

The Internal Borders of the Borderless North

Local Practices of Globalization Within the Reindeer-Herding Communities on the Kola Peninsula

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Introduction

It always astonishes me to realize how many workers in a reindeer-herding farm acknowledge have never been out in the tundra. Based on long-term (1999-2006) fieldwork in reindeer-herding communities in NW Russia, the proposed paper focuses on some recent borderless-North tendencies in the tundra regions of the Kola Peninsula. More specifically, it looks into the local fulfillments of some global mechanisms that have distanced rural from tundra populations, and farm employees from reindeer herders.

With nearly 3,000 inhabitants, Lovozero is the most populated settlement on the Eastern part of the Kola Peninsula and the municipal centre of a huge and rarely populated area stretching from the centre of the peninsula to the Barents Sea. Lovozero has always been dependant on reindeer. Nowadays, the reindeer herding is the only profitable department in the village farm that, with some 300 employees, is the biggest enterprise in the whole area. Traditional Saami place, Lovozero has more than 430 years of history related to reindeer. Today, it is a multi-ethnic society with almost equal percentages of Saami and Komi residents, as well as ethnic Russians, Nenets, and Ukrainians. Occupying a traditional cross-road position in the heart of the Kola Peninsula, Lovozero is surrounded by antagonistic landscapes. The heavy industrialized urban West begins with the miner town of Revda, some 15km from the village, joins up the railroad industrial line Kandalaksha-Murmansk by administrative centers Kirovsk, Apatity (South-West), then by industrial Olenegorsk goes up to the regional center of Murmansk some 170km North-West, pass through the industrial towns of Zapolyarnyy, Nickel, and Pechenga, to reach Kirkenes, Finnmark, Norway, Finland, and Sweden. Located in the heart of the Lovozero village, the SKhPK *Tundra* Farm with its administrative offices (*kontora*) consists of the Farm's director, zootechni-

cian, *vetvrach* administrators, economists, managers, accountants and secretaries. By contrast, the average reindeer-herding camp (*brigada*) is located eastward in the vast tundra region that stretches from Lovozero to the White Sea; it consists of eight herders, one or two *vezdekhod* drivers (*vezdekhodchik* and *naparnik*) and one, rarely two, tent workers (*chum-rabotnitsy*). The latter have traditionally been female workers, spouses of some brigade's herders. This is hardly any true today when one can count very few female workers within the brigades. The chance to have female tent workers still exists in the camps around Lovozero, then progressively decrease to the East.

In the twilight of the central subsidies redistribution, the physical relationship between the village-centred Farm administration and the reindeer-herding camps has been getting looser as the two parts of the local reindeer-herding economy have been reorienting themselves toward different kind of resources. One can identify two distancing forces within this tendency. The internal one lies in the Farm's machinery park out of Lovozero. Out of date radio stations, tracked vehicles and hand-made snowmobiles break down in the tundra making the connection with the village farm an unpredictable adventure. Such weak infrastructure distances the tundra and the village as two distinctive geographical, economic, and cultural entities. Then, the political idea of a borderless North got materialized as an external force that gave the *coup de grâce* to the reindeer herding as a pillar of the tundra-village unity. Here below I propose an ethnographic account of these two tendencies in order to find out a methodological framework for policy-relevant projects within the circumpolar cooperation.

Horizons of Global Discourses

Seen from Kola Peninsula, the Borderless North is a

top-down process. It means an easier penetration of political concepts and discourses from the West, assisted by a flow of funds through cultural tourism as well as through heritage and educational programs, and increasing participation of Lovozero Saami fellows in international projects and forums. Yet, from Lovozero perspective, the Borderless North is unidirectional: it points to the West. While opening new stimulating opportunities for cultural cooperation with the West and thus diversifying the village economy, the Borderless North decreases the importance of the reindeer herding in the tundra East. These new opportunities have contributed to the promotion of Lovozero as the "capital of Russian Lapland" and a "traditional Saami village" even though there have been at least as many ethnic Komi as ethnic Saami living there for the last century. Since 1991, quiet Lovozero residents could hardly get any break from zealous ethno-cultural emissaries from Norway, Canada, and more recently, from Denmark, as well as sporadically from Finland, Sweden, and the UK. The resources that such actors could offer relate not to the reindeer herding but rather to cultural programs, ethno-political activism, and related discourse-based economies. These resources open interesting professional opportunities for Lovozero residents, and especially for Lovozero Saami. As a good outcome, Russian Saami have established firm connections with their Saami neighbors to the West through numerous cultural and educational exchange programs and have joined the Saami Council (Saami delegates from Norway, Sweden, Finland and Russia) in 1992, shortly after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Nowadays, number of Lovozero Saami are actively involved in the urban cross-border political networks and ethnic activism. Other people related to reindeer-herding on the Kola Peninsula, such as Komi, Nenets, Russians or Ukrainians, have been granted by much less attention as the working concept of the ethno-cultural emissaries is an ethnic one and thus rely on political discourse and not on praxis. Reindeer herders from all ethnic backgrounds have hardly any access to such new resources, which are both out of reach and beyond their zones of agency. As elsewhere in the Barents (Beach 2000: 237), globalization in Lovozero means recognition of Saami rights solely on ethnic basis. While there is a long tradition in Norway and Sweden in administering cultural economics on ethnic basis, this has never been the case in the Russian North and so remains a strange and certainly not an indigenous practice. It has to be reminded that the Soviet model, which product is the contemporary reindeer-herding system on the Kola Peninsula, was, despite all unsympathetic practices, one last attempt to look at *homo sapiens* as an universal being. It is the pathetic failure of this model that precipitated Western politics to the ethno-cultural *particularism* where the ethnic background becomes the

most attractive resource for discourse-trained village residents. In regards to Sweden, Beach (2000: 234) points the 1993 legislation that, by granting the Saami "their much-desired Saami parliament", depossessed them from their hunting and fishing rights. This global trend makes new discursive resources such as "tradition", "culture", "identity", and all aspects of ethnic activism more attractive than traditional indigenous economies such as reindeer herding. Consequently, a great deal of the reindeer-herding employees in Lovozero looks to the urban West where their children study rather than to the tundra East where their reindeer graze.

Settlement of the nomadic indigenous populations was an integral part of the Soviet policy towards the North. The originality of these Northern politics comes from the effort to settle down a population not by agriculture but by reorganizing the traditional semi-nomadic reindeer herding. With the building of the collective and eventually the state farm, the main reindeer-herding body was "settled down" in the village while the herders were employed in the tundra camps as salaried workers. All herders though got apartments or houses in the village. While the herder has been spending more of the year out in the tundra, his wife and children have been staying in the village. Herder's wife was most likely to have a steady job (very often in the Sovkhoz' office) while children were going to school. Transmission of skills and knowledge between the generations and especially between father and son has been getting weak. Unless the wife was employed as tent helper, she and children have been going to the tundra camp mostly, if not only, during short vacations in August for the cloudberry season.

This resettlement politics have built and improved logistics for the public services network: electricity, phone connections and health, health care and education have been provided for all official settlements (but not in the tundra camps). This cultural policy on (re)settlement was completed by the building of boarding schools, hospitals, libraries and, above all, a farm administration in the village. In this context, the village quickly became synonym of "civilization", opposed to the open "tundra" that remained associated in public minds with "wilderness".

Permanent settlement, education and jobs in the village have alienated more than one generation from the tundra. In that respect, traditional practical skills have been kept alive by those working in and around the tundra camps: herders, tent helpers, corral workers, drivers, field meteorologists, etc., while people employed in the village offices have developed appropriate communication and organizational skills mostly based on writ-

ten knowledge. Lively voluble, socially extrovert and highly verbalized place, the Farm's office is also a set of written discourse. By definition, all working documents there are written ones. There is where all the reindeer-herding planning happens, so every month it produces an impressive amount of plans for every concerned unit. In this respect, the Farm continues to work in a somehow Soviet manner; this is, as a central planning and re-distributive body in close relationship with the municipal, regional and at some extend federal agencies. As all these agencies are located in urban centers West of the tundra, a reindeer-herding office worker looks for resources to the West. Even the fact that the current director is rather reluctant to engage in endless and, according to him, "fruitless" discussions with city-based political actors makes employees' personal quest for urban networks more vital as number of them do not regard the reindeer-herding farm as a sustainable financial shelter.

Local Adaptations to Ageing Infrastructure, or How to Travel in the Tundra

"Technology networks and connects us", said Mead Treadwell during the Borderless North NRF conference in Oulu. The material background for the progressive alienation between the village and the tundra lies in the deteriorating technology that once have ensured the good functioning of the Soviet reindeer management. During the years, the very distinct physical landscapes of the village Farm and the tundra camps have been building up different landscapes of the mind.

Lovozero is a traditional village fashioned by plain concrete blocks of socialist type commonly called "*khrushchevki*" (as they were built during Khrushchev's era), by some old wooden houses and fishing sheds, and by institutional buildings such as the Cultural House, the Cultural Centre, the Municipality, the Farm Administration, the Saami museum, the public sauna (*bania*), the hospital, the kindergarten and the schools (image 1). Although the so-urbanized village shows explicit signs of modern designing, architecture and planning, everyday life in Lovozero is far from the urban material comfort. Heating and water supply are amongst the most difficult lasting problems. According to the Soviet planning, all *khrushchevki* have been connected to a central heating system. After the collapse of the Soviet economy though, systemic deficit in the municipal budget averts the energy supply. Furthermore, the centralized regional energy provider has to deal not only with its own debts but also with a significant number of unpaid residential and institutional accounts. As a result, all of

the central-heating dependant buildings in the village keep cold until October. In this context, one can argue that heating is easier in the tundra bases as each of them has stoves and relatively good wood supply. It is not the material comfort that keeps young people away from the tundra but rather the infrastructure that can support their vectors of interest. The road to Murmansk, mail, phone and internet connections provide a valuable access to the urban network and resources. For number of Lovozero residents, permanent settlement means "cul-



Image 1. Downtown Lovozero. More than a traditional reindeer-herding village, Lovozero is an important municipal and administrative center shaped by urban culture and concrete *khrushchevki*.

ture" and "civilization" while tundra does exactly the opposite: tundra is "wilderness".

Transport Connection

The tundra landscape secretes living resources such as reindeer, fish, berries, and game. In addition, the material equipment in the reindeer-herding camp provides a strongly distinctive environment that has inherited the Soviet infrastructure from the early 1970's when the state farm was created out from the ancient *kolkhoz*. As a result, the otherwise pastoral tundra camp has been equipped in a way more typical for the early industrial era. Made out of heavy materials, mostly wood and iron (as well as cast iron and lead), all *baza* equipment is physically hard, impact resistant and compulsory heavy. Since 1960s, heavy mechanical transportation has become essential for the maintaining of the traditional economy of reindeer herding. It often comes from the neighbouring military industry. The most important, the most representative, and the most valuable element of the reindeer-herding material culture is, with no doubt, the *Veždekhod* (image 2).

The *Veždekhod* is an 11-tone all-terrain tracked vehicle perfectly adapted to Soviet reindeer-herding thanks to



Image 2. Herder's best friends: the Vezdekhod and the dogs. The mechanization of the Sovkhoz connection to the tundra camps was the beginning of this beautiful friendship.

its specific carrying capacities: originally made to carry a basic infantry unit, nowadays it transports an entire reindeer-herding brigade, this is, eight herders, one driver, and one borderless-North field-anthropologist between the village and the tundra camp. Very often, there are even two brigades (16-18 persons) travelling by one *Vezdekhod* (image 2). In addition to this human cargo, the *Vezdekhod* has two-tone carrying capacity, which is of structural importance in maintaining the heavy tundra material culture. *Vezdekhod* is filled with cargo up to the limit, and often beyond, for every tundra trip. To the village, it is overloaded with all kind of tundra resources collected during the season: several tones of fish and reindeer in spring and autumn, and a full amount of cloudberries in August. Back to the tundra camp, the *Vezdekhod* is filled with basic products for 3-6 months such as salt, sugar, flour, potatoes, oatmeal, etc., barrels with gasoline, in addition to all personal belongings.

As reindeer herders rely on physical access to the local living resources (reindeer meat, game, furs, fish, berries, mushrooms), a non-mediated, direct tundra access is crucial for their economic and cultural survival. Such access relies, above all, on good and trustful means of transport. For ordinary herders, the *Vezdekhod* is the only mean of transport between the village and the tundra camp (usually within a distance of 150km). It can cross rivers, lakes, and tundra marshlands, thanks to its mammoth caterpillars worth one tone each. But the main cultural value of the *Vezdekhod* lies in its collective purpose: unlike the reindeer sled and the snowmobile, the *Vezdekhod* is a collective vehicle (image 3). Furthermore, it is provided by the farm. The collective both ownership and use make the *Vezdekhod* perfectly adapted to the post-Soviet tundra culture where individual entrepreneurship and individual economic responsibility are seen as alien and ominous things. Therefore a great deal of the tundra-village cultural communication relies on this tough Soviet machine. It makes the vital connection

between the reindeer-herding camps and the village Farm, between the reindeer herder and its family in the village, as well as between the reindeer-herder and the reindeer herd. Paraphrasing Mead Treadwell, I would say that *Vezdekhod* "networks and connects us", urban and tundra people.

For centuries, Saami reindeer-herders in the Kola have been on more or less constant travel, covering extensive territories woven by migratory routes. The "modern" Soviet village alienated reindeer from the village insofar that it would be surprising to see any reindeer in Lovozero apart from the annual Northern Festival (*Prazdnik Severa*). The vehicle park was built to resolve the problems introduced by distance. This heavy mechanical transportation has become essential for the maintaining of the traditional economy. The collapse of the subsidized reindeer husbandry dramatically limited people's ability to participate in any aspect of the tundra economy. There is no money to replace broken machines, and fuel is expensive. The heavy *Vezdekhod* breaks down on almost every trip out in the tundra, and especially on land-water transitions, where the old mechanics is particularly vulnerable. The Soviet *Vezdekhod* inexorably needs repair on the borderless North.

Working out in the tundra also means dealing with permanent unpredictability. The latter has dramatically increased after 1991. As the human control over the herds



Image 3. Vezdekhods kaput. Out of date tracked vehicles and hand-made snowmobiles break down in the tundra making the connection with the village farm an unpredictable adventure. Such weak infrastructure distances the tundra and the village as two distinctive geographical, economic, and cultural entities.

has become looser, the movement of the herd is now less monitored and much more unpredictable. Therefore, for every corral and herding campaign, herders have to be "ever ready" to leave the camp for locating and eventually corralling reindeer out in the tundra. In such a context, one must often be in a "fighting trim", ready for action. Furthermore, herders are dependant not only on natural forces and on animal migrations but also on the extremely unpredictable transport logistics

in the tundra. A *vezdekhod's* departure is a major and highly anticipated event in the tundra camp. When exactly a *vezdekhod* should leave or arrive depends on various unpredictable factors such as weather conditions, orders from the Farm administration and definitely on the driver's own plans, mood and physical and mental condition. Therefore, a herder has to be ever ready to pack his goods and everything he wants to take with from the tundra: meat, fish, furs, berries etc. This nomadic-like readiness defines the herder's material facilities as he needs appropriate equipment in order to move quickly. All commodities go quickly in weather-



Image 4. Grinding the axe. "The axe is the all-purpose tool in the hands of the reindeer-herders".

resistant containers: a tarpaulin bag (*meshok*) for personal goods, some waterproof barrels (*bochki*) for fuel, salted fish, meat, berries, bread, foodstuffs and perishables, a hard wooden coffer for kitchen utensils and non-perishables, and a heavy fortified caisson (*yashchik*) for smoked fish. This hard and heavy inventory is perfect for long lasting *vezdekhod's* journeys where only highly resistant and shockproof equipment can survive.

Herders use various military designed items such as kitchen utensils and clothing. Although a lot of herders keep working in some traditional reindeer-herding clothes (*malitza*), all *vezdekhod* drivers, carpenter workers and number of herders use military clothes in the tundra. Military coats (*kurtki*) and trousers (*brjuki*) are of good use for spring and autumn reparation work in the camp, for fishing and everyday chores in the camp. Another military equipment of great value in the tundra is the so-called "chemical-defence complete set" (*himzashitita*). Designed in Soviet times in matt green

tones for the purposes of a chemical war, the *himzashitita* consists of chemically resistant coat, gloves and boots. The coat is the most frequently used of them out in the tundra. Being totally waterproof, it is wore during the frequent rainy days and nights, during *vezdekhod* trips, in the barks while fishing or lake-crossings, it covers temporary tents, warehouses, storage yards and sled's loads...

Among the most common technical tools in a tundra camp, happens, with no doubt, the sledgehammer. Beyond its everyday utility in the tundra camp, it is a mandatory tool for every *vezdekhod* ride. Only a sledgehammer can fix a broken caterpillar. Crucial element of the local reindeer-herding culture, the sledgehammer is indispensable for the functioning of the collective vehicle. The gas saw and the axe are used to cut down birch trees for heating. According to a recent Russian manual on reindeer-herding, "the axe is the all-purpose tool in the hands of the reindeer-herders" (Syrovatskiy 2000: 341) . It is also used for reindeer carcass dismemberment, woodcutting, and carpentry (image 4).

The central piece of a tundra camp is a big-sized iron stove. Serving the most essential needs in a tundra camp life such as heating and cooking, the iron stove also define a symbolic place of gathering . As reindeer-herders' discourse is very much praxis-based, there are few discussions in normal everyday situations. This "tacit" local knowledge on tundra and reindeer is the valued knowledge in all tundra communities, and both indigenous and Russian tundra actors share this value. As for the language skills, the emphasis is put on local languages that are, Saami, Komi and the vernacular Russian language. "Most of us we speak three languages!" tells proudly one Komi herders. In that sense, the tundra provides not only all necessary natural resources but also all social values, which is quite different from the more and more world-connected Lovozero village. In this respect, the typical mistrust on foreigners ("I call them all fascists!" proclaims solemnly one senior reindeer-herder) is rather one on urban people that are not connected to the tundra on a subsistence basis. This mistrust gets especially increased towards the "educated people" as it is expected that one who carries a pen could hardly operate a sledgehammer.

The daily work on a tundra camp is broken by regular tea halts around the iron stove. There can be six to eight such tea gatherings in a usual *brigada's* day. The iron kettle practically never leaves the stove's hot spot. Herders usually use army-style pewter or tin tankards; tea is strong and takes more than three spoons of sugar that is transported in bulk in everyone's *meshok*. In opposition to the active periods full of go out on the tundra,

the camp days around the iron stove are rather static and settled down. The tea gathering is never noisy but rather contemplative with sporadic discussions suddenly arising between long sequences of quiet silence.

There are at least three breaks in a usual Farm's office day: one for lunch (at 1 p.m.) and two for tea/coffee (at 11 a.m. and 4 p.m.). In special occasions, when a visitor arrives from the town (the municipal and regional administrations, from Murmansk or, rarely, from some federal agency), they can be an extended additional one. Unlike the tundra camp, the Farm culture does pay respect to the coffee although half of the employees still prefer the traditional tea. It comes in simple but elegant tea sets served on a light tea tray. It goes with cookies, chocolate or candies bought in the neighbouring shop. There is no general tea gathering like in the tundra camp but rather every department manages its own breaks. Three to four offices gather around the white electrical kettle and the tea tray. This takes an average of eight employees per kettle, a number comparable of the one in the tundra camp; however, the iron kettle on the hot stove there is definitely bigger than the electric one in the office. These meetings are voluble, lively, joyful and noisy; the discussion's continuum hardly knows any break. The break is extremely dynamic there, with a permanent movement inside and outside the office. Everyone fussing around in an energetic hustle and bustle, the door frequently opens welcoming and greeting neighbours and visitors from other offices. Some departments, like the accounting one, are free from men,



Image 5. Reindeer-herding camp No. 8 overhung by Kolm'avr meteorological station. While office's phones, faxes, and computers, connect the Farm employees with the urban centres, the everyday connection with tundra camp No. 8 relies entirely on the WW-II-style radiophone of this most remote meteorological field-station on the Kola Peninsula.

so a sudden male appearance increases even more the level of animation, enlivening and laughs.

This radically different gathering around the kettle from the one we know in the tundra camp is supported by the different material culture around. A Farm office is equipped with desks and chairs, a great deal of docu-

ment folders as well as with a computer, a printer and sometimes with photocopy and fax machines. Although the four latter are far from being brand new and sometimes are out of order, they are nevertheless products of high modernity and so have an unambiguous role in defining the village Farm as a place of "civilization". Compared to the reindeer-herding camp, they shape a "soft" environment made by light polymeric materials. All offices have also telephones and some of them (the economic and accounts departments) have recently been connected to Internet through the dial-up system. Although the Internet connection runs extremely slow and with a lot of difficulties, it provides, through the worldwide web, the so important link to the neighbouring towns. While the office's phones, faxes and Internet-connected computers enable the direct relationship with the other so connected administrative places (the urban centres), the everyday tie with the other part of the reindeer-herding system (the tundra brigades) is possible only by the central radio stationary which occupies a special office on the second floor. This radio stationary plays a crucial role for the relationship between the village Farm and the tundra camps. Yet its exclusivity enhances even more the fact that the material and technical facilities proper to the administrative office enable relationships rather with other urban centres than with the hardly connected tundra camps. The radically different physical environment in the two poles of the reindeer-herding economy defines different cultural understandings, agendas, social networks, practices and discourses. Consequently, this also conditions somewhat opposite cultural affinities and geographical vectors of interest. The material "soft" culture in the Farm ties valuable relationship with the urban world on the West while the harsh and "hard" environment in the tundra camps shifts the reindeer-herding brigada closer to other tundra actors in the Eastern part of the Peninsula such as hunters, military, carpenters, meteorologists ...

Radio Connection

Meteorologists play an instrumental role in the radio communication between the village Farm and tundra camps No. 1 and 8. While office's phones, faxes, and computers, connect the Farm employees with the urban centres, the everyday tie with the tundra camps is only possible by the central radio stationary which occupies a special office on the second floor. It is even worse on the tundra side where number of brigade's radiophones do not work. This is the case of tundra camp No. 8 which connection to the outside world entirely relies on the WW-II-style radiophone of the neighbouring meteorological station (image 5).

Kolm'avr is the most remote hydro-meteorological station on the Kola Peninsula. It literally faces the reindeer-herding camp No. 8 overhanging it some 100m up on the *vezdekhod's* track that links the camp with the winter corral of Porosozero, the brigade No. 1 and, ultimately, the village of Lovozero. The staff lives and work in a 6-room wooden house similar to the ones of the reindeer-herding camp nearby. There are three bedrooms, one kitchen, one study and then, the room with the radio station. A small potato garden goes along the house. Then, of course, several warehouses sheltering the wood and the gas supplies, housing the two most valuable items: the chief's snowmobile and the electricity generator. The latter is nearly one-ton heavy installation dating back from the late 1950's. It takes around two hours to get it started in a complex algorithm. But even if it does not work on a regular basis, the generator happens to bring light and joy to the neighbouring reindeer herders in the dark winter days. Indeed, a more animated atmosphere in the reindeer-herding camp is easily perceptible in an "electric generator's day". Playing cards, domino and even checks provides the background for some energetic discussions and so livens up the otherwise quiet tundra community.

This small station needs five permanent workers but as far as no qualified meteorologist expresses his wish to live and work 11 months a year in the tundra there are now only three people working there. This reduced staff does not imply reducing the amount of work though. In the summer of 2004, the youngest worker stayed completely alone for almost two months in the station! This is quite unbelievable considering the round-the-clock rhythm of tasks one must do in order to keep the station working and to keep oneself alive. Thus, for 50 days in a row he had to not only do all measurements but particularly assure every four hours radio-connections while repairing the frequent bugs in the desperately obsolete equipment, supplying fresh water to the station and, above all, hunting to survive. And here is the point: the institutional affiliation and job-related movements in the tundra are peripheral to survival but play a central role in the resource redistribution and the building up of one's social capital in the tundra.

On the one hand, the job provides the formal framework in which one makes one's own agenda. For all tundra workers, fishing, hunting, and all subsistence activities are the fundamental ones. Their genuine attachment is to the environment and not to the institution. This brings all tundra actors closer to each other as economic and social networks are built up on geographical and environmental closeness. Working in the tundra means living on the tundra, this is, sharing the tundra's cultural values. Considering the great deal of time, effort

and passion that the young meteorologist puts on fishing, it is worth to point out that, because of his allergy, he can not eat any fish. Although fish does not play any role in his physical survival, it is extremely important in terms of social inclusion. First of all, the guy's extensive knowledge on fishing enables him to work closely with the reindeer-herders for whom fish is a resource at least as important as reindeer is. Therefore, he often coordinates his fishing trips with the herders. Then, the great amount of fish that the meteorologist is able to gather is thoroughly distributed through his network: a barrel for Lovozero, a box for the *vezdekhod's* driver, a full backpack for his boss and his colleague in the station. These are the key actors in his closest village/tundra network. In return, he receives some goods and mostly services from all this people, according of their own domains of agency: fuel and *vezdekhod* transportation in the tundra, mailing and administrative cares in the village. Sharing goods and services through barter are essential local values. Far more than a working place, the tundra is a way of life for this young Russian who, moreover, was born in Siberia, faraway from the Kola Peninsula. What makes the meteorologist a legitimate actor in the tundra is not the fact that he gives the forecast but his high capacity to repair snowmobiles, operate the gas saw, to hunt, fish, gather wood and so to actively participate in the tundra subsistence economy and social network.

On the other hand, the central institution provides resources susceptible to empower the one who operates them (Verdery 1996). Hence, what furthermore makes the meteorologist a key tundra actor is not simply his involvement in the above-mentioned everyday activities but, above all, his unique capacity to make electricity and achieve some vital radio-connections. In fact, his formal duty is to transmit regular whether information to the central institution in Murmansk. But aside this job-related responsibility, he carries out a great deal of the coordination of the whole tundra activity in the region. He makes everyday connections between the reindeer-herding camp and the village Farm as well as between the tundra camps No. 1, 8, and 9. Herders asking for connection come often in the station. Brigadiers coordinate the reindeer outrun and eventual corral from there. Every important reindeer campaign (slaughter corrals in winter, capturing male deer as draft animals for herder's sleds (*upriazhki*) in summer and autumn, as well as every search for reindeer has to be coordinated between these three neighbouring brigades. In such occasions, the meteo-station acts as coordinating and dispatcher centre between the reindeer-herding camps so its technical infrastructure takes an active part in the reindeer-herding logistics. In August and September 2004, brigades No. 1 and 8 carried out a difficult search for draft animals among the parts of herds migrating

back from the summer pastures. After several unfruitful attempts to outrun such parts, all reindeer-herders but their brigadier and his wife left the camp No. 8 for a massive action on the tundra. It is the radiophone in the meteo-station that assured the communication between the brigadier and his herders.

Looking for policy relevant projects

Within a context of smooth globalization, the reindeer-herding cultural industry gets torn between the discourse-based resources of the urban West and the pastures of the tundra East. Consequently, its village and the tundra parts decrease their interdependency and eventually become quasi-autonomous units. The valued social relations are no more primarily institution-centred but rather environment-based: they are lined up with particular material and environmental culture and so are more likely to happen within communities sharing similar environments. The material environment conditions the cultural patterns. Therefore a shift in the material environment is able to shift the social environment and could be used as a major instrument of cultural change. Since the 1990s, a number of Western projects have brought new resources to Lovozero. As a result, this well-known “reindeer-herding village” has been progressively equipped for global connection while reindeer-herders have tightened their tundra network around the *Veздеkhods* and the meteo-station in order to maintain the shipment of tundra products to their relatives in Lovozero. These different resource features and locations imply opposite vectors of interests. Consequently, village and tundra have pointed to opposite vectors of migration through the borderless North. Scholarized people tend to go westward in town where they can achieve higher education, professional career, cultural activism, marriage... Tundra actors get low status in village; tend to get closer/mobile access to the tundra resources eastward. Their main cultural tools are mobile ones: snowmobile, all-terrain vehicles, *vezdekods*. The borderless-North cultural boundaries are geographical ones: they divide different environment-related zones of agency. All tundra actors have similar values, knowledge systems, and worldviews, which have been built through their life-time relationship with the tundra: reindeer, fish, game, pastures, rivers, and the whole eco-system whose resources they are dependant on, as well as all social networks and relations with neighbouring military, hunters, geologists, etc. This is the tundra culture, and reindeer herding is part of it. It contrasts with the village culture built in the farm’s offices, reindeer-herding management boards, schools, administrations, etc, which depends on politi-

cal networks. Yet, it is far much easier to get funding for projects based on ethno-cultural discourses than for infrastructural projects able to improve the economic vitality of the reindeer-herding culture.

New discourse-based resources are likely to happen in cultural landscapes where infrastructure for discourse production do exist (international networks, transport, phone and internet connection). From village perspective, the North has become more “borderless”, thanks to international cooperation. From tundra vantage point, though, it has become more remote and isolated than in Soviet times, due to out-of-date material infrastructure.

The “Borderless North” starts with local, regional, mobility and communication capacity. There is a structural need for tundra-based investments starting with the transport and communication: tundra-friendly ATV, snowmobiles; reliable radio connection. As always and everywhere in the world, the vitality of tradition depends on modern innovative techniques and technologies.

Slowly but surely, the village of Lovozero is becoming part of the “global village” and looks forward to meeting the world. Politicians and cultural fund dealers have now interest to pay attention also to the material side of the “culture”, the one that starts with building the infrastructure that enables efficient communication between village and tundra. Their main resource – the discourse on “tradition” – depends on it. Failure to do so risks to empty the signifiers (Saussure 1922) on which their discourse is built from their real-life referents.

Notes

1 In the original text: “topor - universal’noe sredstvo v ruki olenevodov”.

2 See the poetic, yet structural description of the stove in the Komi reindeer-herding camp in Habeck, 2005: 11-14).

3 For an ethnographic account of the relationship between herders and hunters on Kola, see Sabev 2002: 19-24.

4 In theory, the station is supplied with foodstuffs from the center but as the supply heavily depends on the transport traffic, in reality the staff have to secure their food, especially for fresh products as fish and meat.

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