

Urban Population Identities and Symbolic Value Cities in the Sakha Republic (Yakutia)

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Abstract: This article examines various aspects of identities conveyed by urban populations, factors of transformation and development of urban spaces, and historical memory as tools for the socialization, stratification, and integration of a polyethnic society in the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia). The empirical base of the study is a variety of material, including a questionnaire survey of the urban population of Yakutia, spontaneous polls, and in-depth expert interviews. The novelty is the research strategy itself, aimed at identifying all the listed actors through the prism of symbolic representations. The study of the symbolic value of the northern cities of Yakutia as informational and cultural spaces, understanding the heritage as a certain mediative mental-material cultural layer with symbolic codes and texts, provides key registers for considering the fundamental problems of the spatial and socio-cultural development of territories in general. The results of the study show that the political identity of the population of Yakutia has been formed according to the historical memory of the Soviet past. A trend towards positioning the region as “northern” or “arctic” has emerged in recent years, which also depends on government policy in the Arctic.

Keywords: Arctic, cultural heritage, historical memory, identity, northern cities, Republic of Sakha (Yakutia), symbolic capital, territory development, urban space

The collapse of the USSR and the construction of a new statehood of the Russian Federation significantly increased the urgency of problems of political identity. Furthermore, at present, there is a tendency towards the preservation and revitalization of ethno-cultural identity

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in response to the processes of globalization taking place in the world. New geopolitical realities have strengthened the northern character of the spatial orientation of the Russian state, which serves as the basis for constructing historical, sociological, cultural, and other interpretations of Russia's northern identity. However, unlike the countries of the circumpolar North, where "northernness" became a fundamental factor in national identity building in the last century, Russia is only taking its first steps in this direction. Moreover, the factor of "northernness" at the regional and ethnic levels has been understudied. In this light, the study of regional "northern" identity—traditionally based on multiculturalism and toleration—seems reasonable and productive in terms of using the results to understand and inform the social practices and policies of multi-ethnic regions of the Russian Federation.

Consequently, understanding the formation of the identity of the population in the conditions of modern Russia is important for solving the ethno-social problems of the "northern cities" of the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia). The definition of "northern cities" is constructed on the basis of the results of a study to identify various aspects of identity (national, territorial, ethnocultural) and is used by the authors when defining all cities of the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia). By creating and transforming the socio-cultural space of the city, society invests in its image the basic symbols and semantic reference points that allow us to get an idea of the most valuable qualities that embody the identity of the people living in this area. In this regard, it is relevant to study the symbolic space of the city as a "cognitive springboard" for the formation of various aspects of identity, since the city has always acted as an organizing center for the development of territories. The purpose of this article is to study the symbolic value contained in the socio-cultural sphere of urban space influencing the formation of various aspects of the identity of populations in the northern of the Sakha Republic (Yakutia).

The revival of the socio-anthropological study of cities is associated with the expansion of the subject field of Soviet ethnography and the beginning of the study of urban traditions, which contributed to the emergence of a new direction in ethnology and sociology in the 1980s (Rabinovich 1978; Myl'nikov 1981). So far, urban studies have not been considered an independent area of research in Russian science. Nevertheless, the field of urban studies has been actively growing recently: new works have appeared related to the study of urban space and the local identity of the population of certain regions of Russia (Drannikova and Razumova 2010; Razumova 2013). The study of local

identity is closely related to research devoted to a comprehensive analysis of the local text of the city: this characterizes the works of V. V. Abashev (Abashev 2000), M. L. Lur'e (Lur'e 2003), M. D. Alekseevskii (Alekseevskii 2008), N. Iu. Zamiatina and A. N. Piliarov (Zamiatina and Piliarov 2019a, b), M. Laruelle and S. A. Sukneva (Laruelle and Sukneva 2019), and others. A collection edited by Iu. P. Shabaev, titled *Northern City: Cultural Space and Cultural Identities in Arctic and Subarctic Cities* (Shabaev 2020), has made a special contribution to identifying the formation and transformation of urban identities and images of northern cities, as well as analyzing the typical cultural characteristics of urban communities in the Russian Arctic and Subarctic regions.

Materials and Methods

The Republic of Sakha (Yakutia) is a large constituent entity of the Russian Federation, belonging to the Far Eastern Federal District. The area is 3,083,523 square kilometers (18 per cent of the territory of the Russian Federation and 44.4 per cent of the Far Eastern Federal District). According to the Russian Federal State Statistics Service, as of 1 January 2020 the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia) consists of the “city of republican significance” Yakutsk and 34 *ulusy* (districts), including 13 cities, 41 urban-type settlements, 364 *naslegi* (rural districts), and 582 rural settlements. The population of the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia) as of 1 January 2020 amounted to 972 thousand people, including cities and urban-type settlements (642.7 thousand people—66.1 per cent) and rural areas (329.3 thousand people—33.9 per cent). There are 129 nationalities in Yakutia, including Sakha (466,492 people—48.7 per cent), Russians (353,649 people—37 per cent), Evenki (21,008 people—2.2 per cent), Evens (15,071 people—1.6 per cent), Dolgans (1,906 people—0.2 per cent), Yukaghirs (1,281 people—0.13 per cent), and Chukchi (670 people—0.07 per cent).¹ In terms of population, the republic ranked fifty-fifth among the regions of Russia and fifth in the Far Eastern Federal District.

The empirical base of the research includes data from the State Statistics Service (for the ethnic and linguistic composition and the population size and composition of the Republic of Sakha); the Russian Census 2010; our questionnaire survey; and expert interviews.

The collection of primary sociological information on the project was carried out by a questionnaire survey of the urban population in all cities of Yakutia (Yakutsk, Neriungri, Mirnyi, Lensk, Aldan, Udachnyi,

Viliuisk, Niurba, Pokrovsk, Olekminsk, Tommot, Srednekolymsk, Verkhoyansk) ($n = 919$). The questionnaire survey was divided into two thematic blocks; surveying on the role of the modern symbolic space of the cities of the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia) on the formation of political and national identity was carried out from September 2020 to January 2021.

In accordance with the established sample, the questionnaire survey covered the population aged 18 years and older. The ethnic composition of the respondents was as follows: Sakha (52.3 per cent), Russians (40.6 per cent), Indigenous Peoples of the North (2.3 per cent), other nationalities (1.8 per cent), mixed heritage (0.2 per cent), and those who did not indicate nationality (2.7 per cent). In addition, an expert interview was conducted with the heads of executive authorities involved in building a conceptual model of a modern urban space.

Characteristics of the Zone of Mass Survey

In accordance with the economic zoning of the state program of the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia), "Formation of a modern urban environment on the territory of the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia)" (as amended on 9 November 2020), the territorial structure of the republic's economy is formed by areas united into economic zones. The specificity of the demographic situation of the urbanized part of the region is determined by a number of factors and conditions: the uniqueness of the territory in terms of diversity, quantity and quality of minerals, and in connection with this, the uneven territorial distribution of productive forces; disproportions in the distribution of human resources in the labor market; remoteness from the center of the country; and a complex intra-regional transport scheme with seasonality and high transport costs in extreme natural and climatic conditions.

The emergence of the cities of Yakutia took place in different circumstances, and for this reason, each city has its own characteristics, consisting in geographical conditions, history of creation, economic and cultural appearance, and socio-political climate. These circumstances play a decisive role in shaping the national, civil, ethnic, and political identity of the citizens. The establishment of the cities of Yakutia is the result of socio-economic and political strategies of the Russian state, and the creation of each city is linked to certain stages in the history of Russia. Yakutsk, Verkhoyansk, Viliuisk, Srednekolymsk, and Olekminsk were formed during the development of the Siberian territories

by the Muscovite state in the seventeenth century, which established these towns as prisons and collection points for *iasak* (fur tribute to the tsar). Other cities (Neriungri, Mirnyi, Udachnyi, Lensk, Aldan, Tommot, Pokrovsk, and Niurba) were created during the period of industrial development of Yakutia at different points in the 1930s, 1950s, and 1990s. At present, every city in Yakutia has its own characteristics associated with building a system of socio-economic and political management of urban spaces. The socio-cultural, ethnic, and political characteristics of the cities also stem from their roles in the development of the economy of the Republic. Yakutsk is the administrative, cultural, and socio-economic center of the Republic. Here, we find government agencies, higher educational institutions, and cultural facilities. The historic cities of Verkhoyansk, Viliuisk, Srednekolymsk, and Olekminsk are more like rural settlements: the majority of the population are Sakha, and the major economic activity is agriculture. Meanwhile, most of the residents of industrial cities in the Republic are ethnic Russians who work in the exploration and extraction of natural mineral deposits. The industrial cities of Neriungri, Aldan, and Tommot are also the main transport hubs of the Republic, where the railway and the federal highway operate, providing a connection to central Russian cities. In the framework of this article, we will focus on the major cities of each economic zone. The largest in terms of urban population is the central economic zone (urban population 356,550 people) with two cities (the capital of the republic, Yakutsk, and Pokrovsk) and four urban-type settlements (Zhatai, Nizhnii Bestiakh, Mokhsogollokh, and Sangar). Central Yakutia is the most infrastructurally equipped territory with a diversified economy.

Yakutsk

One of the oldest cities in Siberia and the Far East, Yakutsk (founded in 1632) is the business, administrative, scientific, educational, socio-economic, financial, transport, and logistics center of the republic. It is the largest city in the republic in terms of population, where one third of the total population (33.2 per cent) lives. In the list of the one hundred largest cities in Russia in terms of population, the city of Yakutsk has risen by five positions over the past two years and now occupies sixty-first place—as of 1 January 2020, the city's population is 322,987 people.² In the Far Eastern Federal District, Yakutsk occupies the fifth position in terms of population, after Khabarovsk, Vladivostok, Ulan-Ude, and Chita. Between 2010 and 2020 the number of residents

of the city of Yakutsk increased by 19.8 per cent due to natural and migration growth.³ There are more than 120 ethnic nationalities represented in the capital; among those who indicated their nationality, Sakha people (49.2 per cent) and Russians (39.8 per cent) dominate numerically. Government bodies are concentrated in Yakutsk.

Yakutsk is the main center of trade and business in Yakutia, and entrepreneurship is the basis of the city's economy. Thus, the main revenue source of the budget of the city of Yakutsk is tax on personal income, which makes up 62 per cent of total tax receipts.⁴ The volume of shipped goods of local production, work performed, and services performed by medium and small enterprises in Yakutsk makes up 47.5 per cent of the national indicators.⁵

Yakutsk is as an established center of transport routes and communications. The capital is involved in the storage and transit of industrial and technical supplies and consumer goods for most *ulusy* of the Republic.⁶ There are two airports in the city as well as a river port, which carries out the main part of the "northern delivery" and transportation of passengers in the basin of the Lena River in the summer. In total, 600,000 people (more than 60 per cent of the population of the Republic) live in this part of the region. Communication between Yakutsk and the Kolyma highway and the Nizhnii Bestiakh station of the Amur-Yakutsk railway is carried out through the Lena River: in summer by ferry-boats, in winter on the ice. On average, there are 152 days a year when Yakutsk can only be reached by air. At the same time, even in summer, navigation along the Lena River is not guaranteed due to the periodic shallowing of the river. This factor significantly limits the possibilities and increases the cost of cargo delivery. In 2019, the volume of delivery to Yakutia by water transport amounted to 1,245,000 tons of various cargoes. The total cost of transportation is 30 billion rubles. According to estimates, the presence of a land connection through the Lena River will save at least four billion rubles annually on the northern delivery.⁷ Up to 90 per cent of telecommunications channels and 80 per cent of information services in the republic are provided through the city.⁸ They are provided by such organizations as the State Unitary Enterprise "Technical Center for Television and Radio Broadcasting" of the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia), Sakhatelecom (part of Rostelecom), and nine other enterprises.

The largest production and industrial enterprises, companies, and organizations of the capital are mainly aimed at maintaining the life of the city and regions of the republic. These include the energy enterprises of PJSC Yakutskenergo from the RusHydro group (Yakutskaiia

GRES, GRES-2, and TPP), JSC Sakhatransneftegaz with the Yakutsk Gas Processing Plant and other large structural divisions (the main activity of this company is the transportation of gas through main gas pipelines with a total length of 2693 km, and the operation of gas distribution networks in cities and towns with a total length of 4348 km),⁹ and the Kangalasskii coal mine (a brown coal deposit with reserves of more than 5.2 billion tons is located 40 km north of the city of Yakutsk).

There are also large construction enterprises (the timber and wood-working industry of Yakutsk is represented by the companies of JSC Sakhales), the Yakut bakery, the city dairy plant, the poultry farm, the Markhin plant of building materials, the Sakhabasalt basalt materials plant, the municipal passenger car enterprise YAPAK (Yakutsk passenger motor transport company), and others.

Yakutsk is the center of science and education in Northeast Asia. The capital of the republic hosts the Federal Research Center "Yakutsk Scientific Center of the Siberian Branch of the Russian Academy of Sciences," the Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia), and 23 branch research institutes. Personnel training is carried out in 11 higher and 22 secondary specialized educational institutions, including at the M. K. Ammosov North-Eastern Federal University, the Arctic State Agrotechnological University, and the Arctic State Institute of Culture and Arts.

Cultural and sports institutions serve as a unifying principle for representatives of different peoples and religious denominations living in the multinational territory of the city. According to the Department of the Ministry of Justice of the Russian Federation for the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia), as of 1 July 2019, the departmental register of non-profit organizations contained information about 2,249 non-profit organizations, including 1,303 public associations, 160 religious organizations, 28 regional branches of political parties, and 758 other non-profit organizations. The media space of Yakutsk is represented by five news agencies, 22 radio stations, seven television companies, and 49 print publications (21 magazines and 28 newspapers).

The Western Economic Zone

The next largest urban population after Yakutsk is the western economic zone (urban population 134,252 people) with six cities (Mirnyi, Lensk, Udachnyi, Viliuisk, Niurba, Olekminsk) and eight urban-type settlements (Aikhal, Peledui, Chernyshevskii, Vitim, Svetlyi, Kysyl-Syr,

Diamond, and the abandoned Torgo village). This zone is the center of diamond and oil and gas production.

The industrial cities of South Yakutia, such as Tommot, Aldan, Mirnyi, and Neriungri, appeared between the 1920s and the 1950s. Such cities start out as settlements for geological parties prospecting for mineral deposits and receive the status of a city after the discovery of deposits; for example, Niurba and Pokrovsk received the status of a city in the 1990s. Industrial cities are endowed with symbols of the industrial development of Yakutia; the history of these cities is associated with the development of the gold, coal, and diamond mining industries.

Among the cities of Yakutia, the city of Mirnyi is the third most populous, with 35,390 people at the beginning of 2020. This city is mainly engaged in the diamond mining enterprise. In the period from 2010 to the beginning of 2020, the number of residents decreased by 4.8 per cent due to the migration outflow of the population following the reduction in wages and jobs due to the consequences of the Russian financial and economic crisis of 2008–2010 (part of the global financial crisis that started in 2008). The ethnic structure of the urban population of the Mirninskii district consists of representatives of 90 nationalities, dominated by Russians (69.8 per cent), Sakha people (7.6 per cent), and Ukrainians (6.9 per cent). Mirnyi is the center of the JSC ALROSA enterprise engaged in the mining of diamonds in the Mirnyi, Anabar, and Niurbinskii *ulusy*, with their subsequent sale. JSC “Viliuigesstroi,” the enterprise “Western Electric Networks,” JSC “ALROSA-Gas,” and enterprises of local industry, trade, and public catering organizations operate in the city. In Mirnyi, the main structures of the social and cultural sphere of the city were built by builders and at the expense of JSC ALROSA. At the moment, there are seven schools in Mirnyi, along with the Mirnyi Regional Technical College and several university branches. The media space is developed in the city: there are two newspapers (“Mirninskii Rabochii” and “My Generation”) and radio stations with on-air and digital broadcasting.

The Southern Economic Zone

The southern economic zone (urban population 10,794 people) has three cities (Neriungri, Aldan, Tommot) and nine urban-type settlements (Chulman, Nizhnii Kuranakh, Berkakit, Serebrianyi Bor, Leninskii, Lebedinyi, Khani, Zolotinka, and the abandoned village of Bezymiannyi). The zone is the center of gold and coal mining. The share

of industry in the economy of South Yakutia is 85 per cent. A key role in the economic development of the zone is played by transport accessibility, which ensures constant reliable communication with other regions of the country and creates conditions for the development of the macrodistrict's resources.

The city of Neriungri has the second largest population in the Republic, with 57,934 people at the beginning of 2020. Between 2010 and early 2020, the number of residents decreased by 6.2 per cent due to the migration outflow of the population. The reasons for the decline in the population of this coal-mining capital of the region are also associated with the financial and economic crisis in the country and the world. The ethnic structure of the urban population of the Neriungri region consists of representatives of almost 90 nationalities, dominated by Russians (80.5 per cent), Ukrainians (6.4 per cent), and Sakha people (2.5 per cent).

Currently, most of the city's population is employed in the main and auxiliary industries of the territorial production complex for the extraction of coking coal. In Neriungri, there is a coal mine, the Neriungri processing plant for the production of coking coal concentrate, the Ina-glinskii and Denisovskii GOKs, the Kolmar-OGR (a plant for the repair of mining equipment and road equipment, or RMZ), the Neriungri poultry farm, the Neriungri State District Power Plant, and two printing houses. At the moment, there are two branches of institutes in the city, the Technical Institute of the M. K. Ammosov North-Eastern Federal University, and vocational schools. Neriungri boasts the only Actor and Puppet Theater in the region of Eastern Siberia and the Far East. Neriungri is the Republican Center for the Rehabilitation of Children with Hearing and Speech Disabilities, which works according to the methods of SUVAG, and the rehabilitation of children and adolescents with disabilities, also known as the Cerebral Palsy Center, which uses the methods of the Peto Institute of Conductive Pedagogy in Budapest.¹⁰ The city has one of the largest indoor stadiums in the Far East ("Gorniak"), the sports complexes "Shakhter" and "Bogatyr," an indoor skating rink, and a ski base. The availability of all modes of transport made it possible to designate Neriungri district a Priority Social and Economic Development Area "South Yakutia" In 2017. Its formation is associated with overcoming the single-industry orientation of the regional economy; the creation of new industries and jobs; the development of intellectual and innovative potential; the branding of local goods and services; and increasing incomes and improving the quality of life of the population (Ermolaev 2018).

The Arctic Zone

The Arctic zone (urban population 26 297 people) consists of two cities (Srednekolymsk and Verkhoyansk) and nine urban-type settlements (Tiksi, Batagai, Deputatskii, Zyrianka, Chokurdakh, Belaia Gora, Ust'-Kuiga, Nizhneinsk, Ese-Khaia). In the Arctic zone, traditional forms of nature management (reindeer husbandry, hunting and fishing, mammoth ivory mining) predominate. The State Program "Development of the Arctic zone of the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia) and the Indigenous Peoples of the North of the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia) for 2020–2024" indicates that there is an imbalance in economic development, a significant gap between the Arctic regions and other regions of the republic in terms of social economic development. Indicators of the socio-economic development of the Arctic regions are significantly behind the national average. The cities of the Arctic zone are the smallest. So, the city of Srednekolymsk is the twelfth among the 13 cities of Yakutia in terms of population with just 3,477 people. Between 2010 and the beginning of 2020, the number of inhabitants decreased by 1.4 per cent, once again due to outward migration following the 2008 global financial crisis. The ethnic structure of the urban population of the Srednekolymskii ulus consists of representatives of 25 nationalities, dominated Sakha (69.8 per cent), Russians (21.4 per cent), and Evens (4.5 per cent). The main branch of the city's economy is agriculture (cattle breeding, horse breeding, reindeer breeding), fishing, and fur trade. There is an oil base, an airport, a national natural park "Kolyma," a river pier, and a museum of local lore.

Memorial Narratives of Urban Space

Gentry (2018) notes that "identity shapes many aspects of life, from how we see the world to how we behave." Identity problems relating to urban space have been studied by many researchers in other parts of the world. For example, L. Honko developed the theory of identity as a system where the conscious and the unconscious interact, and the description of identities occurs with the help of symbols and metaphors (Honko 2013). A special study on the role of folklore in the formation and preservation of identity was undertaken by Alan Dundes (1982). Closely related to the study of local identity are studies devoted to urban space as a place of socio-historical memory.

Over the past 20 years, research interest in socio-historical and collective memory has been steadily growing in the humanities, due to the expansion of interdisciplinary connections. P. Nora believed that the reasons for the increased interest in the problems of memory are the rapid changes in demography, urbanization, and globalization, and the loss of traditional forms of preserving memory and national identity (Nora 1999). The studies of Gould and Silverman (2013) and Sadowski (2020) touch upon the issues of interaction and mutual influence of individual and collective memory on the development of urban space.

Looking at foundational works in urban studies, it is clear that the urban environment can motivate future actions, since it is closely connected with mental and physical space (Lefebvre 2015: 124). J. Assman (2011) argues that societies, by developing a culture of memory of the past, produce their own images and pass their identity through to successive generations. According to Lotman, “the memory of culture is not only united but also internally diverse. This means that its unity exists only at a certain level and implies the presence of private “dialects of memory” corresponding to the internal organization of collectives that make up the world of a given culture (Lotman 1992).

The “national” component in the system of identification of landmarks in the era of globalization is losing its previous normative significance in the positioning of an individual within a political society; therefore, the “identity of the place,” which can support one’s emotional and symbolic backbone and act as a psychological compensator for the erosion of such landmarks, is important (Semenenko 2011). According to Drobizheva, “A positive civic identity, based on the democratic norms of the political structure of society, can contribute to the preservation of ethnocultural diversity” (Drobizheva 2020). Drobizheva’s work notes that the process of building a common civic identity is based on common historically established patterns, such as the general history of the state or the memory of World War II. However, the author notes that the meanings of the all-Russian civic identity need to be further formed and replenished, since after the collapse of the USSR a new identity began to form in a multinational country. Based on a sociological study, Drobizheva noted that, despite the fact that civic and ethnic identities are assessed as competing, in recent studies (Drobizheva 2019) they are combined and practically do not compete with each other in terms of values. At the same time, if the level of ethnic identity in the national republics is as high as in earlier studies, Russian identity is not now inferior to it in terms of mass character (Drobizheva 2020).

It should be noted that the political identity of the population of Yakutia is formed thanks to historical memory, since most of the established monuments of Yakutia belong to historical eras dictated by the state policy of the USSR. Historical memory, “being the core of a person’s identity,” contributes to the formation of one’s national self-awareness and acts as a factor in the formation of civic identity (Gulevskaia et al. 2019); constituting the basis of public consciousness, it provides “the possibility of identification and self-identification of an individual and society as a whole” (Mazur 2013).

Issues concerning the historical memory of Russia, which contributes to the formation of civic identity, are discussed in the historical works of Tishkov (2013); articles about the political aspect by Semenenko (2011), Malinova (2005), and Okunev (2019, 2020); and articles about the sociological aspect, such as Pokida and Zybunovskaia (2016). Studies of regional identity as a form of collective identity were carried out by Golovneva (2013). Popkov and Tiugashev (2013) and Golovnev (2012) are studies of the northern identity of Russia from a geo-economic perspective.

Our questionnaire survey conducted among the urban population of Yakutia showed an interest by this population in the history and politics of the country (63 per cent) and the Republic (54.4 per cent). To the question “Do you know what historical events, dates, or personalities they (monuments) are dedicated to?” 67 per cent of respondents gave an affirmative answer; in addition, the urban residents were able to list historical events or figures in honor of whom the monuments were erected.

In those cities where there are more monuments associated with local history and culture, with specific famous personalities from their city or republic (Verkhoiansk, Viliuisk, Srednekolymsk, Mirnyi, Yakutsk), respondents were more aware of the value spectrum of monuments. Accordingly, the respondents from these cities showed great interest in the development of the historical and cultural semantic space of the settlement.

The history of the emergence of cities also has an impact on the formation of symbolic space. Monuments dedicated to events of the Soviet past, which are among the key symbols of cities, are also found in historic cities that were established during the annexation of Yakutia to Russia in the seventeenth century. In the industrial cities of Yakutia, the concept of “symbolic urban space” is associated with symbols of industrial development—for example, the Mir diamond quarry memorial or monuments to pioneer geologists in the city of Mirnyi. The most



Figure 1. Quarry “Mir”

representative and iconic memorial among the monuments illustrating industrial development in Yakutia is the Mir diamond quarry (see Fig. 1). The Mir chute itself is an oval measuring 490 meters along the long axis and 320 meters along the short axis. Today, this memorial is supplemented with individual elements and is an ensemble of monuments. Alongside the chute there is a memorial to mining equipment and an observation deck. Not far from the quarry, in 2018, a monument was erected to the miners who died in 2017 as a result of an accident at the underground mine of the Mir chute (see Fig. 2 and 3).

Also, one of the brightest objects of the symbolic space of the city of Mirnyi is the sculptural ensemble “Reindeer-team driver and geologists” (in honor of the first pioneer geologists). It is a life-sized group sculpture: there is an Evenki guide sitting on a reindeer, and L. Popugaeva, the discoverer of Yakut diamonds, is in the foreground with her companion, worker F. Belikov, walking behind (see Fig. 4). Similar memorials in the industrial cities of Yakutia have the same meaning, also based on the history of the respective cities. They are overwhelmingly dedicated to geologists who discovered deposits of valuable metals or minerals.

As the survey has shown, the monuments dedicated to the general history of the Soviet era (the October Revolution, the Civil War, and the two World Wars) do not lose their significance in the formation of



Figure 2. Part of the composition of the Monument to the Dead Miners



Figure 3. Part of the composition of the Monument to the Dead Miners (photographs of the dead miners)



Figure 4. Monument “Reindeer-team driver and geologists”

the historical memory of the urban residents. In this case, the monuments of the Soviet era are a place of memory, a moment of national history as “a living heart of memory—places of refuge, sanctuaries of spontaneous devotion and silent pilgrimages,” according to Nora (1999). To the open question “Do you think it is necessary to preserve the monuments of the Soviet period?” (no answer option), 87.3 per cent of young respondents were in favor of preserving the monuments of the Soviet period (in the questionnaire, a range of answers were possible: “yes”—87.3 per cent, “yes, definitely”—0.2 per cent, “yes and no”—0.2 per cent, “probably necessary”—0.2 per cent, “some”—1.7 per cent, “difficult to answer”—1.5 per cent, no—4 per cent, no answer—4.9 per cent), and among of the adult population, the figure was 92.6 per cent. It is noteworthy that, at the same time, 59.5 per cent of young respondents indicated that they believe they do not know the history of their republic. This answer suggests an ignorance of history by young people who did not personally witness the “Soviet period,” and makes us turn to the work of Nora (1999), which focuses on the French context. According to Nora, “places of memory” are understood as the past we are losing, which is still alive somewhere in the minds of some

social group. Applying this notion to our study, in Yakutia there is still a Soviet generation (exemplified by the authors) that will eventually disappear, and the “place of memory” will become a history that is no longer supported by the collective memory.

It should be noted that, in the cities surveyed, there were no memorial complexes dedicated to the legendary heroes or folklore motifs of the indigenous peoples of Yakutia. Nevertheless, some ethnic motifs are included in the general compositional structure of the monuments. These included ritual vessels, such as the *choron* jug used in the Ysyakh ritual holiday for the ceremony of drinking *koumiss* (fermented horse milk); the form the *urasa* (a traditional Yakut dwelling); horses (associated with the cult of the celestial deity Aiy); Siberian cranes or Daurian lilies (symbols of the fragile and unique nature of the Russian North). But the most popular among them was the figure of the sacred *serge* hitching post—the personification of the World Tree—as a symbolic center of the developed space, a sacred vertical connecting the Middle World (Earth) with the heavenly deities. At the entrance to the city of Yakutsk on the highway, leading to the airport, there is a sign commemorating “50 years of the Yakutsk Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (YASSR)” and a monument composed of three snow-white *serge*, symbolizing Sakha hospitality (see Fig. 5).



Figure 5. Monumental composition at the entrance to the city of Yakutsk

According to the survey, 60 per cent of respondents would like to see monuments with a clear ethnic focus in their cities. As an integral part of the brand and image of the urban space, 35 per cent of respondents wanted to see monuments dedicated to historically significant events related to the industrial development of the territory; 35 per cent wanted to see iconic personalities of the *ulus* (district), “geniuses of the place;” and 40 per cent wanted to see local geocultural images associated with the natural-climatic, ethno-local, historical, cultural, and other features of their area.

Graphic Brand Codes

It should be noted that the geo-cultural panorama of Yakutia consists of diverse ethnic compositions and a wide range of natural areas. To the question “In your opinion, are the graphic images of the coats of arms of your settlement connected with your territorial identity?” 80 per cent of respondents answered that their “territorial” (local) identity was demonstrated by the coat of arms of the city and *ulus* (district). In the newly updated coats of arms of the cities of Yakutia, ethno-cultural representations, geopoetics, and local mythology are integral branding tools. For example, in the coat of arms of the industrial city of Neriungri there are geocultural images encoding industrial development (diamonds), spatial development (grayling—water as a life principle and landscape for foraging), mental development (symbolizing the world around through the solar symbol—a circle, the sun), and sacred landscape (the *serge* and the Sakha horse, according to the cultural memory and tradition of the “southern ancestors” associated with equestrian culture). In addition, the coat of arms reflects two polar cultural codes, “North” and “South,” showing the geocultural space of the indigenous peoples of Yakutia, the Evenki living in the Neriungri region and the Sakha people. Here, the grayling fish specifically represents the traditional fisheries of the Tungus-speaking Evenki, and the *serge* hitching post invokes the Sakha as the horse breeders of Yakutia.

The image of the “territory of identity” in the coats of arms is also realized through a set of local mythologies and landscape symbols that reflect the special features of self-determination and self-presentation. The most striking example is the coat of arms of Verkhoiansk, the capital of the “Pole of Cold.” In December 1868, and then in February 1869, a low temperature of minus 63.2 °C (minus 81.8 °F) was recorded by the political exile Ivan Khudiakov in Verkhoiansk, thus identifying this

spot as the North Pole of Cold, the part of the northern hemisphere where the lowest air temperature had been recorded. Verkhoiansk was founded on the site of a Cossack prison and became an outpost for the development of the northern territories. The Verkhoiansk Sakha belong to the local group of northern Sakha horse-breeders who managed to adapt horse-breeding culture to the conditions of the Far North. Thus, the central symbol of the coat of arms is the image of a horse, around which the entire living space of a northern person is built. The symbolism of the mountain landscape, actively used in the graphic images of the Verkhoiansk region, is associated with the fact that the mountains are one of the important components of the construction of the identity of the local group of the Verkhoiansk Sakha and are present in their self-presentation as “mountain Sakha” (*Khaia Sakhata*).

Thus, in the graphic images, first of all, historical and cultural memory as well as climatic and natural features are actualized, and a “territorial identity” is built for people who are different in appearance, culture, religion, and language. Despite the fact that the coats of arms have changed several times, the main original theme has been preserved, which indicates the presence of stable spatial narratives associated with the historical and cultural landscape. Graphic images, as part of the cultural heritage, “help to preserve the semiotic integrity (identity) of the city, as well as to connect its symbols to state symbols in general to preserve the national-state identity and the integrity of the state” (Kapitsyn 2013).

Sacral Topos in the Urban Space

The structure of the city’s cultural landscape also includes phenomena of spiritual culture, transforming the allocated locus into a sacred place. As for the initial planning of the historical cities of Yakutia (Yakutsk, Olekminsk, Verkhoiansk, and Srednekolymsk), the central square began with the Orthodox (Pravoslavnyi) cathedral grounds and the cathedral itself, which set the image of the city. Subsequently, the city space became divided into several sacred topoi, regulated by religious centers. According to the results of the survey, 80 per cent of respondents see religious temples as the symbolic center of urban space. It is logical that in the central part of Yakutsk, we find both the Transfiguration Cathedral and the *Dom Archy*, the center of the spirituality of the Sakha people; each has its own contingent. According to the respondents, the perception of these religious centers as sacred

loci of urban space is due to the fact that it is within their walls that religious ceremonies and holidays are held. At the same time, as part of the cultural heritage of the people, they convey “moral concepts and a system of life values” (Ivanova 2009). In Yakutia, the mass construction of spiritual centers (such as the *Dom Archy* “House of Blessing” and the *Dom Olonkho*, a center honoring the Sakha storytelling tradition), where rituals, holidays, and various events related to the culture of the Sakha people are held, began after the recognition in 1992 of the ethnic holiday Ysyakh as a state holiday of the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia). This became the main impetus in the revival of the material and spiritual culture of all peoples living in Yakutia. The cult architecture (tethering poles, replicas of ancient dwellings, ritual buildings, etc.), reconstructed and erected at the site of the Ysyakh festival (called a *tyusylge*), provided the basis for the construction of the *Dom Archy*.

It is important to note that the massive Christianization of the indigenous peoples of Yakutia in the seventeenth century did not lead to the complete degradation of traditional beliefs, but there was syncretism between Christianity and traditional worldviews.

Representation of Northern Identity

According to the Canadian Northern Studies scholar D. Chartier, today’s interest in the North and ideas about the North are dictated by a combination of different spaces and political and cultural factors (Chartier 2007). Following L.-E. Hamelin, Chartier defines the North as a living, ever-changing entity that has evolved over the last century in the direction of differential de-northernization, since according to the author, the boundaries of the “North” are changeable. The territory of the “North” must be understood as the sum of its physical, social, and cultural parts, and it must also be considered as a circumpolar entity (Chartier 2007: 38). Chartier emphasizes that the approach of considering the North as a circumpolar entity appeared relatively recently, and the “geographic north” proposed by Hamelin played a role in this:

Through its identification with real spaces, including Finland, Scandinavia, Russia, Canada, Alaska and Greenland, as well as all places that experience winter-like conditions. Using variable Nordicity indices, [Hamelin] calculated that Quebec...is not geographically an Arctic area (Montreal has the same latitude as Marseille on the Mediterranean), but is in fact the place where “Arctic influences extend furthest south” in the world. Hamelin’s calculations were subsequently used

to redraw the boundaries of the circumnordic world, which is not round and defined by the Arctic Circle, as originally thought, but has an “oval shape due, in part, to the circulation of currents, oceanicity, continentality and settlement. (Chartier 2007: 38–39)

According to Chartier, “The northernness of any given place at any given time can be calculated and can take into account factors as diverse as colonial history, political treaties, hydropower, mining, winter experiences, sporting events, cultural performances, etc.” (Chartier 2007: 42–43). In other words, this set of political and cultural factors provide for a new view of the North, and lay out a set of multidisciplinary factors that can be used to draw parallels between the comparable phenomena of “northernness”: the circumpolar cultures of Europe and America, as well as winter cultures (here the author probably means autochthonous cultures, inhabiting cold places). Chartier raises the question of rethinking the North, cold, and winter, and considering the idea of the North in discourse in a multidisciplinary aspect—in connection to literature, culture, and territory.

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, when Russian regions made a qualitative leap in the implementation and development of socio-cultural projects, and the projects themselves became an effective tool for the development of territories, new cultural identity codes were being constructed. The cold climate of the region began to be perceived as a source of additional benefits and opportunities for humankind and a healthy lifestyle, and the previous stereotypical ideas, which had developed in the era of tsarist power, as a “land of eternal winter and cold,” “a prison without bars,” and in Soviet times viewing the North as being “like a raw material appendage” and a “bear’s corner” began to disappear from the general perception of Yakutia. Thus, the historical and cultural landscape as a panorama forms a “permanent space” and serves as an ideal position for a vision of the world (Svirida 2007). The use of “cold/winter” as a unifying theme to create positivity comes primarily from the very cultures that inhabit cold lands, to form an adaptive strategy and create stress tolerance in permafrost conditions.

The promotion of the idea of Eternal Cold, the positive brand of “winter” to the world market, contributed to the emergence of a new festival “Winter Begins in Yakutia” with the lighting of the country’s first New Year’s tree on the first of December on the main square of Yakutsk. In the socio-cultural space of Yakutsk, a metaphorical image of the center of the Arctic space is gradually being introduced. Thus, the Arctic State Institute of Culture and Arts and the Arctic Research

Center appeared in Yakutsk, the Yakutsk State Agricultural Academy was renamed the Arctic State Agrotechnological University, and the construction of the Arctic Center for the Epic and Culture is planned. As for other cities of Yakutia, they are broadcasting their local geocultural images. For example, the city of Mirnyi is positioned as the diamond capital, the southern cities of Aldan and Neriungri are presented as centers of industry, and the ancient city of Olekminsk is marketed as the gateway to the development of the eastern region of Yakutia.

Natural and climatic conditions are becoming one of the main tools for constructing figurative-geographical models. Of great interest are the responses of residents of the cities of Yakutia in our survey. Positive answers to the question "Do you consider yourself northerners?" were quite expected, and 79.6 per cent of the respondents answered "Yes." Those who consider themselves northerners gave the following answers:

A northerner is a person who can survive in any conditions, maintain health, love all these difficulties that the north gives ... he or she is a representative of the indigenous peoples of the North.

[The character traits of northerners are] cooperativeness and mutual assistance. ...the need to do everything together because it is quite difficult to survive in the North alone.

The idea of mutual assistance and cooperativeness among northerners in the harsh climatic and social conditions was constantly confirmed by examples of reciprocity, often free of charge. There was also a portion of respondents (20.4 per cent) who answered the question negatively, saying they did not consider themselves northerners. As they described it:

In my understanding, a northerner is a person who lives in the northern part of our country or Republic. Born and raised there. Their way of life is significantly different from that of ours.

A resident of the North, in my understanding, is a representative of the people who live in the territories of the traditional settlement of their ancestors, preserving the traditional way of life, farming and crafts.

These answers show that part of the population does not consider themselves to be northerners, due to the fact that they live in that part of Yakutia that is not part of the Arctic zone and their lifestyle is different from that of the inhabitants of the Arctic regions. The territory

of Yakutia, in general, belongs to the northern regions due to its geographical location and natural conditions, which dictate the operational features of life-sustaining infrastructure systems in the cities (Gavril'eva and Arkhangel'skaia 2016). But in the perception of a part of the population, the "North" does not include the entire territory of the Republic as a whole, but only those areas where there are indigenous peoples with traditional economy. For residents of other regions of Russia, the entire territory of Yakutia is included in the concept of "North," but "North" in the mental map of the residents of the Republic themselves is outside their immediate location. These representations are an example of when the inner perception of the territory among northern residents turned out to be shifted outside of their places of residence in other northern and arctic regions (Kudriashova 2019).

Problems of Urban Planning Policy and Preservation of Historical and Cultural Monuments in the Urban Space

Today, there are a number of problems associated with the development of northern cities. This was also revealed in the expert survey conducted on thematic blocks regarding the development of urban infrastructure, including urban planning and urban spaces, the economic development of which depends on the functioning of society, its identity, and well-being, as well as on the living conditions and the state and the cultural policy pursued by the government.

The first block included issues related to the development of northern cities that depend directly on Russian legislation and local urban planning. According to expert opinion, the main problems associated with the development of northern cities are their remoteness, natural and climatic conditions of the region, "gaps" in Russian legislation, infrastructural blocks that "conflict" with urban planning documents and with the "exceptional spatial mobility of the population, and economic entities, rapid changes in the number of settlements" (Zamiatina and Piliasov 2019a, b).

The next block centered around the relationship between the executive authorities and society in the planning of urban spaces. The opinions of experts differed on the question "Is there feedback from the population on the development of urban planning policy?": according to the first expert "The feedback is being built very closely at this time in the framework of the Formation of a Comfortable Urban Environment program. ... And all these changes in urban planning policy are

accompanied by the direct participation of the residents of cities and villages themselves, with the involvement of all participants—government, business, public organizations, children, and adults. The feedback formats are very diverse today: rating voting, project seminars, strategic sessions and workshops, questionnaires and collection of proposals, contests and online forums”, and the second expert noted that “Public hearings are not held”. And this contradiction is fully explained by the fact that public discussions began to be held relatively recently in 2018 as part of the Formation of a Comfortable Urban Environment program. At the same time, half of the respondents (51.4 per cent) of the mass questionnaire survey noted that the content of monuments, art objects, and murals correlates with the main urban planning policy of the city, while one-third of the respondents (36.4 per cent) “find it difficult to answer.”

The “issues of the ethnic appearance of northern cities” follow from the previous block. Here we find interesting answers to the question “Are there any plans for future changes in the city meta text (giving an ethnic identity as the capital of a national Republic)?”:

It is an absolutely clear and urgent task, but the search for identity should not go into literalism, eclecticism, and kitsch. Most likely, it will take time for the birth of modern Sakha architecture. Potential

The environment copies our character. It completely depends on us.

The Republic has all it needs to have its own identity. Usually, you have to look for an identity, get inspired, but here you already have it, it goes naturally.

The majority (60.5 per cent) of respondents answered “yes” to the question “Do you think the presence of ethnic elements in monuments, art objects, and murals is necessary?” Comments on the answers to this question were very different:

Of course, ethnos is an integral part of a culture.

Necessarily, and not only Sakha but also Russian, Evenki, Even.

Not necessary. But the people want it—the self-expression of the people is their cultural memory.

Not always, but it would be good, we do not have it.

From these results, it is clear that the history of peoples inhabiting northern cities “longs” to be captured in the symbolic space of northern cities.

And finally, the last group of questions for expert discussion was “City of the Future—the Center of the Arctic Space.” To the questions “How do you see the city of the future? Will the international community perceive the capital of the Republic as the center of the Arctic space?” we got the following answers. Expert 1: “The city—if the majority of Yakutsk residents agree that we can build a unique city that will reflect our idea of the city as the center of the Arctic, then the world will have no choice but to accept this fact.” Expert 2: “If we want our children and grandchildren to live with dignity in a progressively changing world, then we must work to create and develop a comfortable urban environment, preserving the historical memory of the city as the cradle of Siberian (northern) cities of Russian civilization.” As the results of the questionnaire survey showed, the presentation of the cultural heritage of the indigenous peoples of the North (Sakha, Evens, Evenki, Yukaghirs, Dolgans) is considered a promising direction in the Republic in terms of the formation of a new positive assessment scale of perception of the territory’s image as a whole (98 per cent) and the formation of a national identity (86 per cent). The identity of the society is superimposed on the symbolic space, and therefore on the identity of the place—the city. The symbolism of northern cities reflects the change of ideologies, the change of generations, poly-ethnicity, and multiculturalism. Based on the results of the expert survey, we can consider identity as an instrument of political mobilization aimed at the state community, as well as within a region or territory—it is the branding of the territory.

Conclusion

In summary, northern cities have the potential to provide a dynamic course of economic, political, socio-cultural, communication, micro-evolutionary, and other processes, acting as a matrix for the living arrangements and life-support of citizens in the harsh climatic conditions of the North. The historical memory of the Soviet past is one of the main levers for strengthening national identity. There is an intersection between national and political identities. This relationship is based on the fact that the nation, on the one hand, can be understood as an organic community, which is based on the commonality of the state, history, traditions, and language, while on the other hand it can be understood as a political community that constitutes a collective state sovereignty based on common political participation. Political identity

can be differentiated in the regions of Russia depending on the development of the territory. We have shown that the regional identity, adapted to the symbolic images of a lesser homeland, plays an important role in building stable universal and particularistic identity guidelines. The symbols of the area directly influence the formation of spatial identity, which is one of the important conditions for maintaining the internal political harmony and unity of the multinational republic. Identity as an instrument of political mobilization is aimed at the formation of the state community, as well as for the implementation of the image policy of the region, for, as a multiethnic region, the Republic provides space for all religious affiliations. The symbolic space of Yakutia was not specifically associated with northern culture, and only recently has there been a tendency to position the region as northern or arctic. Further development of this positionality depends on the state policy of the country and the region in the Arctic. It should also be noted that harsh natural and climatic conditions are a natural factor in bolstering internal mutual understanding.

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