Acknowledgements

Many people contributed to the writing and publication of this chapter. This chapter is the epitome of my eight years of working experience with Indigenous youth in Russia.

To begin, I am deeply grateful to Andrey Petrov, without whom the project would not have been possible. I recognize his respect for Indigenous Peoples and his strong belief that the Indigenous voice should be delivered by Indigenous scholars. I thank him for giving me so many opportunities to work on this research.

I extend my deepest gratitude to all interviewees who brought their problems and hopes to this chapter. Despite the help I have received, I am responsible for the content and I apologize in advance for any inaccuracies this text may contain.

1 The author is grateful for the editing of this text by Andrey Petrov from Russian to English.
Introduction

Russia is the largest country in the world. Approximately 76% of its territories were historically Indigenous native lands. According to Russian legislation, the Native lands are called the “territories of traditional land use of Indigenous Peoples of the North, Siberia and Far East.”2 The Russian government specifically recognizes only Indigenous “numerically small” Peoples, or nations with populations totaling less than 50,000 persons.3 There are approximately 250,000 Indigenous Peoples and 41 nations living on their tribal lands in Russia. Indigenous nations in Russia are very diverse in respect to livelihood, cultures and languages.

---

2 Federal’noe Sobranie RF (1999), constitutionrf.ru.
3 Ibid.
Among Indigenous Peoples in Russia, there are forest people who live in the Siberian settlements, such as the Selkups, Kumandin, and Udege. Their traditional economic activities are gathering, fishing, beadwork and hunting. Also, there are sea hunters who live on the coasts of the northern Pacific Ocean, such as the Yup’ik and Aleut. However, the majority of the Indigenous Peoples of the North, Siberia and Far East of the Russian Federation, subdivided according to language families.4

nations in Russia are nomadic reindeer nations. That includes such large ethnic groups such as the Nenets, Chukchi, Evenk, Even, and Koryak.

Thirty percent of all Russians live in the Asian part of the country (east of the Ural Mountains) and 75% of Russians are urban residents. In contrast, based on the Russian census of 2010, Russian Indigenous Peoples mostly live in the rural areas; only 30% of Indigenous Peoples live in urban communities. However, the census does not include data on how many Indigenous Peoples live in Russia’s largest cities: Saint Petersburg, Moscow, Novosibirsk and others.5

Indigenous Peoples in Russia are one of the most vulnerable groups based on socioeconomic criteria.6 In Russia, educational and economic opportunities are heavily concentrated in urban centers.7 This means that most Indigenous

communities do not have access to these resources, and many residents subsequently struggle with high unemployment, alcoholism, domestic violence, suicide, and food insecurity.\(^8\)

In the report on his mission to the Russian Federation, former United Nations Special Rapporteur on Racism,\(^9\) Mr. Doudou Diène, concluded that the small-numbered Indigenous Peoples of the North have a higher risk of extreme poverty, low life expectancy, unnatural death and other unfavorable conditions than all other Russian residents.

Johannes Rohr\(^10\) analyzed the current situation of Russian Indigenous Peoples and wrote, “The Indigenous Peoples of Russia have extremely high adult mortality rates. Just over one-third of Indigenous men (37.8\%) and less than two-thirds of Indigenous women (62.2\%) in Russia reach the age of 60. At the national level, the figures are 54\% for men and 83\% for women. 36\% of northern Indigenous people die prematurely from unnatural

\(^8\) Ibid.
\(^10\) Ibid, 32.
causes, which is more than double the national average of 15%.”

The Indigenous nations in Russia face many challenges, including climate change and struggles with extractive industries.\textsuperscript{11} The Russian North is warming faster than other territories around the world.\textsuperscript{12} Additionally, the amount of natural disasters in Russia is increasing dramatically, such as forest wildfires in Siberia or flooding in the Far East. The result of exploitation of the Indigenous lands by extractive industries or the effects of climate change is the shrinking of Indigenous lands. What do people do when they have lost their homelands, their reindeer? They migrate to the cities, hoping to find a job or any opportunities for survival.

\textbf{Encountering the experiences of urban Indigenous youth in Russia}

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{11} Ibid, 31-32.
\end{flushleft}
According to the 2010 Russian census, most urban Indigenous youth in Russia live in the regional capitals of the Northern cities. The largest population of young Indigenous Peoples live between the Yamal-Nenets Autonomous district, Khanty-Mansi Autonomous District, Sakha Republic and Chukotskiy Autonomous District. However, proportionally, the biggest number of urban Indigenous Youth (in particular, aged 15-29 years) live in the Khanty-Mansi Autonomous District.

Figure 2: Map created by Varvara Korkina and Anna Pestereva.

One of the reasons for this rural-to-urban migration is the pursuit of education for children.
and adolescents. This was true for my nation, the Kumandin people. We are a small Altai nation; our population is about 2,800 people around the world. Our core settlement is the city of Byisk (Altai Territory). About 45% of the entire Kumandin population live there. According to the testimonies of Kumandin elders, they left Indigenous rural communities because there were no high schools there and the parents did not want to be separated from their children if they had to be sent to boarding schools. As a result, they migrated to the closest city with a well-organized education system.

My understanding of the role and place of Indigenous youth in cities stems from my own work experience in the State Polar Academy, Saint Petersburg. This university was created for the development of the cold and remote territories in Russia. The main idea was to provide higher education to Indigenous youth and then facilitate their return to their communities. This idea did not work well because none of the faculty members and staff understood the specific requirements for working with Indigenous youth in big cities.

The main problem was the mismatch between western knowledge and the students’ homeland experience. This gap, created by the education system, was further propagated when these newly trained Indigenous youth went back to

their small communities and their professional skills did not match the real life where they were from.

Indigenous youth are dramatically affected by globalization, climate change, cultural and social changes. These profound changes have occurred largely over the past fifty years, and have resulted in significant behavioral health disparities for young Indigenous people. In particular, these health disparities affect young men, who frequently suffer with substance abuse, violence, and youth suicide, as is profiled in research on this topic.14

Youth in the Arctic today find themselves searching for ways to put traditional native values and teachings into practice in the context of dominant Russian, American, Norwegian, and Euro-Canadian culture, and find themselves largely constrained by structural and institutional obstacles.15 In the face of pressures and challenges, youth are developing specific capacities to navigate successfully. However, as case studies describe, successful transition to adulthood is possible only if a young person has access to the necessary social and economic resources critical for movement through the key developmental stages.

Interviews were conducted by the author as a part of the Arctic Youth and Sustainable Futures project with the Russian Urban Indigenous Youth (RUIY). Three sets of focus group interviews were conducted with young Indigenous people between 20-26 years old in different parts of Russia. The first focus group was held online and consisted of eight young respondents from five different Indigenous groups. Twelve additional interviews (three male and nine female) were conducted in Moscow. Finally, 25 mature Indigenous artists were interviewed in Moscow and the Altai Republic to illuminate the role of Indigenous youth and cultural economy in Indigenous societies.

The following issues were identified by the young people in the first and second focus groups:

*Remoteness and lack of transportation*
- No access to medical services (they must order a helicopter for a tooth removal surgery or childbirth).
- Less transportation availability (e.g., they cannot go on vacation because of limited time and they can become stuck at the airport without transportation to their home communities).
- Feelings of isolation are prevalent.

*Education*
- Most former students who received high levels of education have had problems implementing their knowledge and
experience at the local level in their communities. Their relatives, neighbors and coworkers usually reject city life experience. For example, one of the respondents indicated that she does not try to use her knowledge she retained from university because people tell her: “You came in from the city and show off here.”

**Language**

- The majority of the respondents do not speak a native language. They reported that they feel disconnected from their native language, that they are losing the touch with their culture, and some worry that they will disappear as a nation soon.
- Some of them told us: “Language is the soul of a nation,” or “No language, no people. We need to learn language, because we are losing it,” and “Language helps to connect to previous generations. Information is transmitted more easily through language.”
- Conversely, speaking one’s native tongue can be an assertion of cultural identity in which a sense of belonging is articulated in explicitly oppositional, territorial, and boundary-defining terms.

**Jobs and lack of career aspirations**

- All interviewees mentioned that the government does not provide any job opportunities for Indigenous youth even if they have a better education than locals or newcomers from the central parts of Russia.
They complained that they cannot find good jobs in their communities or in the cities near their homelands.

- Employers do not want to hire Indigenous youth because they lack work experience. Some young people believe that this is part of everyday racism and colonialism. They do not feel respected in their local communities without employment. One of the participants lamented: “Local people who received educations don't get jobs because they are already taken by teachers from other regions. No jobs for educated Chukchi.”

Other frequently raised issues were disconnectedness, split identity and social problems, including drinking, and marginalization. Also, the interviewees mentioned a lack of entertainment and self-actualization. To the question: “Why do you think Indigenous youth drink alcohol?” they responded that youth do not have enough knowledge, self-resilience, or faith for personal growth without resorting to substance misuse. One of the reasons for drinking is the relative absence of parental pressure, a lack of discipline, and what sometimes seems to be a lack of interest in the lives of children and teens by parents in Indigenous communities; these are often viewed as the source of youth boredom and mischief.16

16 Olga Ulturgasheva et al., “Arctic indigenous youth resilience and vulnerability: Comparative analysis of adolescent experiences across five circumpolar
Based on my research, I analyzed urban Indigenous youth who live in the big industrial Arctic cities. According to the second focus group of urban Indigenous youth, I found that Indigenous youth are not focused on their sacred and traditional meanings and beliefs. They are more interested to express themselves as Indigenous and popularize their cultures for others. They recognize assimilation as a problem for them and their children, and would like to have an occupation connected with their heritage. Also, respondents reported lacking opportunities to obtain business skills and expressed their willingness to learn trades from the business classes.

**Indigenous youth entrepreneurship: A possible solution?**

Many Indigenous communities, especially in the Arctic, demand the “new money” which should stay in Indigenous communities, instead of “oil” money. Petrov, in his paper “Exploring the Arctic’s ‘other economies’: Knowledge, creativity and the new frontier,” discusses the role of cultural economy for the remote and cold territories. He points out that elements of traditional knowledge, such as arts and crafts, are not only important components of

---

153

Indigenous culture, but are also commodities that can bring economic profit.

In the last set of interviews with 25 practicing Indigenous artists, most respondents said that they received an income from selling their crafts at least once. However, they also indicated that the main problem remains the lack of access to customers. There is a gap between the market and Indigenous communities. They need to have an intermediary who will manage market demands, bring this demand to the communities, and help sell Indigenous items on the market. Indigenous urban youth could serve as such an intermediary.

I think developing entrepreneurial skills is a path to a sustainable future for urban Indigenous youth and rural Indigenous settlements. The Russian urban Indigenous youth are a poorly studied group of people and currently, their role in society is undervalued. Nevertheless, their potential is very important for the modern cultural survival of all Indigenous Peoples in Russia and beyond. More studies should focus on understanding the conditions, human capital and potential futures of the Indigenous urban youth in the context of the sustainable development of Indigenous societies.18

18 This research was partially supported by PLR #1338850 RCN-SEES Arctic-FROST: Arctic FRontiers Of SusTainability: Resources, Societies, Environments and Development in the Changing North and 1441381 RCN Arctic-COAST: Arctic COASTal Community and
Environmental Resilience International Interdisciplinary Research Coordination Network.