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## **Historical mapping of traditional rural settlements of the indigenous peoples of the North from the 20th century to the beginning of 21st century (the case of Yakutia)**

### **Historische Kartierungen traditioneller ländlicher Siedlungen der indigenen Völker des Nordens vom 20. Jahrhundert bis zum Beginn des 21. Jahrhunderts (die Fallstudie Jakutien)**

**Summary:** Five nations of numerically-small indigenous peoples of the North live in the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia). During the 20<sup>th</sup> century the implementation of various administrative-territorial divisions and the industrial development of the republic have had a significant impact on the settlement of these indigenous peoples. The study of literature and archival materials indicates that the territorial organization of the everyday life of these indigenous peoples depends both on administrative measures and political decisions, and – to an even greater extent – on continuity of the settlement patterns in different historical periods. To study the historic rural system of settlements of these indigenous peoples we used multi-temporal maps that contained information about their settlements. The calculation of areas of settlement of indigenous peoples and studying their interactions with imposed administrative-territorial boundaries allows us to model the indigenous system of settlements in Russia’s Northeast. This article presents our work on improving the methods of mapping areas of traditional settlements and traditional economic activities of indigenous peoples of the North. The generated maps show the actual picture of modern traditional settlement of indigenous peoples in Yakutia.

**Keywords:** rural settlements, resettlement, numerically-small indigenous peoples of the North, historical mapping, Yakutia, Russia – ländliche Siedlungen, Umsiedlung, zahlenmäßig kleine indigene Völker des Nordens, historische Kartierung, Jakutien, Russland

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## Introduction

The type of population settlement in northern regions is influenced by various factors: the physical and geographical features of the area, a relatively low population density, the dispersed structure of settlements and the traditions of the nomadic people, the unevenness of development of transportation and communication networks, and the particularities of industrial development and resource mining. Since the beginning of the industrial development of the North and Siberia dozens of new industrial cities expanded, while indigenous settlements that had histories spanning millennia were closed as “unpromising”, and people were driven into large villages, which led to a reduction in their traditional settlement areas.

Covering an area of 3.1 million square kilometres (which represents one-fifth of the territory of Russia), our study area of the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia) is one of the largest ethnic republics within the Russian Federation. It lies in the northeastern part of Eurasia. The whole area of the republic is located at high latitudes, with over 40% of the territory located beyond the Arctic Circle. The republic is rich in natural resources (diamonds, gold, oil, gas, coal, timber, etc.); the spatial distribution of these resources varies greatly.

The population of the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia) – about 959,000 – constitutes less than one percent of Russian Federation’s population. Three major ethnic groupings live in the republic: the Yakut account for slightly less than half of the population (48%), the Russian for 37% and the indigenous peoples together for only 4% of the population. The indigenous peoples include the Evenk, the Even, the Yukagir, the Chukchi, and the Dolgan.

In Russian legislation and legal traditions, the term “indigenous peoples” does not exist in exactly this form. The term appears only in conjunction with specific qualifiers referring to size and place. The full term, found in legal contexts, is “indigenous numerically-small peoples of the North, Siberia and the Far East of the Russian Federation” – 45 peoples are recognized as such (ROHR 2014).

Thus, the term “indigenous numerically-small peoples of the North” only reflects Russian peculiarities, but it is also problematic in other ways: It excludes peoples with larger populations that have often expressed their self-identification as indigenous, such as the Yakut, Tuvans and Buryat. Furthermore, even if all criteria are met (including that any indigenous people has less than 50,000 persons), recognition as indigenous does not follow automatically. Ultimately, the state grants (or withholds) a group’s recognition by including it into the federal “Common Inventory of Indigenous Numerically-Small Peoples of the Russian Federation”. At present, there are groups still struggling to be included in this list but their indigenous self-identification continues to be denied by the state (ROHR 2014). However, in this paper, the term “indigenous peoples” will be used as a gloss for the more cumbersome, official “indigenous numerically-small peoples of the North”.

These peoples historically were hunters, trappers, fishers and reindeer herders. They live dispersed throughout the territory of Yakutia, due to their ways of life as well as to their features of land use, which requires a nomadic or semi-nomadic lifestyle.

While many scholars around the world have studied the settlement and traditional nature use of indigenous peoples (FONDAHL et al. 2015; ROHR 2014; KRYAZHKOV 2010; PERERA 2009; MURASHKO 2008; SIRINA 2012), few have investigated changes in the system of settlements of indigenous peoples of the North as a distinct problem. Rather, such settlement changes have been considered as a part of more general studies of indigenous peoples' use of territory.

The indigenous peoples of Yakutia have been studied by many anthropologists, historians, economists, demographers (BOGORAZ 1899; VASILEVICH & LEVIN 1951; VASILEVICH 1969; DOLGIKH 1963; GURVICH 1966; SERGEEVA 1972; TUGOLUKOV 1979, 1985; DMITRIEVA 1983; IGNAT'eva 1994; FEDOROVA 1999; GNATYUK 2014; MOSTAKHOVA 2015), and many others. In these works, we can find a wealth of material on history, language, and culture of peoples of the North as well as on the composition and structure of their populations.

The analysis of the sources on the system of settlements of the indigenous peoples indicates that recently there have been significant changes in the nature of population settlement (FEDOROVA 1998; FILIPPOVA 2007). The system of settlements began to change due to administrative-territorial reforms, the development of the mining industry, and of transportation infrastructure development. However, we observe that most published works on indigenous peoples are legal, ethnographic, or historical – cartographic studies are missing. The absence of cartographic studies drew our attention as a deficiency in the framework of the project “Study and assessment of the influence of intensive industrial development on the organization of traditional nature management of Evenks in the South Yakutia in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century for the purpose of conducting ethnological expertise,” supported by the Russian humanitarian science foundation.

The purpose of this article, thus, is to examine changes in the territories of traditional settlement of indigenous peoples in northern Yakutia, that have occurred as a result of the government policy and industrial development of the northern regions, using cartographic methods of the 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> century. In a first section, we discuss the methods to approach the lack of cartographic sources. In the three following sections, we discuss results of the analysis concerning the population development, the changes in territories of the population, and the dynamics, which can be concluded from the multi-temporal comparison of different maps and other resources. Finally, a conclusion summarises the outcomes and additional value of the applied mapping approach for future research.

### **Background of the article, methods, and data**

This study is interdisciplinary – located at the interface of social and economic geography, history, anthropology, northern studies, cartography, and geoinformatics. It adopts as its main research method, the use of mapping via GIS technology, one of the most effective methods to process, analyse, interpret, and visualize large amounts of information. To study the dynamics of settlement of the indigenous peoples in Yakutia we used as our two main sources: a) multi-temporal maps of their settlements in the 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> century (from 1914, 1927, 1941, 1953, 1962, 1989 and 2000), b) maps based on interviews with the indigenous peoples,

obtained during field research in various regions of Yakutia from 2009 to 2016. We also applied comparative-geographical, historical-geographical, and statistical methods of research. Historical methods were used to analyse literary and archival materials collected in federal, regional and district archives.

The analysis of archival materials showed that the territorial organization of the indigenous peoples' lives was mainly forced by administrative measures, and that the administrative and territorial division played an important role in the formation of the settlement system. Statistical analysis was applied to the extensive statistical information that we collected on the system of settlements and livelihoods of the indigenous minorities of the North, including information from population censuses from 1939 to 2010.

### Settlement and population of indigenous peoples

As mentioned before, Yakutia is home to five of 45 indigenous numerically-small peoples of the North of Russia: the Evenks, the Evens, the Yukagirs, the Chukchi, and the Dolgans. These peoples formed special local ethnic groups with their own culture and economic activities in the system of settlements. They live in 21 compactly populated areas: five districts (*rayony* or *ulusy*) are considered fully as places of their traditional residence and traditional economic activities; the territory of 16 other districts are classified as partially the places of their traditional residence and traditional economic activities. Representatives of the Tungus-Manchu groups – the Evenks and the Evens – occupy the largest areas. The territory of Evenk settlement covers the northwestern and southern regions of Yakutia; the Evens live in the northeastern areas. Yukaghirs settle in two *naslegs* of the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia) (*naslegs* are the lowest administrative unit of the Republic, corresponding roughly to a township): the Olerinskiy nasleg of Nizhnekolymsky ulus and the Neleminskiy nasleg of Verkhnekolymskiy ulus. The Dolgans live in two naslegs, occupying the entire territory of the Anabar ulus. The Chukchi reside within one nasleg: Khalarchinskiy nasleg (in Nizhnekolymsky ulus).

Data from the Soviet censuses of 1939, 1959, 1970, 1979 and 1989 and the Russian population censuses of 2002 and 2010 shows an increase in the number of indigenous peoples of the North in Yakutia (Tab. 1).

Tab. 1: Population of the five indigenous peoples, Sakha Republic (Yakutia), 1939–2010. Data: FILIPPOVA 2007, various statistical sources.

	1939	1959	1970	1979	1989	2002	2010
Evenk	10367	9505	9097	11584	14428	18232	21008
Even	3199	3537	6471	5763	8663	11657	15071
Yukagir	251	285	400	526	697	1097	1281
Chukchi	400	325	387	377	473	602	670
Dolgan	183	0	10	64	408	1272	1906
<b>Total</b>	<b>14400</b>	<b>13652</b>	<b>16365</b>	<b>18314</b>	<b>24669</b>	<b>32860</b>	<b>38030</b>

Experts studying social and demographic problems of indigenous peoples indicate that the population growth is mainly due to mechanical population growth (i.e. the difference between the number of arriving to the region and the number of departing from it over a certain period) (FEDOROVA 1998; MOSTAHOVA 2009; SUKNOVA 2010). However, in our opinion, the significant increase in the number of indigenous peoples, especially in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and early 21<sup>st</sup> century, can be explained primarily by a significant growth of indigenous consciousness among the population of mixed parentage who previously registered as non-indigenous (e.g. Yakut or Russian) (VINOKUROVA 2000).

### **Changes to the territories of indigenous peoples of the North due to government policy, administrative-territorial system and sedentarisation**

The creation of new administrative and territorial divisions based on ethnicity resp. indigeneity in the USSR in the 20<sup>th</sup> century was difficult because of dispersed settlement of indigenous people and the lack of information about their livelihoods. The vastness of the territory called for the formation of small independent administrative units on the one hand, yet also demanded the arrangement of a single strong local government. The need to combine these two contradictory principles led to continuous operative changes in the administrative and territorial divisions. In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, Siberia and the Far East periodically witnessed the reorganization of administrative and territorial bodies in order to “regulate” the areas that comprised this territory.

Each reorganization entailed a change in external and internal borders, which frequently led to the division of territories of traditional nature use formerly shared by indigenous peoples. New administrative and territorial divisions resulted in splitting single clans between two administrative regions. Such “revamping” of the borders also sometimes changed the administrative affiliation of settlements. For example, the territory of the village of Nelemnoe in the Verkhnekolymsky ulus of the Republic Sakha (Yakutia) (formerly the Yakut ASSR) was, at different times, part of Yakutia, Khabarovsk Territory (*kray*), and later Magadan Region (*oblast'*). Archival materials indicated that the Evens nomadised in the territory of the Siver and the Berezovka Rivers, using lands in the territory of two different regions – the Yakut ASSR and the Khabarovsk Territory. When the external border of the Yakut ASSR was revised due to formation of the Magadan Region, the territory of one group of the Evens was divided into two territorial groups: the Berezovsky Evens, assigned to the territory of Yakutia, and the Rassohinsky Evens, territorially subordinated to the Magadan Region (FONDAHL & SIRINA 2003).

Therefore, in our opinion, an awareness on the dynamics of the lowest administrative divisions is of particular importance for the organisation of the territorial information. It is impossible to conduct spatial analysis of the information about a territory over an extended period without understanding the history of the changing system of the administrative and territorial division.

Before the establishment of the Soviet power, indigenous people arranged their government in accordance with the specifics of their lifestyles, customs and historical traditions. The basis of self-government of the North was a community-tribal

(*obshshinca-rodovaya*) structure and common law. Elders held power and rights in both the tsarist “Clan Administrations” and “Native Boards”, which were responsible for the collection and delivery of taxes, the organisation of fulfilling various duties, the registration of natives and the provision of information about their number, the execution of the orders from higher authorities and some police functions. The elders of the tribe led military and hunting trips, defined fishing areas and campsites.

In the first years of the Soviet power, the party leadership believed in the need for national sovereignty for the indigenous peoples of the North, based on their historical traditions. This should be achieved through the formation of councils (*soviet*) based on tribal principles. The government appointed Commissioners on Indigenous Affairs, and sometimes the nomadic populations maintained their previous forms of pre-revolutionary governance (PETROV 1998, 52). Later, the Soviet regime established “national” (autonomous) regions as forms of indigenous administrative and political structures for the peoples of the North. As noted, the creation of new administrative and territorial divisions was difficult because of the dispersed settlement of indigenous people and the lack of information about their livelihoods.

In the opinion of the Committee of the North (the agency charged, *inter alia*, with assisting the development of the indigenous peoples of the North), the optimal territorial organisation for creating favourable conditions for the development of national consciousness and stimulating the rise of culture and economy of the indigenous northerners was the combination of the existing, disjointed indigenous areas into amalgamated national areas for each of the (more numerous) indigenous nationalities. Thus, indigenous peoples of the North were provided with a four-level control system, consisting of an indigenous council, an indigenous district executive committee, a national district and a regional (*kraevoi*) executive committee (TERLETSKY 1930, 3). National territorial division, designed in the 1920s to protect rights and interests of indigenous peoples of the North, essentially turned into administrative territorial ones in the 1930s (losing their importance for indigenous self-governance), which helped to ensure the practical implementation of social and economic policy in the North.

The process of forming new villages and transferring indigenous peoples to a sedentary life started simultaneously with the collectivization of the northern economy in 1929. The sedentarisation of indigenous peoples was directly related to the issue of their national and territorial division. Until the 1940s, it was carried out as a policy of nationalization of the traditional economic activities of the indigenous peoples of northern Yakutia. Many settlements were closed in the late 1950s to early 1960s, a move connected with the formation of state farms (*sovkhozy*) to replace collective farms (*kolkhozy*). The policy of closing “unpromising” villages was enforced throughout the entire territory of the former USSR. Indigenous villages and camps were dissolved, and their inhabitants were resettled to central villages of the expanded collective and state farms. As a result of the sedentarisation process among indigenous peoples and the closure of “unpromising” villages, the number of rural settlements of Yakutia fell. For the period between the 1939 to 2010 censuses the number of rural settlements of Yakutia decreased by almost 95% (Table 2).

Tab. 2: Number of Rural Settlements in Yakutia, 1939–2002 (includes both indigenous and other (e. g. predominantly Yakut) villages). Data: FEDOROVA 1998, various statistical sources.

Year	1939	1959	1970	1979	1989	2002	2010
Number of rural settlements	10716	4423	1317	726	641	590	586

State policies introducing new administrative-territorial structures and policies on the sedentarisation of the nomadic population resulted in the reduction of previously used territories of traditional land use, including the abandonment of distant fishing and hunting grounds. This reduction led to a decrease in traditional activities, to a sharp decline in the number of professional hunters among the indigenous peoples, and as a result, to the destruction of the ethnic culture and, ultimately, to a loss of continuity between generations.

### **The analysis of the dynamics of settlement using multi-temporal maps**

Our methodology required, first, the conversion of maps from different periods, scales and projections to a single base map, with one scale and projection. We compiled information on the changes of the external and internal borders of an administrative and territorial division of the Yakut ASSR, in accordance with text descriptions of geographical features, which formed the border of the Yakut ASSR. These descriptions are given in the Collections of Justice and Regulations of the Workers' and Peasants' Government of the USSR for 1920–1940. Archives of the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia) and the Khabarovsk Territory provided extensive map material for analysis, covering the period from 1910 to 1940. More recent maps, from the 1940s to the 2000s, were found in the archive of the Laboratory of Electronic Mapping Systems of the Department of Geography of the M. K. Ammosov, North-Eastern Federal University. These maps depicted changes of inter-district and external borders of Yakutia. Beyond this, we used data from field studies in different areas of Yakutia. We created an extensive database, which includes numbers of archived records; names of regions, districts, and settlements; settlements types, lifestyle of people; number of households; and the population for different historical periods. Detailed maps of Yakutia's settlements for each census period were compiled with the data from this database.

We confirmed the spatial representations of changes in the borders and settlements of the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia) during the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century by placing them on a single map base of 1:2,500,000, which made it possible to track changes in time and space. The application of asynchronous layers of maps of the administrative and territorial division and areas of settlement of indigenous peoples of the North demonstrates the dynamics of change in the borders of Yakutia. It also makes it possible to carry out calculations on the dimensions of

administrative districts areas on landscape maps and to follow the dynamics of their change in scope and form.

After analysing the published maps on the system of settlements of the population of Yakutia, based on the census materials, we identified the lack of population and settlements maps for the 1930–1940s. In this context, we have recreated the system of settlements of the rural population of Yakutia by types of settlements, based on the 1939 census.

We created a database of the distribution of settlements according to their types and the number of inhabitants within the various administrative districts. The database includes 10,673 settlements. The following types of settlements are recorded in the Yakut ASSR Census of 1939: large villages, settlements, small villages, skin tents, hunters' lodges, winter cabins, detached buildings, camping grounds, bases, permanent cattle camps, nomadic cattle camps, yurts, collective farm settlements, state farms settlements, industrial settlements, settlements related to highway water and air transport, 'booths', cultural and social settlements, and others. The resulting picture of the spatial distribution of population of Yakutia gives an idea of the system of settlements of the peoples of Yakutia. For example, small villages, large villages, and yurts in Central Yakutia usually belong to the Yakut; settlements, industrial settlements, and settlements of highway, water and air transport in South Yakutia are mostly populated by Russians and Ukrainians; skin tents, permanent cattle camps, nomadic cattle camps in the north, northeast and south are inhabited by the indigenous numerically-small peoples of the North (the Evens, the Evenkis, the Chukchi and the Yukagirs) (Fig. 1). All the settlements were mapped with icons of various shapes, which were then grouped by ethnicity into three groups: those of indigenous numerically-small peoples of the North, those of Yakut and those of settler populations (e. g. Russians, Ukrainians).

The comparison of the map compiled from the data of the 1939 census with a modern map of settlement of peoples of Yakutia (2002) shows that the main areas of settlements of the various peoples have been preserved, but that there has been a decrease in areas inhabited by the indigenous numerically-small peoples of the North, who were sedentarised during the Soviet period into permanent settlements, including big villages and settlements, while their smaller settlements consisting of yurts, tents, and *tordokhas* were abolished.

An important part of our research and mapping is to display the information about the real borders of the rural settlements and to compare these borders with the official borders on ethnic maps. The maps of ethnic groups provide important information on the territorial relations of nations since they show the settlement borders of various peoples. The identified cartographic data contains rich material for different time periods, indicating directly and / or indirectly the system of settlements of indigenous people, which may be taken as a basis for allocation of territory of traditional nature use in the future.

The main drawback of the published maps of ethnic groups is that the areas of settlement depict only the most prevalent ethnic group. For example, if, according to the census, a district is dominated by Russians, who in reality live mostly in one

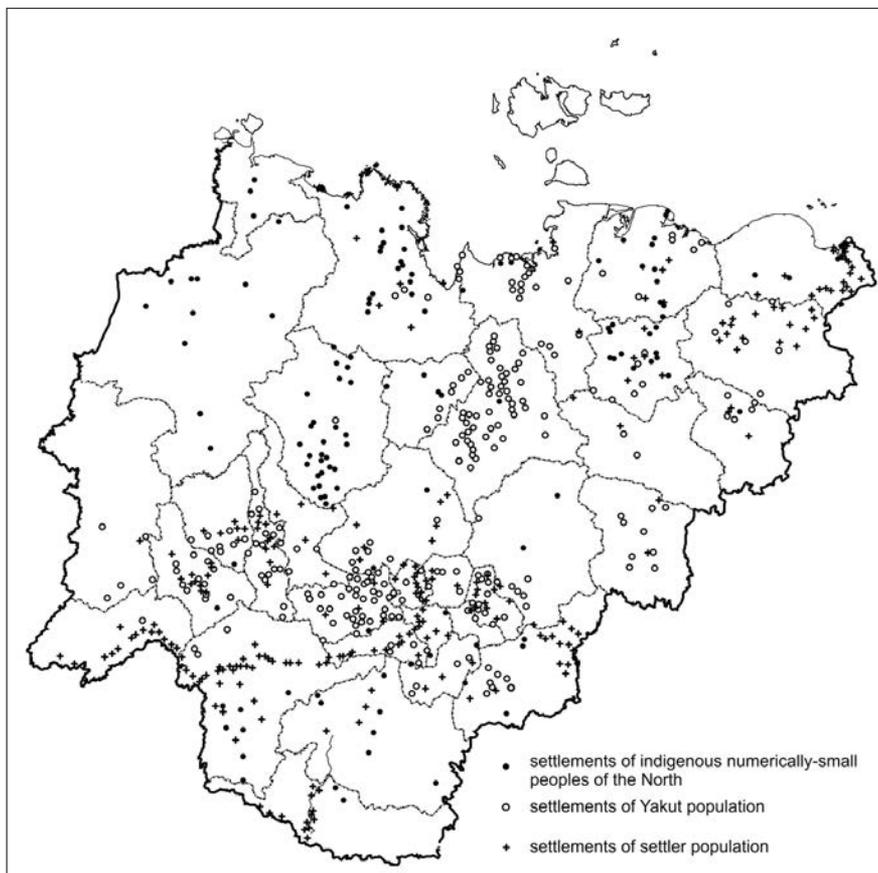


Fig. 1: Groups of ethnicity types of settlements (1939); created by the authors.

town or administrative centre, the whole area will nevertheless be designated (e. g. by its colour) as “Russian”, without any indication that other nationalities, including indigenous peoples, live there.

To address this shortcoming, we have proposed a somewhat different methodology to identify areas of population settlement. The first stage of work was the creation of a thematic map that showed areas of settlement in the lowest administrative units (*naslegs*). Thematic layers showing “language families, groups and ethnicities (in settled and developed territories)” and “settlement of numerically-small indigenous peoples of the North of Yakutia in view of *naslegs*” were applied to update the settlement areas of indigenous peoples of the North. The application of borders of the thematic layers allowed us to create a final map with updated borders of the areas of the indigenous people’s settlement. The updated map showed a different picture of the spatial representation of their places of residence (Fig. 2).

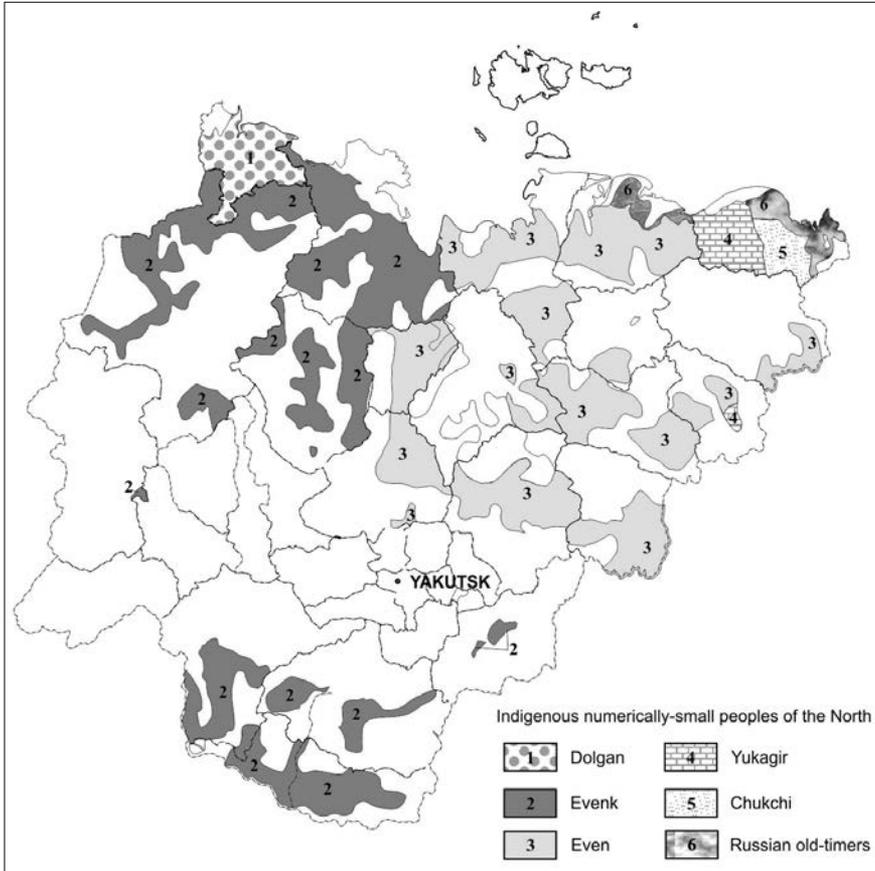


Fig. 2: Final map of indigenous peoples settlements in Sakha Republic; created by the authors.

For instance, according to the 2002 census, a majority of representatives of Slavic nationalities (Russians, Ukrainians and Belarusians) lived in Nizhnekolymsky ulus (in the outmost northeast of the Republic of Sakha), but most of them lived within the village of Chersky. Accordingly, all the area of Nizhnekolymsky ulus on the official maps of ethnic groups<sup>2</sup> showed only one ethnic group: Russian. After updating the borders within this district, we see defined areas of settlement of Yukagirs, Chukchi and Russian old-timers (*starozhily*, a separate ethnic group from Russians). Thus, we improved the technique of distinguishing the areas of settlement of the peoples of Yakutia, by accomplishing a more meaningful and detailed picture of the modern settlement patterns of indigenous peoples of the North.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. "The ethnic composition of the population", LAZEBNIK & FEDORENKO 2009.

## Conclusions

The analysis of maps from different periods, representing the administrative and territorial division and settlement, as well as our mapping of the changes in the territory and the settlements of indigenous peoples of the North in the 20<sup>th</sup> century resulted in the following conclusions:

In comparing the administrative and ethnic maps, the difference in scale, projections and methods of mapping representation make it difficult to compare data and confirm their reliability.

The compiled maps demonstrate a reduction in the number of rural settlements in Yakutia. The number of rural settlements decreased by 95% between 1939 and 2002. The reduction of the number of villages was due to the 20<sup>th</sup> century policy of relocating indigenous peoples of the North to larger villages.

Comparing a map compiled from data of the 1939 census with a modern map of settlement of the peoples of Yakutia (2002), you can observe that the main areas of settlement of peoples are still preserved. Nevertheless, you also notice, there is decrease in areas inhabited by indigenous peoples of the North, since they were sedentarised during the Soviet period in permanent settlements such as big villages and settlements, while their smaller, often temporary settlements (*yurts*, tents, *tordokhas*), were abolished.

Our calculations show a reduction of the territory of traditional settlement of indigenous peoples of the North of Yakutia in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. As a result of the division of districts, the areas of settlement and natural resource use of a given ethnic group may extend over various administrative and territorial units. Calculating the areas of settlement of small-numbered indigenous peoples and studying their interactions with the administrative and territorial borders allows us a better understanding of the dynamics of settlements of indigenous peoples of the northeast of Russia. Understanding the changes of the lowest-level administrative divisions (townships or *naslegs*) is of particular importance for the organization of spatial data; it is impossible to conduct spatial analysis of information about the territory for a sufficiently long period without recording the historical evolution of administrative and territorial divisions.

In conclusion, we have taken steps to improve the methodology of updating and displaying places of traditional residence and traditional economic activities of indigenous peoples of the North portrayed in the ethnic maps. This work has resulted in a compilation of a much more accurate picture of modern indigenous settlement in Yakutia, which can be used in making policy recommendations for the further sustainable development of places of traditional residence and traditional economic activities of numerically-small indigenous peoples of Yakutia's North.

The results of the study will be useful for the development of proposals and advice concerning the regulation of conflicts that arise over land use as well as regarding programmes aimed at the socio-economic development of indigenous small-numbered peoples of the North, as well as for the protection of their traditional areas of residence and their traditional ways of life.

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