Ethnic branding technologies of the Arctic zone of Russia (on the example of the Murmansk region)

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Abstract. The article focuses on the analysis of some technologies that are used for ethnic branding of the Arctic zone of Russia on the example of the Murmansk region. The main features of the Kola Sami and Pomors who are indigenous people and old-timers of the Kola Peninsula respectively by branding this northern territory are considered. The study presents interpretation of the results of the scientific research in the area of branding, sociological imagination and phenomenology. The concept of humanitarian geography and geographical images plays a significant role in this article. The increasing importance of the Arctic in the context of political and economic governance gives more relevance this topic, especially with respect to regional branding, strengthening regional identity, popularizing and preserving the ethnocultural heritage. The research is based on the content of Internet sites, media texts, modern ethnological work. Methods of virtual anthropology, phenomenology, visual and textual analysis of sources, practical branding were used. The study draws conclusions that as a result of branding, the Arctic region often appears as an imaginary space and ethnic images of the Arctic population at the same time are distorted. To a large extent, this process is facilitated by modern Internet technologies that reinforce stereotyping, exoticization and visualization of Arctic peoples' images.

1. Introduction
The image of any region is commonly shaped in the collective representations uneven way. However, it can be created and cultivated professionally and deliberately, e.g. in order to develop an attractive brand for tourism marketing or regional planning. Ethnocultural diversity has long been recognized as a specific brand building positive image of the multicultural community in Central Europe [8]. However, Russia realizes only in recent years that ethnocultural branding and creating positive ethnic identity have to develop as the region's economic and social potential [9]. The study of ethnocultural branding and the transformations of the ethnic traditions of the Murmansk region is relevant in the context of modern sociocultural processes. It works with market economy, since the unique historical and cultural potential of the territory is a significant advantage for both regional branding and development of tourism, folk arts and crafts, etc. The same could be said for the formation and strengthening of ethnic and regional identity of the population. At the same time, regional branding and its influence on the regional identity of the people lead to a certain problem. On the one hand, ethnic and regional identity is based on the sense of belonging to a culture. That means the reproduction of cultural elements, which are perceived as real, traditional, ethnic and typical of a
community and a territory. It is precisely the elements that build the historical and cultural potential of the region and provide a platform for brands, which contribute to cultural awareness, formation of a vivid geographical image and representation of ideas about this territory. On the other hand, the processes of intercultural interaction, globalization, integration, modernization can affect the regional branding, mix elements from many different cultural traditions, form hybrid models and create new regional identities.

2. Results of the research
Mass media and Internet play the most important role in branding of the Murmansk region. They design the area of the Kola Arctic North as that with specific natural, cultural and ethnic-cultural features. Notably, analysis of printed and on-line publications revealed that central educational periodical press and web sites with resource kits are the most important in this respect (“visual” mass media and image-oriented web sites are not considered in this research). Journals and on-line publications can be studied using the discourse analysis, revealing the following aspects: dissemination area; profiles of the information sender and user; topic and content of publications; aim of interaction; main scripts and contexts; linguistic analysis (in particular, vocabulary and syntax), first of all, a metaphor as one of the most efficient tools of the ideological programming. Besides, quantitative methods can be considered, e.g. circulation of print editions and attendance of web sites.

The ethnic-cultural component is an important touch to the image of the Murmansk region, along with the history and natural-geographic features. The Kola North is called a crossroads of cultures for a reason. As the Kola Peninsula developed, its ethnic composition has been changing and become all the more complicated. Notably, ethnic cultures of the resident population, which the native Sami and the Pomors old-timers refer to, have the greatest possibilities of the regional branding. Nowadays, the Kola Sami are the main target of the ethnic branding of the Murmansk region, being a kind of the ethnic-cultural marker of the Kola North, mainly, in the tourism business.

The ethnic branding focuses on some points. First, it is nearly always a political branding, especially regarding the domestics policy. Analyzing the content of the official web site “Administration of the Murmansk region” (section “Region”) considering the ethnic-cultural data revealed this resource to focus on indigenous minorities of the North. That is very relevant in modern conditions of growing globalization and urbanization but not objective regarding all nationalities of the Murmansk region only. The paragraph on indigenous minorities of the North provides general information and news of cultural life of the Sami people (culture, number, demographic situation, history, education, calendar of cultural events, sport activities). Mass media also provide full coverage of political activities, national holidays, conferences, “round tables”, cultural events, festivals, exhibitions, art workshops of the Sami. Arranging them is considered the regional sociocultural policy on “preserving traditions and customs, promoting authentic national culture of native minorities of the North [3], i.e. the Sami, in the Murmansk region” [4]. This perspective may be another evidence of the emphasis on sport and tourist activities in the regional policy and a need to create an efficient regional brand. At the same time there are no data on other indigenous small peoples of the North or arctic and northern ethnic groups inhabiting the Kola Peninsula, e.g. the the Karelians, Finns, Ingrian Finns, Komi-Izhemtsy. The Komi people are mentioned only so far folklore ensembles of the Murmansk region.

Despite a broad coverage of festive sport events in the Sami community life, there is an extreme lack of data on their material culture, household matters and social-cultural features in mass media, press and Internet. The Sami culture is presented in a festive way, while data on common life are quite poor. According to the news web site “SeverPost”, “they remember native minorities only on holidays in our region” [2]. On the other side, there are abundant descriptions of exotic, especially mystic, phenomena connected with the Sami culture, i.e. the seid cult and shamanism, which can obviously draw maximal attention of a cultural info user. Hence, there is the second peculiar feature of the ethnic branding in the Murmansk region, i.e. mythologizing of the Sami culture. Tourist web sites and topical sections in mass media are the main sources channeling near- and pseudoscientific texts to the
collective consciousness, with the most popular topics of the Sami shamanism and seids. The ethnicultural data in such sources are commonly presented through the prism of “mystery” and “enigma”, thus featuring the Kola Peninsula as “a land of enigmas, mysteries, legends and amazing treasures” [7]. Typically, there are publications ostensibly testifying to the existence of the ancient Arctic protoculture, which the Sami inherited their magical knowledge from: «It is possible, that the “chosen ones” could get some knowledge from remained representatives of the Arctic civilization that used to be prosperous. Where could the legendary and world-credible Sami shamans come from, but from here?” [14].

The third component of the ethnic branding in the Murmansk region is the focus on the authentic culture of the resident inhabitants of the Kola Peninsula. The “Vocabularies and encyclopedia on Academic” web site provides the history of the Kola North in two ways, excluding a table with data on the ethnic composition of the region. First, it outlines a Sami group presented as a people preserving its traditional way of life, while some elements of “civilization” penetrated into its common life: «The ancient Sami graveyard of Lovozero is the district centre, a village with multi-storied houses, shops, palace of culture, boarding school, stadium. The national traditions are preserved and maintained here” [10]. On this web site the ethnic spirit is enhanced by semantic means, including defining Lovozero as a pogost (graveyard) and emphasizing that the Sami live “in tundra”, i.e. in specific natural-geographical non-urban conditions, despite the fact that Lovozero has long-term status of a urban-type village. Much attention is given to “sacred stones of the Sami” (seids), which are characterized as sites attractive for tourists.Enumerating ethnographic realities or exhibits of the local history museum, i.e. the Sami huts called tupy (pyrty), vezhi, kuvaksy, is also especially important for such texts. Besides, reindeer is seen as the central symbol of Sami culture, because it is both the material basis of the life of reindeer herding semi-nomadic people and their main totem Myandash. Researchers noted that reindeer symbolizes the identity of the Arctic nomadic cultures, since reindeer herding provides autonomy in life, movement and communication [6].

The second scenario refers to the history of the Pomors populating the peninsula, which is also widely highlighted by mass media and Internet. An image of the Pomors as a people tightly associated either with the general Russian culture, or with the mystic Northern one is widely promoted. The general Northern culture is reflected in the stereotypic vision of the North as a metaspace with specific natural and cultural features, in particular, the northern people’s being highly “spiritual”. Regarding a group of the Kola Pomors, the branding of the Murmansk region is aimed at traditional tourist sites, i.e. sacred objects (churches, chapels) in the Pomors settlements. The Pomors festive activities carried at the Tersky coast of the White Sea are in high tourist demand. They are symbolically and spatially joined with different youth and musical festivals. The so called ethnic music is a pillar of these activities. It synthesizes ethnic and contemporary music, stylizes folklore genres (songs, chastooshka, joik, etc.) and adjusts it to the mass audience. Most music groups of the Murmansk region, e.g. “Aku-Aku” (this is the name of a legendary gorge in the Khibiny), “Mkhi” (“mosses”), “Severny (“northern”) music. It is often reflected in the very name of groups and performance. As a rule, “ethnic” musicians have nothing to do with real folklore ensembles of the Northern region and are far from authentic performance of arctic music of the Komi, Sami and other Northern peoples. Their art is more likely to stylization and representation of hybrid folklore traditions. It recreates the “arctic myth” of the uniform culture. Thus, organizers of the “Teriberka” Music Fest carried at the coast of the Barents Sea believe their main aim to be “developing and supporting the authentic culture of the North, i.e. introducing its nature, getting back to its basics and channeling it in contemporary interpretations” [11]. That's true regarding the “Bely Shum” Fest that is a great activity at the coast of the White Sea.

Whatever important, the myth of the common northern culture, as well as that of the Russian North, is rather ambiguous. Despite the word “Russian” in its name, the European North of Russia (the North-Western District of Russia) never was a Russian territory only. It has been and remains a poly-ethnic region, though the ethnic group of the Russian have greater numbers (80.75 % according to the All-Russian Census of 2010 [13]). Notably, the constant decrease in the Russian population of the
Murmansk region (incl. those leaving the North) and inflow of “new migrants” from former Soviet republics resulted in the constant rise of non-Russian ethnic groups in the population of the Russian North. Thus, the Russian North, despite the circulating myth, becomes all the less Russian. And this is just an example of the real and imaginary space (the reality and brand) differing a lot.

Finally, as mentioned above, one of major pillars of the regional branding is a presentation of natural and geographic peculiarities of the area. Toponymy is essential in the ethnic branding of the Murmansk region. It has a vast tourist potential, especially folklore stories connected with natural and geographic objects of the Kola Peninsula, i.e. mountains, waterways, islands, etc. The coverage of toponyms in the Murmansk region is one-sided. As a rule, only toponyms of the Sami origin are mentioned. Moreover, data are often provided not quite right, e.g. the stereotype that the Sami toponymy of the Khibiny Mountains has very ancient origins. The Sami toponyms are often opposed to the “newest” toponyms that occurred at the time of the first geological expeditions on the Kola Peninsula. In fact, most part of the geological and so-called Sami toponyms in the Khibiny originated at the same time. They were named in the 1920-1930s, when the first expeditions of academician A.E. Fersman were held.

The ethnocultural branding in recent years has expanded through new, specific methods and technologies of the virtual network. There is a syncretism of many different forms of information transfer and communication in the Internet. Video and audio formats complicate the text and simple pictures of virtual resources, as well as an interactive form of interaction between the creator of a site / author of a text or other content and the user, on the other hand, were added to the text and simple image. However, Internet-texts have the same characteristics of Northern indigenous peoples' images as in the pre-internet era. This includes intertextuality, stereotyping, mythologization, exotization. At the same time, the classical tradition of ethnographic description has been replaced by mosaic thinking, clipping, discreteness. Ethnographic realities distort much more than before as a result of stereotyping of ethnocultural information. Both clip-discrete textuality and a special form of visual identity are distinctive features of virtual branding. Focus on visual images and symbols is actually typical for all ethnic presentations and serves as one of the main tools of branding. The features that emphasize an exotic image of Northern peoples prevail in their brands. Examples of that are instruments of hunting, fishing and herding, fur clothes, traditional houses by the Sami. These cultural elements represent the Arctic as natural habitat of indigenous peoples. The Pomors are associated with the White Sea, marine environment, fish and wooden architecture.

Speaking of the visual image of the Kola Sami people, it comes from Russian illustrated editions of the 18th century. The visual representations of the Kola Sami are contained in the various sources: ethnographic albums, researchers’ ethnographic pictures, illustrations to textual descriptions, photos. The semiotic method allows both to analyze the visual characteristics of images: (pictures, prints, lithographs, photos) and to reveal their function to translate some cultural information and the mission that is used to manipulate the reader’s conceptions connecting the Sami culture.

In ethnographic albums of the 18th-19th centuries (by Johann Gottlieb Georgy, Gustave Theodor Pauly [5, 12]) the Kola Sami image shows signs of a costume portrait. They accent the idea of “cultural body”: anthropological characteristics, ethnic close, tools, traditional house, domestic flora and fauna elements. In fact, such representations are very stereotyped and far from the real appearance of the Sámi people. Besides, there is a hypothesis that the Sami's image in the first ethnographic album has been made by Georgy (his editor), although he was not a professional artist. He took a sample of Sami's clothes from an earlier German illustrated edition.

As early as in the middle of the 19th century, the Russian society knew very little about the ethnographic and anthropological features of the Kola Sami. In the first Russian ethnographic exhibition of 1879 the Sami were represented with only one dummy. There are not any images of this dummy. In many Russian ethnographical albums there were also not any Kola Sami's representations. For example, there is an image of the Inary Sami rather than Kola Sami in the edition by Pauly. The young anthropologist Alexander Kelsiev filled a gap of information, making the first anthropological measurements of the Kola Sami and collecting a grate amount of their material culture objects in 1877.
Collected anthropological masks and pieces of clothing were used for dummies, presented on the Moscow Anthropological Exhibition of 1879 and, further, as illustrations to many editions, ethnographical reference books and travel essays of the end of the 19th century.

The illustrations, which present the ethnographic realities of the Kola Sami culture, reconstruct historical facts of this ethnic group being and represent an exotic image of the “Stranger”. On the one hand, this image reflects embodied stereotyped notions about the Sami culture: fishing, reindeer herding, hunting as a basis of their economic activity, forest and wetland habitat, vezha as the Sami traditional house, etc. On the other hand, the visual representation of an exotic folk reflects the colonial intentions of Russian editors to show the ethnographical variety of the peoples of Russian Empire as the measure of its territorial and cultural wealth.

The illustrations for educational and popular scientific books are an especial research topic. Usually, these editions were illustrated by the painters who were not familiar with the Sami culture. That is why the Sami images commonly represent false or hyperbolized illustrator’s notions that are then replicated to the readership. For example, anthropological features of Sami like the Komi, Russian sled in place of the Sami keryozha, kuvaksa or kuwas in place of the vezha, etc.

By the way such pictures differ from illustrations for scientific editions, which are true and really through their art form. Some ethnographists drew illustrations for books about the Kola Sami with own hand. The fieldworkers' ethnographic pictures (by Vladimir Charnolusky, Yakov Komshilov, etc. [1]) are a special method of the visual ethnography. Finally, many photos of the beginning of the 20th century were used as illustrations to ethnographical books about the Kola Sami. It is a very interesting documentary source.

3. Conclusion

As shown above, the culture of the Kola Sami is much distorted in the mirror of the regional branding. It is often combined with cultural elements of other northern peoples or used as scattered cultural elements. It provides an incorrect notion and distorted vision of the Sami culture in minds of the non-Sami locals and guests from other regions. It is dangerous for preservation of the Kola Sami traditions in a way. Besides, it contradicts the paragraph on the cultural heritage of the Declaration adopted at the XIX Sami Conference in Rovaniemi in 2008. We can assume that contemporary social-cultural representations deal with the imaginary ethnic community of the Kola Sami rather than the real one. Branding of the Murmansk region reflects it as an imaginary, and no real space as well. Global spread and development of virtual technologies caused imagined communities and territories becoming even more such imagined. Territorial and ethnocultural brands were added to processes closely related to cross-cultural communication. Stereotyping, exoticization, visualization, which are common in the Internet towards ethnocultural images of Northern peoples, are growing resulting intertextuality and discreteness of network texts.

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