



## Conference Paper

# Practical Aspects of Cultural Policy in Ethnic Administrative Territorial Units

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## Abstract

The article describes the specifics of the implementation of cultural policy in ethnic administrative territorial units, and in places of compact residence of indigenous minorities of the Russian North, Siberia, and the Far East. This topic is highly relevant because the analysis of actual implementation of cultural politics has shown that not enough attention is being paid to the ethno-cultural aspects. Existing cultural policy is characterized by an internal contradiction: on the one hand, it facilitates integration of ethnic minorities into the common Russian and global cultural space; on the other, it has to deal with the desire of the minorities themselves to preserve their ethnocultural identity.

**Keywords:** cultural policy, indigenous peoples, the state, heritage

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## 1. Introduction

Russian society is gradually coming to an understanding that, if in future our country wishes to develop as one of the leading nations and an equal member of the global community, we need to protect not only the common Russian culture, but also make our national priority the preservation of cultural diversity of peoples living in Russia, including indigenous minorities of the North, Siberia and Russian Far East.

No other age can compare with our contemporary era in a fast-moving social dynamic. All ethnic groups residing in Russia exist in constant interaction with different social groups and classes, and with each other. They move through the geographical space and experience powerful processes of migration and assimilation. As a result of the constant global and local changes, preserving their ethnic identity and self-identity is a particularly challenging issue for all Russian minorities.

At the same time, people who reside in the close-knit compact areas, cannot isolate themselves within their geographical and cultural landscape: they are vigorously trying to overcome their isolation by entering into intercultural communication not only with the neighboring Russian regions, but also with the foreign states. As a result, we

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perceive a need for a regional cultural policy that would be able to satisfy, as much as possible, ethno-cultural needs not only of the individuals, but also of ethnic minority groups and our entire poly-ethnic state, which Russia has always been throughout its history.

## 2. Cultural Policy in Ethnic Administrative Territorial Units

Implementation of cultural policy in ethnic administrative territorial units and in the areas of compact residence of ethnic indigenous minorities requires a special approach. This is due to the fact that, because of their small numbers (less than 50 thousand people) and climatically harsh areas of residence, Northern indigenous minorities find it much more difficult to withstand assimilation and globalization processes compared with the other, more numerous indigenous peoples of Russia. As a result, these minorities usually don't have their own administrative territorial units at a federal level. The exceptions are: Nenets Autonomous Okrug (AO), Chukotka AO, Yamalo-Nenetsk AO, and Khanty-Mansy AO (Yugra). In all other cases, ethnic administrative territorial units exist on a municipal level. Therefore, they possess much less agency, also in respect to their own cultural policy.

As a result, implementation of state cultural policy within the existing legal framework is usually limited to the state seeing its main task in providing population with an access to all types of cultural institutions. As an example, let us describe an approach that the cultural policy takes in areas of compact residence of indigenous ethnic minorities of Krasnoyarsk Krai: Taimyrsky Dolgano-Nenetsky municipal district, Turukhansky municipal district and Evenkiysky municipal district.

We have chosen an example of Krasnoyarsk Krai for a number of reasons. First, this area is a home to 8 indigenous ethnic minorities (Dolgans, Nganasans, Nenets, Ket, Selkup, Chulym, Evenki and Enets), with some of them (Nganasans, Ket) found only at the territory of Krasnoyarsk Krai. These circumstances require cultural understanding and analysis when developing and implementing a cultural policy. Second, Krasnoyarsk Krai is a strategically important region at a national level: this region occupies the middle geographical position providing economic, transport, social and cultural connections to the entire territory of the country. This means that the population of Krasnoyarsk Krai performs a vitally important geopolitical role: by the sheer fact of their existence, they support the territorial unity of the Russian Federation. Third, there is a factor of harsh climate which largely determines the traditional ways of economic production. This is mostly caused by the great geographical expanse of Krasnoyarsk

Krai: its median temperatures in January range from  $-36^{\circ}\text{C}$  in the north to  $-18^{\circ}\text{C}$  in the south, while the median July temperatures range from  $+13^{\circ}\text{C}$  in the north to  $+25^{\circ}$  in the south. Fourth, Krasnoyarski Krai has some of the largest industrial enterprises (such as Norilsk Nkel, RN-Vankor, Polus and others), which significantly influence the area's climatic conditions and transform the traditional economic institutions of indigenous communities. Fifth, Krasnoyarsk Krai has a fairly well developed normative and legal framework regulating various aspects of life of ethnic indigenous minorities, including their cultural development. And finally, Krasnoyarsk Krai is one of the few divisions of Russia, which had developed and approved its own concept of cultural policy long before the introduction of the Federal Principles of Cultural Policy.

Most of the federative units have governmental institutions that specialize in indigenous ethnic minorities. These institutions are a part of the executive branch; they coordinate the relevant regional special-purpose programs and the issues of socio-economical development of these ethnic groups. However, even where such institutions exist, the main powers of cultural programming are usually reserved by the relevant authorities in governmental management of culture. As part of the development of cultural programming, Krasnoyarsky Krai Ministry of Culture has designed the 'Implementation Program for Basic Strategic Guidelines of Cultural Policy in Krasnoyarsk Krai for 2009–2020'. This program has not yet come into effect [3].

In general, total budget required to achieve all declared 2020 target goals for Taimyrsky Dolgano-Nenetsky municipal district, Turukhansky municipal district and Evenkiysky municipal district is 2.2 bn rubles, not including financing the operations of the existing relevant cultural and educational institutions. In current socio-economic situation, this volume of financing is unrealistic, not only in the short term, but also in the long term, since the consolidated annual budget assigned to 'culture' in Krasnoyarsk Krai is, on average, about 10 bn rubles (including all municipal budgets) [4].

### 3. Preserving the Culture of Ethnic Minorities

Turning to the specific cultural practices, here understood as artistic and creative phenomena, which are most the most effective tools in preservation of the ethnic minority cultures, the biggest potential here belongs to the decorative and applied arts. This type of art produces the most efficient combination of the cultural values and economic profit. Besides, due to its affordability and everyday usefulness, applied and decorative

arts possess the highest potential in popularizing the culture of indigenous Russian peoples.

Based on the Principles of Cultural Policy, the state sets the goal to preserve ethnic cultural traditions, support folk art and crafts, preserve ethno-cultural diversity as one of the main sources of professional culture and as an important component of ethno-national identity [2]. This goal may be significantly more difficult to achieve without the relevant measures required to preserve and support decorative and applied arts of indigenous ethnic minorities, as one of the most accessible tools in constructing self-identity of these peoples.

The power and authority of the federal territories and local governments to preserve and develop decorative and applied arts of Northern indigenous ethnic minorities is described in too general terms, such as: 'support of folk arts and crafts' and 'participation in preservation, restoration and development of folk arts and crafts'. These descriptions do not list any concrete support measures, nor do they presume any obligations and demands regarding the scope and forms of such support. As a result, these regulations may be interpreted in much too abstract terms allowing executive authorities to minimize their practical implementation. At the same time, to counteract the consequences of this exceedingly generalized interpretation, and to utilize their own agency in preserving applied and decorative arts of indigenous ethnic minorities, most of the federal units that include ethnic minorities areas have developed their own laws and regulations in this sphere.

In general, the analysis of regional legislation shows that the main laws and regulations pertaining to the preservation and development of decorative and applied arts of indigenous minorities typically include the following regional legislative acts: on culture; on indigenous ethnic minorities; on basic legal safeguards to protect ingenious minorities; and on the objects of cultural heritage (historical and cultural monuments) of ethnic groups residing in the Russian Federation.

## 4. Conclusions

In view of all this, we may say that contemporary Russian state cultural policy regarding ethnic administrative territorial units and in the areas of compact residence of ethnic indigenous minorities takes a design approach that is less concerned with the preservation of ethnic cultures, but rather focuses on achieving median rates of availability based on a number of formal markers (whether there is a House of culture, a library, what is a seating capacity in the cultural venues, etc.) Even if these these

markers are 100% met, it does not always follow that the actual cultural development is achieved (this is true not only regarding indigenous minorities, but all Russian citizens as well). Also, official ethno-cultural markers do not include indicators describing the quality of life of indigenous minorities; however, they do include a lot of various economic and social markers, which are used to assess the effectiveness of the existing governmental system.

In many ways, this situation arises because, when developing the practical approaches to implementing cultural policy in ethnic administrative territorial units and in the areas of compact residence of ethnic indigenous minorities, the opinions and desires of the minorities themselves are disregarded, and the priority is given to the formal median measures. Also, the shortcomings in language policy often lead to the situation where indigenous people either don't speak their own language and only know Russian, or, conversely, they know only their native language and don't speak Russian – which significantly hinders their socialization and the development of an integrated cultural space.

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