

GAZPROM CITY ГАЗПРОМ СИТИ

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with a glossary by Gertrude Saxinger

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'If you're at home and you want to make yourself a nice cup of coffee in the morning, and you turn on the stove but there is no gas, then you know that something must have happened in Novy Urengoy.'

What connects Europe to a city in the polar circle? The Gazprom company exploits the gas fields around Novy Urengoy. More than half of the natural gas extracted in Russia is produced there. A substantial portion of this gas is exported to European countries.

GAZPROM CITY – a report about life at the other end of the gas pipeline.

The book describes daily life in Russia's natural gas capital Novy Urengoy – a city with more than 110.000 inhabitants in the Yamalo-Nenets Autonomous Okrug in Western Siberia.

After the discovery of the Urengoy gas field in the late 1960s, the systematic development of the natural gas industry began here, in the swampy lakeland of the Subarctic tundra. Transportation routes were built, production facilities were set up, hundreds of kilometres of pipeline were laid, and little by little a small settlement for workers grew into the northern city of Novy Urengoy. All characteristic ingredients of a city – housing units, schools, hospitals, administration buildings and leisure facilities – were erected in this remote region, far from any populated areas. Here the temperatures often drop to more than 50 degrees below zero and the winter lasts for nine long months.

But the *dlinny rubl*, the 'long rouble', lures thousands of young men and women to the polar circle, despite the extreme conditions. Novy Urengoy is a wealthy city and a job in the gas industry stands for a secure and – by Russian standards – high income.

The viability of the city is inextricably tied to the natural gas industry and to a city forming enterprise: Gazprom. The energy company and its local subsidiary companies extract gigantic quantities of natural gas from the deposits around the city. Gazprom is the most important employer in the region. More than half of the natural gas extracted in Russia is produced here. That is why the city is unofficially called natural gas capital of Russia or simply: GAZPROM CITY.

The mutual interdependence of Western Europe and Russia resulting from imports and exports of natural gas and the weighty position of Gazprom receive regular attention in politics and the media. The emphasis is usually on the consequences this dependence has for the consumers at the European end of the gas pipeline. However, the circumstances of the gas production and the living conditions of the people at the source in Western Siberia are barely ever discussed. How do the people of Novy Urengoy live, here in this city that is completely dependent on natural gas resources and where life is dictated by the big corporation?

The city is closed to foreigners. We made countless requests to Gazprom, we inquired again and again, until the head office in Moscow finally gave the go-ahead. The 14-day stay in Novy Urengoy and in the shift workers camps around the city offered the opportunity to talk to the inhabitants and interview the workers on the gas fields. Daily life in the company town is described on the basis of our on-site impressions but especially through personal stories of the inhabitants of Novy Urengoy. Throughout the text the inhabitants get a chance to speak. Their voices tell about life in the Arctic.

Numerous pictures accompany the text. Schematic maps as well as facts and figures provide an overview of the history of the city and the natural gas industry. An interview with one of the 'pioneers', one of the first inhabitants of Novy Urengoy gives insight into the early years of the city and reveals motivation and ambition of the first settlers. Last but not least a glossary written by Gertrude Saxinger explains important terms that play a crucial role in urban life in the Arctic and Subarctic and for work in the extractive industries.