems can be solved by embracing high-value-added raw material processing thus easing the burden on the transport network, increasing economically viable transport distances and expanding the sizes of market outlets.

Russia's spatial policy should acknowledge the indisputable fact that Siberia is both a national source of raw materials having considerable industrial potential and a supporting macro-region capable of strengthening economic ties with partners in Greater Eurasia. It is essential to recognise that immense Siberian land

is no longer a distant Asian province, but a region that Russia's fate depends on, and its development will be responsible for the country's future prosperity or its demise 41, p. 717].

Moscow-centrism in the multipolar Greater Eurasia: pro et contra

Voices advocating for the relocation of the capital from Moscow to Siberia have resurfaced amid the formation of Greater Eurasia. Proponents of this idea argue that the region is becoming central to the trade flows, as it lies both in the vicinity of key global economic growth points, and, which has become particularly important after the onset of the special military operation, at a considerable distance from unfriendly countries. This discussion reinforces the traditional perception of Moscow as a source of evil for other Russian regions — a city draining them of population and financial resources, ultimately harming the country's economy and itself since it cannot develop rapidly due to excessive population concentration.

Moscow is indeed the main destination of Russian in-migration [42]. According to Rosstat, the continuous increase in population concentration (from 9.068 million at the beginning of 1992 to 13.104 million at the beginning of 2023, or from 6.1 % to 8.9 % of the country's total population) brings not only positive effects but also a host of problems, primarily transport and environmental issues [43; 44]. Moscow has one of the lowest housing availability rates per capita across the nation. Migration from other regions, mainly from nearby Central Russia, to Moscow deprives these territories of part of their workforce necessary for development [45].

Discussed at length in earlier publications [32], Moscow-centricity has been linked to the long-established organisation of Russian society. Despite the inevitability of Moscow-centricity, its adverse effects on the country and the city can and must be mitigated. Current conditions confirm this postulate, providing new arguments in its favour. Neither the largest economy nor the most populated nation of Greater Eurasia, Russia needs to maintain its status and bolster its ability to interact with other Eurasian powers as an equal. A sine qua non here is the involvement of world-ranked global cities, one of which is Moscow [46; 47]. St. Petersburg, another city in Russia enjoying the status, is not a competitor to the capital at the moment. Moscow is the country's hallmark, and no other city — existing or newly built — will compare with it in the foreseeable future.

Moscow-centricity also manifests in the nation's research and technological prowess concentrated in the capital. In 2022, Moscow accounted for 31.1 % of all Russian personnel engaged in research and development, with an additional 12.5 % located in the Moscow region, bringing the total for the capital region to 43.6 %. In St. Petersburg, the figure was 10.5 %, while in the leading eastern

region of the country, Novosibirsk, it was only 3.0%, placing it fifth in the country after the Nizhny Novgorod region. Given Russia's need to rapidly achieve technological sovereignty, the leading contribution of Moscow and the Moscow region is essential. Moreover, Moscow possesses the necessary high-tech capacities and the potential to further develop them. [48].

Moscow's contribution to national performance and its level of socio-economic development have already been repeatedly discussed in the literature, sometimes in great detail [49]. Yet, to date, there is no compelling evidence that Moscow has exhausted its development potential. Throughout the post-Soviet period, the capital's socio-economic growth has been irregular, at times above and at times below the national averages. These fluctuations can be attributed to objective advantages or limitations, as well as the varying success of Moscow's economic policy. Remarkably, in recent years Moscow has far outstripped an average Russian region in terms of output from industries — unlike GRP, this metric is published promptly, including monthly dynamics, and reflects the situation in the real sector of the economy. The advanced development of the eastern part of the country has not, however, been reflected in the statistics so far (Table 3).

Table 3

Output from major industries, year-on-year, %

Year	Russia	Central federal district	Moscow	Moscow region	Siberian federal district	Far Eastern federal district
2018	103.5	105.0	104.3	111.4	102.7	103.8
2019	102.4	105.5	104.5	110.7	102.6	108.7
2020	98.0	103.2	105.2	106.5	98.3	101.8
2021	106.7	116.6	123.0	123.1	106.0	106.5
2022	99.3	100.2	101.1	98.3	101.6	101.3
2022 on 2017	110.0	133.6	142.6	158.9	111.6	123.9
2023	105.1	111.5	114.9	109.6	99.1	106.3

Prepared based on Rosstat data.¹ The 2023 data are a preliminary assessment.

It is hardly justified to analyse Moscow in isolation from the Moscow region: today the city is typically considered in conjunction with the region within migration and settlement studies, but not those focusing on the economy. For example, the situation with residential construction in the capital region differs substantially from that within the city's official boundaries. Moreover, the perfor-

¹ Rosstat, 2024, URL: https://rosstat.gov.ru/storage/mediabank/IVBO_OKVD2_02-2024.xlsx (accessed 07.04.2024); Rosstat, 2024, URL: https://rosstat.gov.ru/storage/mediabank/IVBO-sub-RF_01-2024.xlsx (accessed 07.04.2024).

mance of Moscow itself is far from being a phenomenon subject to unequivocal interpretation. For example, in 2000, the average monetary income per capita in Moscow was 3.5 times the Russian average, but in the last ten years, this ratio has decreased to 2.0–2.2 times, suggesting that the capital has lost some of its advantages. In 2000, the share of remuneration in the population's income was 20%, with almost 40% coming from other sources, including hidden income. In recent years, labour remuneration has accounted for about two-thirds of the income, and the ratio of average monthly accrued nominal wages of employees in Moscow to the national average has increased from 1.5 to 1.9–2.0 times.¹ The standards of living in Moscow are higher in many respects than in other regions. Despite environmental problems, life expectancy in the city is second to only that in two North Caucasian republics. Therefore, the capital region is unlikely to lose its attractiveness to migrants in the coming years, with Moscow and the Moscow region accounting for almost 15% of the Russian population and more than a quarter of the total GRP. The region's leading role in Russia's development also stems from its central position in the country's transport system. Consequently, Moscow will continue to play a primary role in enhancing the much-needed connectivity of Russian territory, especially considering the current and upcoming projects for the construction of transport routes.

The above, however, by no means suggests that there is no need to create conditions for advanced economic development and improved living standards beyond the capital agglomeration — the current geoeconomic and geopolitical situation demands otherwise. Therefore, federal authorities will have to strike a balance in the distribution of budget resources between territories of different types. Nevertheless, Moscow, the capital region as a whole and the entire Central Russia, which is already emerging as a territorial socio-economic entity, will undoubtedly act as one of the key elements in the formation of Greater Eurasia. They are also expected to cement the Russian space, ensuring its integrity in the face of the inevitable growth of exogenous economic and socio-cultural influences brought about by Greater Eurasian integration.

The municipalisation of approaches to strategising in planning spatial development in the context of Greater Eurasian integration. The transformation of the Russian space under the influence of the Greater Eurasia factor amplifies the traditional logic underpinning federal spatial policy. Russia's Spatial Development Strategy (SDS), approved by the Government in early 2019, is set to con-

¹ Calculated by the authors using data from Socio-economic indicators by subjects of the Russian Federation, 2023, *Rosstat*, <https://rosstat.gov.ru/folder/210/document/47652> (accessed 30.12.2023).

clude in 2025. The Prime Minister has already commissioned a new concept for this document that would consider current geopolitical challenges and regional and municipal priorities. The Strategy is to be presented in 2024.¹

The 2019 SDS was the first federal document to explicitly address not only Russian regions and broadly understood macro-regions but also intra-regional differentiation. However, the multi-scale approach was not embraced to its fullest extent at that time. Progress continued along this avenue, and the amendments made to the SDS in 2021 and 2022 somewhat enhanced its municipal focus. We believe that a new SDS will require a heavy emphasis on municipal issues, including those arising in the processes of Eurasian integration.

The radical eastward and southward shift in the structure of Russia's foreign economic relations is primarily discussed by national scholars in terms of the development of the country's macro-regions. However, the impact of the change on larger geographical areas is indirect, while their effect on various municipalities is immediate. Primarily, these are the municipalities that facilitate foreign trade flows by hosting seaports, land border crossings and border logistics centres. The initial version of the SDS categorised entire border regions as geostrategic territories, regardless of the ratio of actual border and non-border areas within them. In 2022, the SDS was supplemented with the concept of 'border municipalities', but even among these, the degree of actual participation in foreign relations varies significantly. Therefore, it is important to identify the type of municipalities performing the essential 'international gateway' function.

A similar situation arises with the development of transport corridors or major transport arteries. Ensuring connectivity between macro-regions and regions, they have an immediate impact on the territories through which they pass. This way, conditions are created for the formation of not only 'points' but also 'axes' of economic growth. The 'development axis' concept is never mentioned in the current SDS, although it is a well-known notion stemming from core-periphery theories. New 'development axes' associated with Greater Eurasia can become hubs for industries supplying domestic and international markets and seeking to maximise the benefits of transport artery construction. Fulfilling this task will likely require additional measures leveraging the advantages of favourable geographical positioning, including, if necessary, the introduction of preferential economic regimes, such as special economic zones and territories of advanced development, and the deployment of necessary infrastructure.

The 'municipalisation' of spatial approaches also has relevance to research and technology policies and national technological sovereignty. Research centres and their related high-tech production facilities are situated in particular loca-

¹ Mikhail Mishustin gave instructions following the strategic session on infrastructure development, 24.11.2023, *Government of Russia*, URL: <http://government.ru/news/50202/> (accessed 30.11.2023).

tions, which may not necessarily be major cities or cities officially designated as science cities of which there are only 13 in Russia. Facilitating the development of all Russian science cities, without exception, is crucial and this evolution would be impossible without understanding their actual number, socio-economic status, trends and prospects. The adoption of the SDS was not followed by the creation of an analytical monitoring system for municipal development in Russia, a gap that urgently needs to be bridged.

The formation of Greater Eurasia requires a broader perspective on other types of municipalities as well. For instance, the eastward and southward shift in Russia's spatial structure is expected to strengthen major cities serving as the cores of the corresponding macro-regions; their role in international interactions should also grow. Naturally, Moscow and St. Petersburg must not be the only cities in Russia aspiring to global status. As long as general spatial development trends remain slow-moving, Eurasian integration will alter the overall landscape of municipal differentiation in terms of economic development. This will lead to the emergence of new growth centres, increased migration attractiveness, and, consequently, greater risks of peripheral areas deteriorating. The increasing municipal focus of federal policy, in turn, will require the participation of experts and researchers. Thus, studies on socio-economic geography and regional (spatial) economics need to pay greater attention to the municipal level.

Conclusion

The primary and highly relevant task for Russian social geographers is to overcome the catastrophic lag in understanding the tectonic geo-economic and geopolitical shifts that are radically changing the picture of the world and its geographic aspect by impacting space and giving rise to new territorial-economic and settlement structures and processes. An essential step in this direction is the study of Greater Eurasian integration — a process largely driven by the eastward and southward shift of Eurasia's economic and demographic weight and the conspicuous manifestations of de-globalisation and regional fragmentation catalysed by the conflict between Russia and the collective West. Greater Eurasia poses a significant challenge for researchers due to its complexity: a constantly changing phenomenon of polycentric nature, it is characterised by great diversity, asymmetry, and fluid boundaries. The intricate interaction between Greater Eurasia and the Russian space, which cannot be simplified to a mere part-whole relationship, gives rise to various problem areas and research avenues. In the article, we aimed to highlight the principal ones, which represent merely the tip of the iceberg. The increasing focus on this issue will require refining research approaches through the synthesis of modern global studies (sub-global studies, research into the dynamics and architecture of 'large spaces'), Eurasian studies (in their expanded geographic format), geopolitics, geo-economics, problem-oriented regional stud-

ies, transboundary regional studies and socio-geographic Russian studies with a focus on the country's regions and municipalities. This synthesis is necessary to address both conceptual and practical challenges in strategic spatial development planning.

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