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ABORIGINE CULTURAL LANDSCAPES OF THE RUSSIAN NORTH AS HERITAGE OBJECTS

ABSTRACT

The paper presents a problem of preservation of cultural landscapes of indigenous peoples as a part of national cultural heritage of Russia. The structure and features of aboriginal cultural landscapes of the North that reflect semiotic arrangement of areas under economic development are discussed. This paper also focuses on the problem of identification and mapping of real and virtual aboriginal cultural landscapes of the North and their ecological – economic functions.

KEY WORDS: cultural landscapes, indigenous peoples of the North, heritage, preservation, mapping.

INTRODUCTION

Recently, there has been a marked growth of economic development in the northern areas of Russia. After the breakdown of the Soviet Union, Russia became a real northern country because the major part of its territory is located in taiga and tundra zones with severe climatic conditions. Economic expansion to the North has been accompanied by growth of industrial sector and settlements, migration, and areas with considerable environment disturbances that occupy about 10% of the total territory [Yevseev et al., 2004]. Despite these facts, public still regards the North as a territory with vast virgin lands, which justifies industrial development of natural areas associated mainly with mineral, gas and oil extraction. Assessments of ecological damage from industrial development is far from the ideal and deal primarily with inadequate

compensatory payments for environmental pollution, water consumption, lands removed from users that include traditional nature management by indigenous peoples of the North, etc. The focus has so far been on material losses of aborigine population due to disappearance of land that can be subject to traditional nature management. Legislation acts provide for possibility of compensation for land removed from this use to cover material losses of aborigine population. Such land is only treated as economically productive, which considerably limits motivations for its preservation.

SUBJECT AND METHODS OF INVESTIGATIONS

Industrial development of northern territories is mainly performed by newcomers who were brought up in different environment where nature management is based on European cultural canons. They adhere to different from aborigines' world outlook principles (i.e., anthropocentrism); they often do not accept integrity of aborigine cultural landscapes of the territories under traditional nature management and even ignore their existence treating such lands as virgin. Traditional nature management, which formed aborigine cultural landscapes, is very often regarded as archaic demanding European style modifications. The lack of ecological-economic assessments of various biological resources and ecological services of geo-systems at such territories hampers their economic competition with other branches of modern economy, which prompts aspirations to address this

situation. However, culturological aspect of the problem is still known to a limited group of professionals.

Ethnologists, geographers, and culture experts are all aware of fallacy of approaches that promote disappearance of northern ethnoses. They attempt to draw attention to the need for conservation of aborigine cultural landscapes because these landscapes not only provide familiar living and working conditions for northern people, but are also a part of national cultural heritage of Russia. Many principles of traditional nature management, being a part of culture accumulated by aborigine population of the North during many centuries, may considerably enrich modern nature management philosophy [Krasovskaya, 2006]. Ignored and unaccepted by carriers of European traditions, landscapes of indigenous peoples of the North are being gradually destroyed in the course of changes in nature management practices. Organic unity of aborigine society and nature achieved during many centuries is, therefore, being destroyed. But this unity is important as ethnos necessary forming component. In many industrially developed territories, cultural landscapes of indigenous peoples of the North exist in virtual form. Their fragments may exist as material or semantic objects and as cultural-natural archetypes well fixed in regional identity memory. According to academician D.S. Likhachev, memory is not conservation of the past but a care for eternity [Likhachev, 2000].

Modern methods of studies of northern aborigine cultural landscapes integrate methodological approaches of ethnology, cultural studies, sociology, and other humanitarian sciences and traditional for geography methods for detection of natural and economic territorial systems. These methods belong to cultural geography, which received a new development urge in Russia after a long period of inactivity due to many reasons. This urge is also explained by the need to transition to

sustainable development. Russia initiated the development of a new “cultural dimension” in programs for sustainable development in the Arctic conducted by the Arctic Council (International Institute for Coordination of Circumpolar States Development). Such programs stimulate further activities for regional cultural heritage conservation including conservation of aborigine cultural landscapes.

CULTURAL LANDSCAPES OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES OF THE NORTH: SEMIOTIC ARRANGEMENT OF AREAS UNDER ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

What is a cultural landscape of indigenous peoples of the North? In order to answer this question, the concept of a “cultural landscape” must be first defined. There are several interpretations of this concept all associated with a comprehensive concept of post-non-classic science important to the development of cultural landscape theory which states that man and nature make an integral whole. “The Earth space organizes culture, and culture organizes this space” – this idea of Yu.A. Vedenin [1997] brilliantly reflects “poles of attraction” forming the interdisciplinary concept of a cultural landscape.

Ethnic-cultural interpretation of the “cultural landscape” concept, specifically, that it is a historical product of interactions between nature and society within a certain territory, has been adopted here. A cultural landscape is a culture of a community of people formed at a certain natural-geographical environment regarded as a whole [Kaluzkov et al., 2000]. A cultural landscape integrated model includes six components: spiritual culture, local society, local economy, settlement pattern, language system, and natural landscape. Each of these components is a self-evolving system. Their coherent development stimulates mutual adaptation and defines common characteristics of cultural landscapes evolution. Multifaceted connections of man and nature expressed in nature management systems, settlement

patterns, toponymy, and other characteristics comprise foundation of cultural landscapes.

These connections are reflected in aborigine cultural landscapes brightly and originally. For example, northern geo-systems have low productivity and are unstable to technogenic impact. How is it reflected in settlement patterns and nature management structure? Traditionally, indigenous peoples of the North are mainly nomadic and semi-nomadic, and seldom settled. Each community manages a territory of up to several thousands of kilometers. Seasonal roaming may extend to 600-1000 km. These parameters represent dimensions of cultural landscapes. The objects of focus ("nuclei") of this space, are nomadic settlements and sacral places scattered here. Its semiotic arrangement reflects original inclusion of man in nature. The structure and functions of such cultural landscapes are supported by geographically determined cultures.

A quick response of nature to human activities makes people aware of their dependence on nature so they develop certain social-ecological values that help to preserve nature. Indigenous people accept development as cyclic but not advancing as in European culture. For example, according to Hanty concept, the cycle length is three thousand years and modern people live only in its middle.

Language, being a component of northern aboriginal cultural landscapes, reflects and organizes aborigine peoples' experience of economic development. Seasonal-temporal "pieces" of aborigine life are vividly fixed in phonological phenomena, animal life rhythms, and economic activities. For example, Evenk year cycle includes: "ilaga" – a month of berry dwarf shrubs blossom (June), "ilkun" – a month of berries ripening, "iren" – a time to pick larch bark (both – in July), "ugun" – a month when coastal ice on rivers appears (September), etc. A well-known polar explorer V.Yu. Vize once wrote that the Earth's nature is too diverse to be described strictly by seasonal rhythm.

Traditional knowledge of indigenous peoples of the Arctic has been preserving this idea for many centuries! Aborigine toponyms vividly fix the character of the environment: Nenez toponym "*Hadyta*" means "spruce river", "*Tabседа*" – sandy hill, "*Yambto*" – long lake, etc. There are many other examples, but all of them are the evidence that aborigine cultural landscapes represent a social-cultural system and not isolated objects and phenomena. This system has developed internal links and characteristics.

Cultural landscapes of indigenous peoples of the North are socially designed and constructed due to integration of culture (spiritual, economic, etc.) and natural environment in the course of nature management. One may say that nature is a cradle for aborigine peoples and space is their tutor. Cultural landscapes of indigenous peoples of the North are expressed in patterns of economic development of a territory, its semiotic system, toponymic and spatial-temporal characteristics.

These characteristics are as follows:

- Multi-scale space – existence of several organizational levels (from a nomadic camp to the entire Arctic);
- Vertical differentiation – existence of two distinct layers: natural and cultural, each of them is differentiated as well;
- Specific "local time" formed by original cultural, geopolitical, economic environment when local traditional nature management practices and traditional communities appeared;
- Dynamic character: nomadic nuclei centers, patterns of nature management, and seasonal territorial organization of economy;
- Semiotic arrangement that reflects organic unity of man and nature, soul attributed to Nature;

- Low polarization and nature-defined limits; and
- Existence of images and symbols formed by regional identity.

These characteristics reveal the cultural landscape code and form a certain "landscape text", consisting of verbal and visual components. Consolidated landscape images of native cultural landscapes are formed not only by sets of their elements (spatial texts), but mostly by metric correlations between these elements that form landscape icons [Strelezky, 2002]. Codes and texts are referred to as object-spatial cultural landscape characteristics formed by the culture. Studies of these characteristics enable identification of aborigine cultural landscapes, their preserved objects at certain territories, refer them to cultural heritage group, and develop conservation measures.

IDEAL IMAGES OF ABORIGINE CULTURAL LANDSCAPES OF THE PEOPLES OF THE NORTH

According to V.N. Strelezky [Strelezki, 2002], three ethnic factors play an important role in ethnic cultural landscapes:

- Sacral natural environment archetypes – "internal images" of landscapes;
- Historically formed types of initial organization ("local time"); and
- Traditional religion.

These factors ultimately determine internal structure and laws of cultural landscape functioning. They also radically differentiate cultural from anthropogenic landscapes and demonstrate that cultural landscapes are studied by humanitarian (cultural) geography and related branches of science. Understanding of these factors facilitates investigation of cultural landscapes. Let us briefly characterize the essence of these ethnically stipulated factors for cultural landscapes of indigenous peoples of the

North with natural environment in the background.

The traditional model of the World of ingenious peoples is an integral world outlook that controls all aspects of spiritual and material life and forms its own natural environment archetype. "The North" has never been treated by aborigines as a geographical object only. It represents metaphysical space where temporal-spatial limits of the World expire. It was only their own cosmology that could describe such space but not objective reality.

Perception of geographical space is being achieved through integration of mythological cosmos geography and real geography of the Arctic. A cultural landscape is a semiotic system with information links among objects. Semantic objects of cultural landscapes include symbolic-index (for example – island Vaigach for Nenets) and iconic (for example a river or lake as a water limit between "living" and "dead" world for Saami) objects.

Perception of Northern space based on aborigine world outlook enables one to understand principle rules of its organization and management by man. A continuous nature of space without "vacuum" not processed mentally or physically, its spirituality, identity of Heavens and Earth nature form semantic patterns of cultural landscape structure. Integrity and identity of rational and metaphysical world structure promote the development of sacral attitude towards the Earth's space.

Internal images of motherland for indigenous peoples of the North are connected with tundra, forest-tundra, and taiga forests landscapes that form the arena of traditional nature management. It is typical that information about objective reality in the minds of indigenous peoples is formed for a larger part as visual images: "...The world, surrounding a man speaks many languages... and it is an attribute of wisdom to learn to understand them..." [Lotman, 2000]. A well

developed image memory of aborigines of the North helps them keep nature images. Art critics noticed that alien elements in familiar cultural landscapes images (pipelines, electric lines, etc.) are always shown in black color in pictures of aborigine children. At the same time, natural objects are precisely drawn with a full color spectrum including halftones.

Traditionally, community is a well-developed type of social organization. It controls the type of ethnic mentality and is presented in the historic pattern of settlement structure, self government, traditions, and customs. Aborigine people think that community is the best form of social organization. This notion is based on many-centuries experience. Common ownership and management of natural resources and community role in keeping traditions of moral-ethic behavior patterns stipulate the creation of a specific type of aborigine material life-support culture (asceticism and reasonable demands) [Krasovskaya, 2005].

A unique perception of space (as a "Middle World" in the sacral system of the Universe) in aborigine culture helps maintaining its regulation, turns it into a semantic system, and fills it with a special sense. Traditional Universe model combined with image perception of space promoted formation of a special cultural landscape structure which essences is pagan spirituality of a vast economically exploited territory where man is only a part of natural environment. Tundra and taiga, pastures, and fishing and hunting areas are sites that belong to idols controlling natural resources exploitation by family clans. Evenks ask for permission from Mother-Earth idol before constructing a tent. Some feasts devoted to sacrifice to idols – owners of productive lands, are still preserved. For example, coastal Chukchi have a feast for the sea sacrifice – "Thanks giving festival". Seids (Fig. 1), sacral rocks, and places, for example, Nenets sacral place Kozmin prolesok in Kaninskaya tundra, etc., represent material "incarnation" of idols and their lands.



Fig.1. Saami seid

Thus, aborigine cultural landscapes are saturated with symbols and sense. Together with natural environment archetypes they form ideal images that are inherited by generations of regional identities. Loss of cultural landscapes actually means depletion of culture of indigenous peoples of the North.

DISCUSSION

Identification and preservation of northern aborigine cultural landscapes

The existence of unaltered aborigine cultural landscapes is hardly possible. But even consideration for their fragments may help to preserve indigenous peoples of the North cultural heritage. The appearance of new cultural layers modifies cultural landscapes considerably not only in the course of transformation of natural resources exploitation patterns but also through replacement of spatial-temporal patterns of land use. All these facts stimulate reasonable questions: how to identify such a large territorial object for conservation and which fragments of aborigine cultural landscapes are of prime importance as heritage objects? It is clear that in order to isolate aborigine cultural landscapes as heritage objects it is necessary to find territories with well preserved codes and texts of cultural landscapes in the context of the components discussed above. Such territories may be found in traditional nature management regions with a well preserved nomadic economy. Long-term changes in a life-style of aborigine population, e.g., life in permanent settlements, resulted in their gradual involvement in other economic activities. But there are still over the 3.000 nomadic farms. In the future, nomadic economy will involve fewer and fewer aborigines, however original traditional occupations (reindeer breeding, hunting and fishing, berries gathering) must be preserved as an important factor of the regional ethnic identities existence and preservation of aborigine cultural landscapes.

The preservation of aborigine traditional nature management based on traditional

methods and organization principles provides an opportunity for the preservation of the regional natural environment in the best way possible. It allows organic unity of cultural landscapes and also supports a normal process of ecosystem ecological restoration. In the modern world, the economic value of natural ecosystems grows year to year. Thus, territories of traditional nature management turn to be the elements of ecological stabilizing areas which preservation is extremely important to northern territories [Krasovskaya, 2006]. Economic value of these territories may grow not only as a result of traditional economic activities, e.g., reindeer meat, fish, furs etc., but also through ethnic and ecological tourism development with necessary participation of aborigine communities in this process.

In order to identify the existing fragments of aborigine ethnic – cultural landscapes within the boundaries of traditional nature management territories, it is necessary to detect local natural-cultural complexes. They correspond to family clans territories of nomadic communities with traditional economy. Considering the fact that traditional economy is determined by natural conditions, fragments of cultural landscapes are within nature limits, determining location of pasture and hunting lands, fishing sites, etc. The identified fragments of cultural landscapes must be studied in order to isolate preserved codes and texts using cultural-geographical, ethnographic, cultural studies, historical, and other methods. This enables discovery of material and symbolic elements of cultural landscapes that may be referred to as aborigine cultural objects of different ranks.

Folklore studies help to materialize cultural landscapes texts images in the regions with considerable changes in nature management patterns. They also help to reveal virtual cultural landscapes, their elements, sacral objects, spatial-temporal characteristics, etc. with natural environment in the background. Combined studies of natural environment patterns, traditional nature management

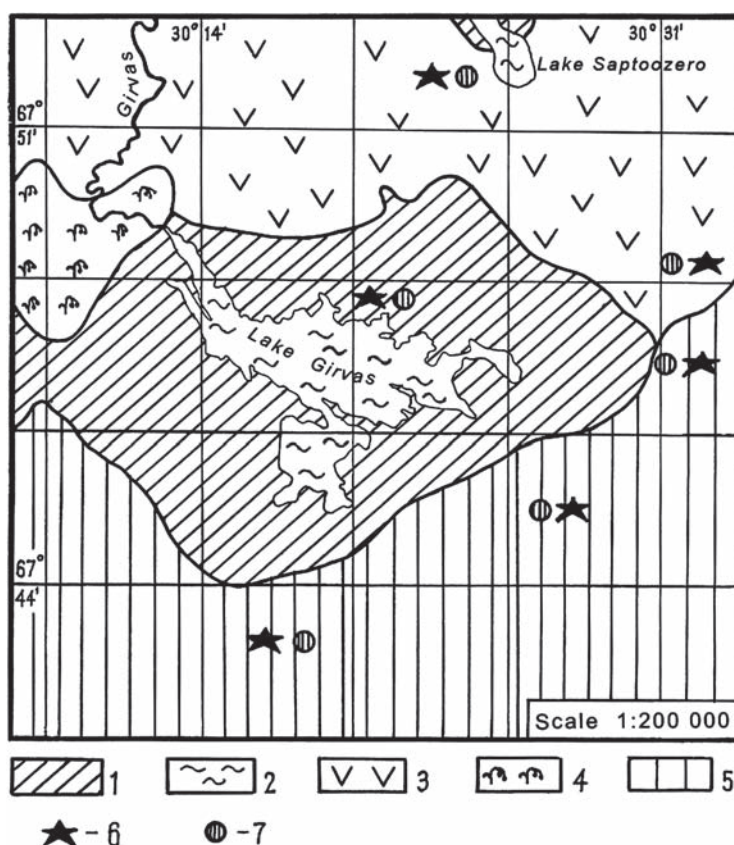


Fig.2. Saami cultural landscapes in Lake Girvas region:

1 – pastures at lacustrine plains with willow and ash woods; 2 – lake fishing sites; 3 – hunting sites at hilly denudation plains covered by northern taiga forests; 4 – berries gathering sites at the bogged lacustrine and alluvial plains covered by pine forests; 5 – combined hunting and berries gathering sites with northern taiga forests; 6 – sacral areas (“urochishe”); 7 – settlement areas (“urochisha”)

system, and folklore enabled compilation of maps of Saami virtual cultural landscapes for the Hibiny Mountains and Lake Girvas (Babinsky Saami) in Murmansk region (Fig. 2).

Multi-scale characteristics of aborigine cultural landscapes call for preservation of sacral macro-regional centers as top-priority heritage objects. These centers may be dissociated with the territories of nomadic traditional nature management. Nenets island Vaigach may serve as an example of such sacral center. In its southern part, there is a male idol – “Vesako,” while in its northern part, there is a female idol “Hedako”. Sacral Saami lake Seidozero may also be referred to as such center. Original images and symbols in aborigine communities present

a problem of how to preserve separate parts of virtual cultural landscapes together with their elements – symbols. Kulikovo battle field in Russia and Waterloo battle field in Western Europe are analogues to such virtual cultural landscapes fragments. Similar objects also exist at the vast Arctic territories, but they are hardly known in this respect. For example, the Rauchua river flows into the Eastern-Siberian Sea. In Chukchi language, this toponym means “the place of the great battle”. The territory of this historical event fixed by toponym may also dictate the need for its preservation as a virtual element of Chukchi cultural heritage.

A unique nature of aborigine mentality prevents informing aliens about preserved

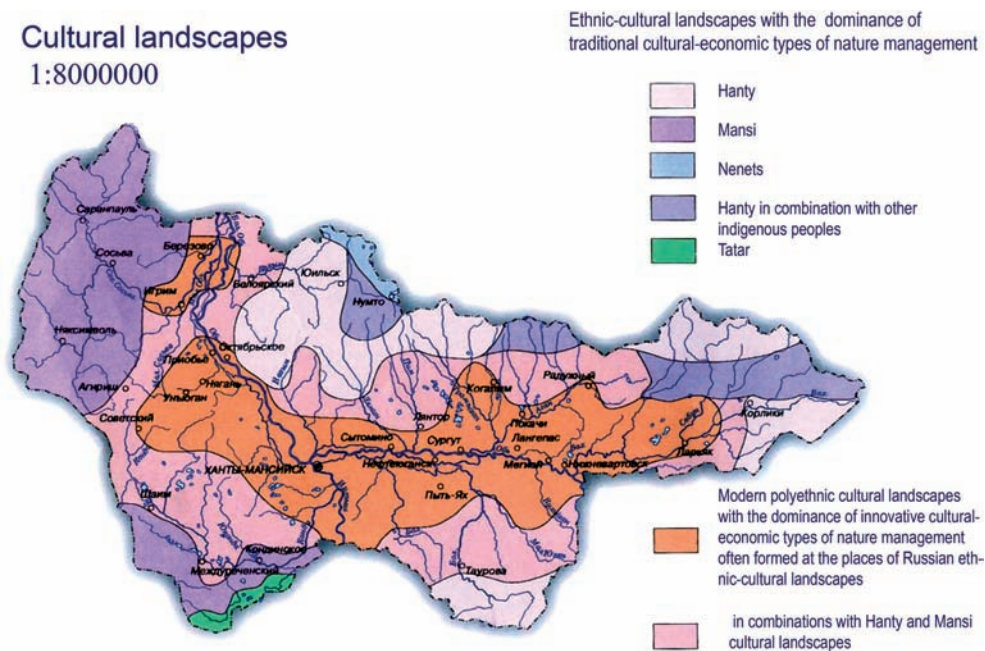


Fig. 3. Cultural landscapes. Scale 1 : 8 000 000

elements of cultural landscapes possessing symbolic sense (seids, ancestral stones, etc.). However, these symbols may be still found by ethnological, archeological, and cultural studies. Identification of such objects as heritage elements and assigning them certain preservation status may help to mitigate many social-cultural conflicts associated with the development of new types of nature management, such as recreation activities in aborigine people's territories (recreation nature management directly threatens Saami sacred object Seidozero [Yevseev et al., 2004]).

Mapping of northern aborigine cultural landscapes to identify heritage territories

Mapping of northern aborigine cultural landscapes is a necessary step not only for identification of areas that represent heritage significance. It is also crucial for the development of regional nature management planning policies with adequate regard for social-cultural issues. The evolution of cultural landscapes components (natural environment, local community, economic and settlement structure, and language

and spiritual culture) creates individual spaces in cultural landscapes, limits of which are formed by their combination. Metachronic development of cultural landscape components and their evolution explains possible co-existence of modern and traditional cultural landscapes in the same areas. Such spatial and temporal characteristics of cultural landscapes make the procedure of their identification and representation more difficult.

Identification of areas of cultural landscapes may be done with the help of fuzzy classification algorithm [Tikunov, 1997]. The procedure enables one to refer territorial units either to unique categories, or, in the case of their transit character, to several categories with different attributive functions. Clusters of cultural landscapes may be found through mathematical modeling. The territory with cultural landscapes of Hanty-Mansi Autonomus Okrug (i.e., region) has been mapped at a small scale using fuzzy classifications algorithm [Krasovskaya et al., 2007] (Fig. 3) which allowed isolation of heritage fragments within the limits of mapped ethnic-cultural landscapes.

CONCLUSIONS

The analysis of cultural landscapes of indigenous peoples of the North as heritage objects allows one to conclude the following:

- Preservation of fragments of cultural landscapes is important because of considerable changes in traditional living and nature management patterns of indigenous peoples of the North;
- Northern aborigine cultural heritage is limited not only to historical and cultural significant sites, but also includes cultural landscapes comprising them. Northern aborigine cultural landscapes may exist in two forms: material and virtual;
- A distinctive feature of aborigine cultural landscapes is the "World" philosophy in the foundation of their evolution. Its essence is an inseparable unit of man and

nature which forms the original code and text of cultural landscapes often "invisible" to newcomers;

- Preserving fragments of northern aborigine cultural landscapes promotes conservation of ethnic-cultural and nature components both of which are crucial to regional sustainable development; and
- In order to provide preservation of aborigine cultural landscapes as heritage objects it is necessary to clearly determine their modern economic functions and develop mapping strategies.

The problem discussed herein demands urgent attention to the development of information and legal foundation for policies that facilitate traditional nature management of the areas of indigenous peoples of the North. ■

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