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10 MODEL FOR THE TUNDRA SCHOOL IN YAMAL: A NEW EDUCATION SYSTEM FOR CHILDREN FROM NOMADIC AND SEMI-NOMADIC NENETS FAMILIES

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Introduction

This article describes the modernisation of the education system for the indigenous people of the North by providing an example from the Yamalo-Nenets Autonomous District (YNAD). In 2010, the District's Department of Education started an experimental education system for reindeer herders' children. In this experiment, children have the possibility to get primary education in the tundra, where they live with their parents. This model for the Tundra School (*kochevaia shkola*) was introduced by the Nenets writer Anna Nerkagi. It is a new experiment for the District, because in other places in Yamal children still study in boarding schools. These boarding schools have a double impact on the indigenous children¹. On the one hand, they provide them with education, but on the other, they have a negative impact on their native language and culture. This is not only the case in the Yamalo-Nenets Autonomous District, but also in the whole of the Russian North, Siberia and the Far East.

This paper is intended as a report on my personal contribution to this work, which is rather modest. I had to prepare papers and to write about the Tundra School project with Valentina Niarui, a specialist in teaching methods from Salekhard. We had to apply to the Yamalo-Nenets Department of Education for official support for this project. An interesting aspect of this work is the fact that the Tundra School is not a completely new education concept in the tundra. There have been attempts to try it before, but they did not succeed. This time the participants are hopeful that this school will have the right to exist and that it will bring good results into the process of education for the tundra children. During our meetings we used to talk to Anna Nerkagi and other teachers of the Laborovaia School, and we asked them how they are working at their school and what is different there from ordinary schools.

As a result, we were able to compose a document about the development of this new type of school and its way of teaching children whose parents have a nomadic way of life or live in places difficult to reach in the tundra. This Tundra School is officially called the 'Model of Nomadic Education for Indigenous Children of the North in the Yamalo-Nenets Autonomous District', whose parents follow the nomadic or semi-nomadic way of life. In this paper, we shall consider it as an example of the Municipal system of education in the Priuralsky County (*Raion*) in the Municipal Educational Institution, the Primary Comprehensive School in Laborovaia.

The location of Yamal in the Russian Federation and its inhabitants

The Yamalo-Nenets Autonomous District (Okrug) is one of the 89 federal districts of the Russian Federation. It is located in Western Siberia. The indigenous population of Yamal consists of the Nenets, Khanty, and Selkup people. They form approximately 8.2% of the whole district's population, and only a small number of them speak their native languages in everyday life. The majority of the population consists of people of many other nationalities who migrated to this region from different parts of Russia. Most of them moved here in the 1990s from central Russia, Ukraine and other former Soviet Republics because of the development of the gas and oil industry in the district.

Nowadays Yamal is one of the richest regions of the Russian Federation, with high salaries and good living conditions. This is very attractive for incoming people from central parts of the country and from former Soviet Union republics. As a matter of fact, this process is surely still changing the whole population structure of the district, which is illustrated by the following table.

Ethnic group	1979 Census		1989 Census		2002 Census		2010 Census	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Nenets	17,404	11.0 %	20,917	4.2 %	26,435	5.2 %	29,772	5.9 %
Khanty	6,466	4.1 %	7,247	1.5 %	8,760	1.7 %	9,489	1.9 %
Komi	5,642	3.6 %	6,000	1.2 %	6,177	1.2 %	5,141	1.0 %
Selkups	1,611	1.0 %	1,530	0.3 %	1,797	0.4 %	1,988	0.4 %
Russians	93,750	59.0 %	292,808	59.2 %	298,359	58.8 %	312,019	61.7 %
Ukrainians	15,721	9.9 %	85,022	17.2 %	66,080	13.0 %	48,985	9.7 %
Tatars	8,556	5.4 %	26,431	5.3 %	27,734	5.5 %	28,509	5.6 %
Others	9,694	6.1 %	54,889	11.1 %	71,664	14.1%	74,625	14.3 %

The Nenets people form the most numerous northern nation among all indigenous peoples of the Russian Federation. According to the 2010 census of the Russian Federation, there are 44,640 Nenets people. They live in three national districts: the Nenets Autonomous District (as part of the Arkhangel'sk Province), the Yamalo-Nenets Autonomous District (as part of the Tiumen' Province) and the Taimyr Autonomous District (as part of the Krasnoiarsk Region).

In the past, there existed a widespread multilingualism among the local people in Yamal, where one of the above-mentioned indigenous languages was dominant. Local people only used the Russian language for trading and for communication with Russians, Komi or Tatars. This situation changed markedly after the 1930s.

Moreover, intensive oil and gas development in huge areas of the Yamal peninsula is a main reason for many nomadic people (who were living in the tundra with

reindeer and still used their native language in everyday life) to move to settlements, where they have to use Russian. In many families the next generation will shift to the use of Russian, which is due to the fact that Russian is the official state language of the whole Russian Federation, and therefore it is the language of communication, education and official mass media. This situation is a common feature everywhere in Russia, except that in several parts of the country the local national languages also have official status, such as in the Sakha Republic (Yakutia) or the Republic of Tatarstan.

Why it is important to modernise education for aborigines

For the history of the tundra schools, we refer to the article by Elena Liarskaya (this volume), which describes how the northern minority nations of Russia had a negative experience with boarding school education. Not all ideas were optimal under the working conditions of Tundra Nenets. However, here we should mention that in the 19th century there were some examples of migrating schools (*shkoly peredvizhkie*) accompanying the children of the families that followed their reindeer herds (see Toulouze 1999: 56). Other solutions were developed in the first part of the 20th century. These schools did not really follow nomads on their migration but they were situated on the routes of migrating families (Toulouze 1999: 65). The idea was that these migrating schools would bring education to children who lived in areas difficult to reach. Such schools started to work in the early 1930s, but it was found that such methods of education did not work well in the conditions of a permanent nomadic life. Unfortunately, we do not have many materials about these schools, but Elena Liarskaya wrote about them (Liarskaya 2005; this volume). Some articles mentioned that teachers used to travel with reindeer herders to the tundra and tried to teach children and their parents there. This work did not yield good results (Golovnev and Osherenko 2000).

It is clear that the reindeer herders' traditional way of life depends very much on reindeer. This means moving with the herds and looking for good pastures all the time. Nenets migrate all year round from the south to the north and back, a distance of several hundred kilometers. The children of these families travel with adults, and by living this life, they learn their inherited language and culture. They do not just watch how their parents work, but they also learn by taking an active part in their families' lives, and helping the adults with the reindeer and the household work. We know that there was a strong political movement to bring literacy and education to all 'wild northern tribes' and to make them members of the Soviet Union. For this purpose, the children of the northern aborigines were taken away from the tundra to study in boarding schools with Russian as the only language of education for all school subjects. We know about this from the stories of people who used to study at that time (Dudeck 1998; *this volume*).

Because of this fact, there is nowadays an important group of indigenous people who live in settlements and towns and speak predominantly Russian, whereas only a small number of them speak their native languages. All of them were taken to boarding schools from the tundra, and from primary school age they felt that they were different from Russians because they spoke a different language and used to live in 'uncultured' life conditions. When we had our interviews with representatives of this group of people, some of them were from settlements, whereas others continue to live a traditional way of life in the tundra. Both of these groups have their own problems, but at the same time they are happy in their own way. On the one hand, there is the life in warm houses of the settlements with a small regular income, but under the pressure of a bigger nation, and on the other hand, there is the life in the primitive conditions of the tundra, but with a strong feeling of freedom. In many cases, these people have the same negative memories. They did not have a personal life in their childhood, but were more or less considered as property of the Soviet state. They were fed, clothed and provided with education according to state rules, while their parents were partly replaced by teachers. Such an education programme does not build up the children's knowledge of their own ethnic background or their own place in it. No one can learn specific national skills outside his or her own community. Even nowadays, when pupils come from the boarding school back home to the tundra, they are not completely members of their community but, at the same time, they are still not completely Russians. They are citizens of the Russian Federation, educated by the same programme as for instance pupils in Moscow and other places of the Russian Federation. Unfortunately, they do not know much about their own culture, nor do they have the same proficiency in Russian as Russians have. For them it is difficult to switch into Nenets society and to be Russians at the same time.

In the Yamalo-Nenets District, quite often, Russians pejoratively call aborigines *natsionaly*. This word derives from the name of the federal national districts, which appeared in the 1930s. It means 'people who do not completely belong to the Russian society and are not fully competent in their indigenous culture'. Nenets called them by themselves *jodej ter*" – 'new people', or settled aborigines, who moved from the tundra to live in villages for many reasons. Some of them drink and they do not have any fixed income; mostly they live on an unemployment benefit. Most of them do not have any professional qualifications other than a school diploma. Quite often, they live in the poor parts of the settlements, in old and ramshackle houses. This group of aborigines cannot integrate completely into the settlement's life. It is even difficult for their children, who were born in villages, because they are somehow halfway in between Nenets and Russians, and they do not know these cultures well. Maybe here I could relate an example from my own childhood.

My own attitude about Nenets culture formed chaotically. In my early childhood I spoke only Nenets and I lived with my parents in the tundra. Sometimes we used to come to Russian settlements, where our relatives lived. My parents were at that time

private reindeer herders and lived in the Baidaratskaia tundra in Yamal. I went to the boarding school when I was six. In my class were mostly Khanty children. We had one primary school teacher who spoke Khanty and Russian. She taught us the Russian language. In the beginning she used to speak Khanty with pupils, introducing step-by-step the Russian language until the children started to understand it and tried to speak it as well. Therefore, I learned Russian with the help of the Khanty language, and I started to speak it quite fast. The next school year my aunt moved me to the settlement class to study with Russian children. In the boarding school we had Khanty language classes every week, but my parents thought that the Russian language was more important for my future and I had to speak it well. Well, then I started to study in Russian with Russians.

Our settlement class was international: there were also children from mixed families, but most of them were Russians. It is interesting that when I was with my Khanty classmates I knew that I was different but it was not a shame to be Nenets, but in the Russian class, I always felt uncomfortable about my Nenets origin. So, I had one period of my life when I tried to hide my connection with Nenets culture. When my Russian school friends asked me if I spoke Nenets I used to say 'no' just because I wanted to be closer to Russian society. Of course, it was a deception, but in such a way I wanted to be more like the settlement's children and to be closer to their life. During summer, when other children used to go for their vacation to the South, I travelled in the opposite direction, to the tundra. At first, it was difficult to return there, but in a few days I would become a tundra child again, speaking just Nenets language. It meant that I always used to live between two cultures, but they were always at a distance from each other and they never mixed. It was good for me, and this made me somehow follow Nenets and Russian rules and not mix them together. Therefore, among settlement children, I was like them, and among tundra children, I was also not so different. It is a question, why I tried to hide my provenance. Maybe, because quite often my Russian schoolmates gave me names. Some of them were from socalled 'low class settlement society', and often their parents did not have a good education. They could easily call me khantejka2, which is another variation of national, but with a more humiliating meaning.

Why was it so? I think the explanation for it is that there is a lack of information among Russian speaking inhabitants, which is quite a serious problem. Many of them do not think in a positive way about the northern aborigines. The problem is also that most of the Russian language speakers who moved to the North have no interest in getting information about the culture of the locals and their traditions. This situation leads them to tell different disparaging jokes and anecdotes about local indigenous people, mentioning how stupid they are and how they are not able to follow 'normal rules of behaviour'. Of course, there are cultural centres, museums, and libraries where it is possible to get some information about the indigenous cultures and traditions, as is also described in Stephan Dudeck's contribution to this volume. There

are many cultural folklore events in the Yamalo-Nenets district, but they are mostly modernised and are presented in quite an artificial and funny way. In reality, they do not show so much of the real life and values of the indigenous population. The painful part of this situation is that most of these *natsionaly* who live in towns or settlements do not value their own culture, but instead think that inclusion into Russian society is more important and will make their children more successful.

It is also a problem that for ex-boarding school pupils it is more difficult to find their place, either in the native or in the Russian society, and to realise their full potential in adult life. As a result, there is a high level of alcoholism and suicide among the minority peoples. Could this be caused by the separation of these people from their traditional living conditions, to which they were accustomed for centuries? For a long time people in Yamal did not talk about this inconvenient subject. It was somehow like a taboo. It became open in the 1980s, after the publication of the book *Aniko from the Nogo clan*, by the Nenets writer, Anna Nerkagi.

The Tundra School of Anna Nerkagi

Anna Nerkagi was born December 12th, 1952, in the Polar Ural tundra and lived there with her parents. When she was six years old, she was taken to a boarding school, as many other Nenets were. She returned to her family when she was already a young woman. In her novel, she described her own experience of schooling and then returning to the tundra to her Nenets culture after studying at the industrial institute in Tiumen and living in Russian society. The most anguished part of her book is about her childhood in a boarding school when she was not allowed to live with her parents and speak her native language. All indigenous children there had to be ashamed of belonging to their nation. She said that at that time they were brought up in school like soldiers and that it was part of their destiny that they were indigenous.³

Anna Nerkagi is not only famous as a writer, who has won many literary prizes for her novels.⁴ She has a very authoritative character and is a strong leader in her community in Laborovaia. She used to be a regional deputy of the Priuralsky County, where she worked on protecting the Nenets' rights. We should also state that Anna is very religious. The forerunner of the Tundra School was her orthodox camp 'The Land of Hope'.

In the 1990s, Nerkagi already organised a primary school for local Nenets children in the Laborovaia village, which is situated 200 km from Salekhard – the Yamal District's capital city. Laborovaia village is located in the Priuralsky municipality and has a population of about 20 families living with their children who are of preschool or school age. There are about 47 camps of reindeer herders in the tundra near the village and in the Polar Ural Mountains.



[22] Laborovaia village.

By the way, Anna is by nature a big pessimist. Even in her novels, we can read about her feeling of hopelessness about the Nenets future. When working with the Tundra School project, I feel as if Anna Nerkagi tries somehow to turn back the huge wheel of history. She tries to correct its consequences by taking the young generation of Nenets back to the tundra, as if by doing so she could somehow



[23] Children in the winter tundra.

correct a big mistake of the former Soviet empire's political regime.

When she presented her idea for the first time, she said that it is most important for children from indigenous families to have the feeling of self-sufficiency. This is the main way in which they realise their personal, psychological and social identity. When Nerkagi, as a leader of her project, provided information about the Tundra School project, many people (teachers, parents and children) reacted to it in different

ways. People have quite a careful attitude to Anna Nerkagi. Nenets people know her not just as a writer, but also as a strict leader of their society. Most of them are afraid even to have any contact with her, because they never know how it will be to meet her personally, because this depends very much on Anna's mood. At the same time – although she lives in the little Laborovaia village – she travels once or twice a week to the capital city Salekhard and to the district centre Aksarka.

When Anna came for the first time to the Department of Education in Aksarka with her idea about the Tundra School, nobody knew how to work with it. There were no documents about it or examples of how it would be possible to realise this idea. Authorities were not so enthusiastic about Tundra education, because most of them were quite happy that there was just one way of educating children from nomadic families, one which showed its value over time: the boarding schools. Nevertheless, Anna's strong character and the clearness of her idea made bureaucrats take this idea seriously. I met Anna when the head of the Department of Education in Aksarka, Sergei Boichenko, asked me to work with the Tundra School documents and to prepare them for an application to the Department of Education in Salekhard. My first impression about this school was quite chaotic. There was not so much information about the way this school would work. We found some information about nomadic schools in the Sakha (Yakutia) and Evenki areas, but that was all.

On the internet we discovered a few documents about the Tundra and the Taiga Schools in other places. This information was very useful and it introduced the idea of an alternative way of giving education, different from boarding schools. We should say that for some teachers in the district it is still difficult to accept the idea of the Tundra School. The majority of them have already fixed models of the basic traditional education at schools or in boarding schools, which are formed by years of working practice and for them it is difficult to imagine how to try this completely different way of education.

In comparison to the last century, the living conditions in the Yamal tundra are changing dramatically. Therefore it is time to also try to change the old way of educating aborigines. Nenets people still follow their traditional way of life, the reindeer herding culture. It is somehow a mystery how they managed to save it. At the same time they are very open to changes and new technologies, like the telephone and internet, which make communication faster and easier (see Stammler 2009). Besides that, Nenets people are very much interested in new ways of teaching that can help them to save their native language and will give their children the chance to preserve their culture and to learn about their traditions, history and cultural knowledge from early childhood.

When we asked Valentina Niarui, the coordinator of this project as a representative of the Regional Institute for the Development of Education in Salekhard, for her opinion of Anna Nerkagi's school, she gave a very positive evaluation of the Tundra School and said that it is a new level of education. Niarui used to work for a long time

as a supervisor of the teaching of the Nenets language at school, and she wrote many teaching books for indigenous children. Nowadays it is possible to put new methods of teaching into practice because there are good telephone connections and internet in the tundra. Many difficulties, which used to exist before, are not relevant or present anymore. It is possible to start the Tundra School. "By the way", added Niarui, "Anna Nerkagi developed this idea a long time ago, and when she came out with it, it was clear that the necessity and reality to try it in real life have a future".

When Anna Nerkagi started her Tundra School project, she based it on the fact that the education system of a district cannot ignore the culture and lifestyle of reindeer herders, hunters and fishermen. When their children live with them, they learn the essential quality of self-sufficiency and the virtue of looking reality in the eye (Ready 2000). "Of course," said Anna, "they would not become political leaders or famous people, this is not my aim, but I hope that my children will never become confirmed drunkards or scum of society because they are educated by labour."

Most of the children who live with her were from orphanages. Anna does not have children of her own. Her adopted children lack relatives beside Anna herself who are responsible for them. It is also interesting that in old times it was difficult to find Nenets children in orphanages, because in the Nenets culture it was a big sin to treat orphans badly. The Nenets believe that orphans bring good luck to their family. Some of Nerkagi's children are from families with social problems, whose parents were deprived of their right to child custody. They had a tough childhood and therefore have difficulties integrating into life under tundra conditions without proper education and training. It is right that children with problems should have an education which is different from the ordinary one. At the same time children from local tundra families, who have a completely different life, still study at Anna Nerkagi's school, in the settlement of Laborovaia.

Anna organised the process of studying in an unique way. She divided her school into three sections: one is in the village – it is a primary school; another one is in a camp not far from Laborovaia, where children learn in theory how to work with reindeer. Later, when they know this, they will move to the third camp. This camp is in the mountains quite far from Laborovaia, with tents and reindeer. Mostly all young people work there with reindeer in the traditional way of life and live in the tundra most of the time.

Place of the Tundra School in the education system of the YNAD. Why the Yamal government accepted Anna Nerkagi's idea.

The problem of the integration of boarding school children and their socialisation is not new. Several years ago a different approach was made to facilitate their integration into the education process. The system of the boarding schools in the Yamalo-Nenets

district introduced a new project to make a family type boarding school. Brothers and sisters from the same family were allowed to live together in the same sector of the boarding school, just to make it similar to family living. This change had a positive impact on the process of adaptation of school children to the education process, and later other boarding schools in Yamal adopted it (Sotrueva 2003). Here we mention some aspects:

Positive aspects of boarding schools:

- They give the possibility to children, whose parents live in the tundra and migrate all year round, to get free primary and secondary education in stationary schools:
- In boarding schools children get food and clothes, school books, exercise books and other writing materials for free;
- After finishing school, children have the possibility to study for a profession at colleges or at university level.

Negative aspects of boarding schools:

- They are a cause of language and culture loss, for from the very beginning children were not allowed to speak their native languages or to wear traditional clothes;
- Children are separated from their family for the period of nine months.

We could surely say that young indigenous people who finish studying at a boarding school are the most vulnerable group of people. They have to integrate into another social system which differs from their boarding school experience. Therefore, the need to try to provide good education in the tundra is very clear. One way to realise it is a new experimental Tundra School, which is officially called a New Model of Education in Yamal.

In December 2010, the governor of the Yamalo-Nenets Autonomous District signed a document about Anna Nerkagi's experimental project on developing a new model of education for children from reindeer herders and fishermen families. This school is called in Russian *kochevaia shkola* which means that this school is nomadic. The name 'Tundra School' fits well because it works mostly in the tundra. This form of education should teach all school subjects according to the Russian Federal Educational standards. The main aim of the Tundra School is to save the language speaking ability of Nenets children and moreover, to encourage them to use their traditional cultural knowledge in different natural (traditional) life situations. Children learn how to live according to their traditions; they know and respect their culture, history and nation.

This act shows that the authorities of the Yamal-Nenets Autonomous District were introduced to the culture and lifestyle of the indigenous people, who are reindeer herders, hunters and fishermen. Their children, studying and living in boarding schools, cannot integrate easily into modern society because they lack knowledge of basic skills such as cooking, cleaning or working to earn money. Children are not taught how to do elementary things for themselves because, according to Russian state health standards, children in the boarding school are not allowed to do these things. They live in an artificial world and as a result, we observe a low level of socialisation after finishing such schools.

As I was told, the Laborovaia primary school is very different from all other schools in the Yamalo-Nenets Autonomous District. In this school, children do not just study school subjects, but they are also taught how to fish, hunt and work with reindeer in natural conditions. Nowadays, 37 children study at this experimental school. The original idea of the Tundra School, which combines school, family and tribal education, is to make children familiar with their culture and with working skills in the tundra. It is the first time educational methods of the Nenets traditional pedagogic have been officially recognised. Why has this happened? Probably one of the reasons is connected with the 'Concept of Sustainable Development of Indigenous Peoples of the North, Siberia and the Far East of the Russian Federation' (4 February 2009 N 132), which the Russian Government adopted in 2009. It focusses on the idea of the socio-economic, ethnic and cultural development of the minorities and on the modernisation of education in the North. The change of the level of educational politics encouraged people to start to discuss new ways of teaching indigenous children that are different from the boarding school system.

Future planning of the new experiment

The changes in educational level make it possible to organise new forms of teaching, where teachers are willing to work in the tundra and teach children in their traditional living conditions. If this Tundra School project were successful, other schools in the district would be ready to work in the same way. According to the idea of this project, the main language of education would be one of the district's indigenous languages. Nevertheless, Russian would also be introduced to pupils as the language of teaching. This bilingual (possibly trilingual) education would help to skip the language barrier and would assist pupils to get primary education both in their native languages and in Russian as well.

The original idea of the Tundra School is that parents and teachers in collaboration give the children the basic primary education and provide them with knowledge about their traditional way of life in the tundra. This tundra project is still an experimental model for the contemporary education of children from nomadic families in the Yamalo-Nenets Autonomous District. Therefore, it is under the supervision of two official education centres: the Departments of Education of the Priuralsky County and the Yamalo-Nenets Autonomous District.

Official papers dealing with the experimental model of the Tundra (nomadic) School state that this model is based on the following facts:

- the traditional way of life is one of the components of the Arctic civilisation, which has its own customs and values;
- the separation of primary school age children from their parents is detrimental to their psychological health and leads to a low degree of adaptation and socialisation to new living conditions;
- young people are not prepared to live in modern society after finishing boarding school, due to their lack of skills in leading an independent life in the village (or town) or in the tundra.

The Tundra School has the following objectives:

- to organise for the educational process such a situation for indigenous children that they are adapted to the natural living conditions of migration in the tundra;
- to guarantee the possibility to continue education at the secondary school level;
- to develop innovative teaching methods for the Tundra School which are based on the Nenets ethno-pedagogical ways of teaching and on modern teaching methods with the use of internet and telephone communication;
- the education process should work to maintain the connection between generations of nomadic families, in order to ensure the preservation and further development of the traditional way of life and ethnic culture of indigenous people;
- to train professional teachers to work in the tundra.

What does it mean to study in a 'nomadic' or 'migrating' or 'tundra school'? This method of teaching is not yet specified. I understand it as a way of education that provides such knowledge, which allows children to use and practice it in real life situations. Of course, 'nomadic' means a process of permanent migration, mobility and seasonality. For that purpose, the tundra school's classes should be organised not like the ones in ordinary schools and not only by teachers, but also by the parents, who play an active and important role in the education process.

Summary

This experimental model of education for children from nomadic and semi-nomadic indigenous families is the new contemporary education system of the Yamalo-Nenets Autonomous District. Today the living conditions of the Nenets are much better than they were previously: there are telephone and internet connections in the tundra and electricity generating stations. People use these modern facilities quite actively.

I hope that this Tundra School project will have a positive outcome and that it will be a good model for many other places of the Yamalo-Nenets District, where nomadic reindeer herders live. Nowadays there are completely different ideas about what members of society need to have, different from a century ago. It is a pity that at the beginning of the 20th century, the human factor hindered the success of the Tundra School project. At that time the indigenous people were not yet ready to accept the idea of education, which is possible nowadays. This is understandable, because people had simply to survive in the severe conditions of the tundra.

Today, under the circumstances of scientific and industrial development, people have more possibilities, even in the tundra, and they do use all achievements of technical development. Yes, some innovations cause painful experiences and people have to cope with them, but returning to the old experimental ways of education would not work.

The Tundra School project is just starting to work, but it is becoming clear that its main problem is the lack school books, which are only written in the Russian language. All available books in Nenets are quite old and were made in the 1950s to 1970s and reprinted in the 1990s after the collapse of the USSR. Today children are Russian and Nenets bilinguals. The question remains, how to follow the standards of the Russian State Education school programme without special books for native education. A lot has been done by local teachers in the Tundra School who teach in both the Russian and the Nenets languages. If this experiment works well, we could say that the Tundra School provides such an education for children, which is adapted to the national traditional education and preserves the traditional way of life and the Nenets language.

To summarise, we should remember that Yamalo-Nenets Autonomous District is one of the most expensive places in the Russian Federation, where prices are based on the high level of oil and gas workers' salaries. These prices for food and everyday goods are so high that it is hard for ordinary people without a regular income to survive in the region. It is especially hard for those Nenets families who do not have reindeer and therefore cannot sell their meat. This means that they do not have any income of their own. Nowadays there are so many huge industrial projects inland of the Yamal Peninsula, which completely change the ecology, land and human environment. Anna Nerkagi said herself that children should work and get an education that would help them to survive in the tundra. The question remains, how long they will live in the tundra. It is also important for them to learn how to survive in the aggressive environment of industrialisation. It is probably possible to live in a balance between these completely different spaces of the tundra and oil, gas and industrial areas. The Tundra School is taking its first steps, and I think that the young people who finish it learn by themselves how to use their traditional knowledge in modern situations for their life and work. If this is successful, then we will have the Nenets culture and language safeguarded for a longer time and for more Nenets generations.

Notes

- Project Socio-cultural change of Uralic minority languages in 20th-21st century Siberia, analysed through Nenets life histories (KONE foundation grant 2010, number 18-4665; KONE foundation grant 2011, number 27-6407, Finland).
- 2 From the word Khanty, which is a name for the Khanty ethnic group. It is used both for women and men.
- 3 One of the stories of a woman who used to study in a boarding school and who lives now in a village is told in a film of Anastasia Lapsui and Markku Lehmuskallio *The last in the line*. Illume OY, Finland, 2010. www.sukunsaviimeinen.fi.
- 4 Ilir (1975), The white lichen (1995), The Silent (1996).

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