

7 ANTHROPOLOGY AND APPLIED ANTHROPOLOGY IN SIBERIA: QUESTIONS AND SOLUTIONS CONCERNING A NOMADIC SCHOOL AMONG EVENK REINDEER HERDERS

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Introduction

Designing and implementing a project for language revitalisation is not easy and requires facing many obstacles in various domains, most of which are really unexpected. I will illustrate some of these obstacles on the basis of my own experience as a social anthropologist who never planned to take part in an applied anthropology project, but was asked to by the community. This example can also demonstrate the need for a good knowledge (be it anthropological or not) of the concerned society when carrying out such a project.

From social anthropology to applied anthropology

The path from social anthropology to applied anthropology may contain a certain theoretical contradiction. Keeping in mind, firstly, that in contrast to what some anthropologists tended to describe in the past, societies are not ‘frozen,’¹ since they were and are changing due to various cultural exchanges, individual or global issues, and secondly, that neither social anthropology nor applied anthropology are ‘neutral’ in terms of influence over the concerned societies, and thirdly, that current applied anthropology has developed new approaches, there are still important differences between social/cultural anthropology and applied anthropology.

This theoretical contradiction was highlighted in a historical debate between French anthropology and Anglo-Saxon anthropology (between the 1950s and the 1970s), but also between the so called ‘ivory-towerish’ anthropology in England and the ‘practicing anthropology’ in the USA. This opposition was based on the following principle. Social anthropology aims to observe and study the society, avoiding as much as possible changing it (even if the lack of influence of the anthropologist in the field, or of his or her writing, is an illusion). In contrast, applied anthropology or development anthropology, willingly involves anthropological knowledge in decision-making processes that are acting on (with) the society, or sometimes somehow deciding for the society (Baré 1995). Indeed, it groups persons from different cultures (i.e. from different cognitive realms) in one common action that can be a source of

additional problems. It also transplants onto traditional societies some alien/foreign resources, techniques and knowledge (together with the development). In addition, in contrast with social anthropology, applied anthropology applies the method and theory of anthropology to the analysis and solution of practical problems and often works for non-academic agents such as governments, development agencies, NGOs, tribal and ethnic associations, advocacy groups, social-service and educational agencies, and businesses. In the 1990s, these applications of anthropology were realised in almost every part of the globe (Cernea 1991; Baba and Hill 1997; Hobart 1993; Long and Long 1992). Nevertheless, applied anthropology can have and usually has a consulting role, and ethnography with participant observation are the applied anthropologist's primary research tools (Olivier De Sardan 1995, Lévi-Strauss 1958: 440–443). More recently renamed 'engaged anthropology', applied anthropology redefines its sphere of activity as following: "from basic commitment to our informants, to sharing and support with the communities with which we work, to teaching and public education, to social critique in academic and public forums, to more commonly understood forms of engagement such as collaboration, advocacy, and activism" (Low and Merry 2010). In spite of the development of more participatory methodology and reflexive approaches that avoid some previous approaches that were close to colonialism, Aiello writes that "among the dilemmas that remain unresolved" regarding engaged anthropology "are the ethics of intervention, the appropriateness of critique given the anthropologist's position, and the hazards of working with powerful government and military organisations."²

Despite the historical contradictions mentioned above, the link between ethnography or anthropology and applied anthropology is ancient. Except for the involvement of L. H. Morgan in the 19th century in Indian Affairs, the first experiences of applied anthropology date from the 1930s and were initiated by John Collier in some Indian reservations. Some famous western anthropologists took part in applied anthropology, such as, in the 1940s M. Mead and G. Bateson, who created the Society for Applied Anthropology.³ In the East, from the 1930s to the 1950s, the Russian ethnographers were consultants for the Soviet state in order to propose solutions for the economic development of indigenous peoples, to study the consequences of Soviet policies on Siberian societies and, in particular, to create an alphabet and indigenous language manuals; to build up a unified and standard written indigenous language from numerous dialects of one language. In spite of the current development of engaged anthropology in the USA, most French anthropologists are still sceptical and critical of applied anthropology. This situation may change in the future since for instance the University of Paris X has a Master programme with an option in development anthropology and the University of Versailles developed a Master of 'Arctic Studies' that attributed scholarships to Siberian indigenous students.

The contradictions in the French position toward engaged anthropology mentioned above made me feel, in the beginning, embarrassed to be fully involved in

the creation of the project for a nomadic school among the Evenk reindeer herders. On the other hand, Evenk in the field often told me that, according to their social logic of gifting and counter-gifting, “You take information from us, we give you a lot, but what do you give to us? You could help us with something”. It is also, but in other words, what Fluehr-Lobban defines as collaboration, i.e. “key to the sustainability of anthropological fieldwork and research, and perhaps for anthropology as a discipline,” meaning that collaboration helps to gain equality between researcher and ‘researched’ from its traditional top-down approach (Fluehr-Lobban 2008: 177). In contrast to France, in Anglo-American social anthropology, collaborative and participatory (research) projects have been developed for the last ten years. As an illustration of such a shift in research ideology, the expression ‘applied anthropology’ was also replaced by ‘collaborative anthropology’ or ‘cooperative anthropology’ and the term ‘informant’ was replaced by ‘collaborator’, ‘co-researcher’ or ‘colleagues’. A good example is a project that directly addresses the reindeer herder’s need for additional data and information in responding to the global and environmental changes called EALAT (2007–2010).⁴ It is an unprecedented new reindeer herder-led initiative that is studying the challenges to reindeer herding posed by climate change.

To come back to our concrete case study, from 1996 to 2005, I spent some of the time I had free from social anthropology research helping with a project to create a nomadic school among Evenk reindeer herders in Siberia. After my Ph.D. was completed, I became more engaged in the project in 2005–2006, and devoted time to implementing the wishes of the Evenk nomads with whom I was working. But, from the beginning it was clear to me that my role had to be only to help in the creation of this nomadic school and that, when the project was running well on its own, I would distance myself from this direct involvement.

My way from social anthropology to applied anthropology was as follows. I performed fieldwork among the Evenk (but also among the Yakut of central Yakutia and the Even of northern and north-eastern Yakutia). I studied such themes as shamanism, ritual practices, indigenous concepts of the material and immaterial constituents of the individual, nomadic lifestyle, adaptation of nomadic collective representation to the settled lifestyle in villages, the renewal of traditional rituals after the fall of the Soviet Union, the urban minority *intelligentsia*, indigenous development projects, etc. For that purpose I learned the Evenk language and performed many field projects (in total for a length of six years between 1994 and 2003), mostly among the nomadic Evenk reindeer herders and hunters in two main areas related to the villages of southern Yakutia (Olekminsky and Nerungri *ulus*) and the north-western Amur region (Tyndinsky *rayon*).

Siberian and Evenk cultural and linguistic insights

Before explaining the Evenk nomadic school project, let me give an overview of the Siberian context. Today, most of the Siberian languages are endangered or have disappeared.⁵ According to the decree of 2000, Siberia and the Far East of the Russian Federation count 40 indigenous peoples of the North with a population below 50,000 people,⁶ for a total population of 250,000 people, which corresponds to 2 % of the whole population of the Russian Federation. Of these, 80 % of the indigenous population live in the villages and/or practise a nomadic lifestyle.⁷ We can estimate that nomads represent around 10 to 20 % of the whole population of indigenous peoples of the North.⁸

As we will see from a case study of the south-eastern Siberian Evenk, indigenous languages are often better safeguarded in the nomadic realm and in villages to which a nomadic community is still related. In contrast, in villages where the population was completely settled, indigenous languages are often not used anymore. One of the reasons could be, as I often noticed in the field, that Evenk speakers prefer to use Russian in the village since, as they explain, the vocabulary is more adapted to the rural life (i. e. Evenk language has no term to designate 'administration', 'post office', 'street' or other items). According to the same logic, they prefer speaking Evenk language in the nomadic realm, since Russian has a lot of terminological lacunas for the nomadic lifestyle. So, logically it seems that in the case of the disappearance of the nomadic lifestyle (i. e. when the traditional uses of the natural environment disappear), Evenk language is not needed anymore.⁹ Here I must clarify that, in contrast with other Arctic peoples, such as in the West among some Inuit groups, a standard language was not adopted by the population (see *below*) and no effective efforts were made to adapt vernacular language to urban life and technologies, which requires the commission of native speakers to create neologisms and the help of governmental institutions or media to impose the use of those new words.

The language situation seems to be better among some of the indigenous peoples with a population of over 50,000 peoples, such as the Sakha (Yakut), the Altai and the Tuvan.

The Soviet Union brought far-reaching changes to Siberian societies and cultures. Of these, the most important for our argument are the following. The nomadic populations were partly settled in villages built especially for that purpose. Most of the parents and all children received education in Russian in boarding schools and from that period, Russian has been the sole language of school teaching. Between the 1930s and the 1950s, according to the various regions, children of nomads were obliged to live in boarding schools and to be separated from their parents for months on end. In addition, according to the testimonies of the Evenk, until the 1980s it was strictly forbidden to speak indigenous languages within the walls of the boarding school. Some of the informants even remember being beaten by some educators if they were caught speaking their language. At the same time, in the 1930s, for almost every Sibe-

rian language – originally oral languages – a standard written language was created by linguists on the basis of one (or two) of the numerous dialects of each language. These Siberian standard written languages are currently taught in most of the boarding schools. Also, Soviet politics allowed for the appearance of an indigenous *intelligentsia* (current teachers, researchers, artists, writers, politicians, administrative workers, library and House of Culture workers, etc.).

The language situation of the Evenk can illustrate the consequences of Soviet politics. The Evenk are 70,000 individuals¹⁰ and live in small groups in Eastern and Central Siberia (38,000 individuals in Russia) and in Manchuria (35,000 individuals in China), in taiga or tundra environments. Their language (divided into 51 recognised dialects) belongs to the Tungus-Manchu linguistic group together with the Even, Negidal, Nanai, Udihe, Ulcha, Orok (Uilta) and Oroch languages.¹¹

2010 Russian Census	Evenk	Even	Negidal	Nanai	Udegei	Ulcha	Orok Uilta	Oroch
Population	38,396	21,880	513	12,003	1,496	2,765	295	596
Speakers	4,802	5,656	74	1,347	103	154	47	8

Diagram by A. Lavrillier on the basis of 2010 Russian Census' archives

The Evenk standard language was artificially built, firstly in the 1930s on the basis of a dialect from the Irkutsk region (Nepa dialect) (first in the Latin alphabet, then in Cyrillic) and secondly was changed in 1952 to a standard language based on the dialect of the *Podkommennaia Tunguska* subgroup of Northern Krasnoirsksk region (Poligus dialect).¹² Thanks mostly to G. M. Vasilevich, one hundred books in standard Evenk were already published by 1934.¹³ Despite the numerous publications, distributed textbooks and obligatory training at school for several decades, this standard Evenk language is still not accepted by most of the Evenk, but only by a small part of the *intelligentsia*. Worse, this standard Evenk is so different from most of the Evenk dialects in pronunciation, lexicon and suffixes, that according to Evenk speakers, it results in a rejection of Evenk language by children in general. Parents explain that children lose patience: “on the one hand they know one Evenk language from us, on the other hand they learn another Evenk language from school that we cannot understand; we even cannot help them with their homework in Evenk. If they write their homework in our dialect, they get bad marks. So, they are lost between those Evenk languages, they can properly study neither our Evenk nor standard Evenk, so they switch to Russian – that is easier for them. Children need a teaching in our dialect if we want to keep Evenk language”. Three other reasons can cause children to lose interest in Evenk language. Firstly, Evenk standard written language is currently taught in boarding school only one to two hours a week and secondly, this language is not

highly valued by the village's Slavic social groups. Thirdly, speakers of Evenk dialects still have an oral conception of their language: almost all of them report that they are not "able to read or write Evenk language", while they currently read and write in Russian. Effectively, when I asked them to write something in Evenk, they hardly did it and wrote one word each time with a different orthography. When I gave them some texts to read, they could not understand what was written, but when I read those texts aloud, they understood. So, the problem is cognitive: the speakers have a representation of their language that excludes writing and it probably precludes the appropriation of a written standard language.¹⁴ In addition, except in the official Evenk Autonomous Okrug in Krasnoïarsk region (also called Evenkiia, with a population of only 3,800 Evenk) where standard language is supported by written press and media, the standard Evenk is not spread by any media in other regions where Evenk live.

In 1990, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, there appeared in almost all Siberian villages under the collective idea called by indigenous people themselves 'revival of traditions', a lot of projects initiated by local schools, museums, dance groups, town halls and nomadic families. These projects were aimed at cultural survival or language preservation, but they faced many obstacles and most of them were never implemented.

Siberian specifications in the setting up and implementation of projects

For the last two decades, some factors seem to be curbing language revitalisation projects undertaken after the fall of the Soviet Union. The reasons are diverse. In contrast to most of the other Western Arctic and Circumpolar Regions, in Siberia (in its broad geographical meaning) there are very few aboriginal decision makers. The size of the indigenous minority *intelligentsia* is small and insufficiently represented in governmental institutions. The logistic and financial support of the government (using indigenous language for mass media, official communication in policy and education) is essential to carry out language revitalisation projects efficiently, as the case of Sakha (Yakut) language has demonstrated. In Siberia and the Far East of Russia, there is also poor financial support for projects emerging from indigenous villagers or nomads. The system of non-profit associations which could counteract this lack of financial support is not active because, generally in Russia, the volunteer work groups (associations) are very few and don't act as a social phenomenon (accomplishing tasks that government cannot perform) as they do in the West. Another source of funding of projects for language revitalisation is the foreign funding organisations, such as DoBeS (Volkswagen Foundation), The Hans Rausing Endangered Language projects, Earth Action and so on. But, several phenomena are preventing the indigenous *intelligentsia* from benefiting from this help. Firstly, the majority of the indigenous *intelligentsia* do not even know about those funding institutions. Secondly, they

usually have little knowledge of foreign languages and computing (which is essential for submitting proposals). Another fact which is curbing the efficiency of revitalisation projects is the lack of close social interaction and contacts between speaking communities in villages or in the nomadic realm which often have very good projects and field knowledge, and the indigenous *intelligentsia* of the towns which has some power to act and to access some funding.

The origin of the Evenk nomadic school project

This applied anthropology project took place in north-western Amur region, among Evenk nomadic groups administratively related to a village where only Slavic allochthonous population and Evenk live.

From the beginning of my fieldwork in the 1990s, Evenk, but also Even nomads expressed to me the need for a nomadic school in order to keep children with them, and to convey Evenk language and nomadic knowledge to them. They also wanted to ensure their children got a good quality education with knowledge of current technologies and foreign languages. They were very willing for their children to receive the needed knowledge to feel confident and powerful in both the nomadic world and the worlds of the villages and towns. In those regions, some nomads had already tried to convince local authorities to fund their familial nomadic school, and some members of the indigenous *intelligentsia* had also tried to convince local authorities, without any success.

In the late 1990s, members of the local indigenous *intelligentsia* asked me to work out with the nomads during my field work the logistic details of such a school – as an anthropologist supposed to know nomadic communities well, their demography, children's populations, the details of roads travelled, etc. After collecting from the nomads all the needed information and defining the project's specifications, I was asked by the indigenous schoolteachers and pedagogues to help in writing down the parameters of the nomadic school project for the local authorities. Together with them, with the Centre of National schools in Yakutsk, and with the help of RAIPON (CSIPN/RITC),¹⁵ we studied the various cases of already existing 'nomadic schools' in Siberia, most of which were little settled schools (*stacionarnye shkoly*) in remote places in the tundra (as for example Yuri Vella's one) (cf. Dudeck, *this volume*) or in the taiga. The experiences showed that most settled little remote schools were not really attracting the nomads: "It is worse than the village boarding school, because we also need to be separated from our children and the school is badly built, children get cold, and the teaching is not as good as at the village school and we have additional work to prepare wood for the school", explained some parents I met during conferences on that subject. The expensive project with heavy technical equipment seemed also to not be a good option. Indeed, a nomadic school was transporting the

teachers from one camp to another by big truck. But after two years, the school had to close because the fuel consumption was too expensive, the truck broke down and no additional money was found. Two other cases helped us in finding the proper organisation. The first one was along the Olenëk River in Northern Yakutia where an indigenous teacher in retirement took her numerous grandchildren with her into the tundra and taught them there, living and teaching in the tent, moving with a nomadic group. The second example took place in the Amur region. In the 1980s, an indigenous teacher and her husband, travelling by helicopter, visited the nomadic camps and taught there. Her teaching experience has shown the great results of educating nomadic pupils. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, this teacher organised the so-called 'taiga school' (*taezhnaia shkola*) which allowed the pupils from 12 to 13 years of age to join their parents in the taiga. There, they were studying on their own with manuals and exercises given by the teachers in the village. In this context, one nomadic mother personally taught all her children and grandchildren on her own in the taiga. The pedagogical results were varied, but all those nomadic pupils became great reindeer herders and hunters, are fluent Evenk speakers, founded a family, and this village (in contrast with most other similar places) did not know such symptoms of social depression as mass suicides among indigenous people. Using all these experiences, we defined a project for a nomadic school that allows children to live continuously with their parents, that uses the cheapest and most secure transport (i. e. the reindeer), that avoids heavy technology and infrastructure and that offers high-quality education. Also, the parents wanted a school that would prepare their children for both nomadic and rural/urban life. Indeed, if some of the parents, thinking that there is nothing good in rural and urban places, wish their children to continue the reindeer herding lifestyle, most of them desire their children to 'be satisfied with their lives,' be it in the taiga, in the village or in the town, or both. By the way, surprising as it may seem to the European mind, to be both nomad and urban is perfectly possible. Effectively, among the Saami, as among Siberian peoples, there are several persons of different generations who are efficient in both the nomadic lifestyle and urban administrative or business tasks. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, parents think that their children must be able to manage administrative, juridical and business tasks, even if they lead a nomadic lifestyle. So, parents wish their children to be adaptable to both lifestyles and environments in the future.

After the Evenk nomadic school project was defined, the Evenk schoolteachers and pedagogues asked me to defend this project in front of the Russian authorities, thinking that it would be easier and more persuasive coming from a 'French doctor of the Sorbonne'. From time to time over the course of many years, during my free time from research, and in collaboration with Evenk nomads, villagers and townspeople, we wrote a dozen versions of the project for submission to local authorities, and for presentation in numerous local conferences, in order to get funding. We had no success except in 2002 in Moscow, when we obtained a diploma from the Minis-

ter of Education of the Russian Federation certifying that this project for a nomadic school was recognised as a federal pedagogical platform, but no funding came with this diploma. Then, with other French researchers, in particular with the ethnomusicologist Henri Lecomte (who edited eleven CDs of traditional music of Siberian peoples),¹⁶ we decided to look for funding from European countries or the USA, and in 2004 we created the non-profit and completely volunteer NGO 'French-Evenk Association Sekalan'.¹⁷ We decided that the first funding for the school would be the little sum of the royalties from the CD of Evenk traditional songs we created together (Lavrillier and Lecomte 2002). We submitted the project to various funding organisations in France and visited various people at the UNESCO headquarters in Paris, and on the advice of RAIPON, we tried without any success to get funding from various organisations such as Sorosoro, the World Bank, etc.

Creation and development of the school

As mentioned above, our purpose was to implement the wishes of a nomadic Evenk group to have a nomadic school. One of its aims is to preserve language by keeping children in the nomadic environment with their parents, who still use the traditional knowledge and speak the Evenk language. In this region, around 70% of adults are fluent Evenk speakers, but there is a problem of language transmission to younger generations. As I noticed during the fieldwork, Evenk is spoken mostly within nomadic communities, while Russian is spoken in villages (see *above*). In this region, the language preservation situation is exceptionally good, in comparison with the other Evenk regional groups, where for instance in some Amur region villages the Evenk speak only Russian, or in most southern Yakutia villages the Evenk speak only Yakut and Russian. Here we can see that this project's idea is – in contrast with *stricto sensu* revitalisation projects – to maintain language practice and to reinforce intergenerational transmission before the language disappears. Indeed, the present generation of children is a key generation, among which (according to their current knowledge), the language will be lost or maintained.

Before continuing the description of this project, let me clarify a few points on the Siberian language situation. In many other Siberian indigenous peoples' villages, be they Yukagir, Koryak and so on (cf. Odé, Kasten, *this volume*), and among other Evenk villages, the language is not anymore practiced by children and young generation.

The reasons for language loss can be various. Many Evenk assert that one of the consequences of education in the village boarding school is the loss of their language. This point of view can be moderated by several facts. First, let me say that the boarding school is probably not directly the only factor responsible for the disappearance of the language. Indeed, the first generation entering the boarding schools were Evenk only speakers and had to learn Russian language at school. Despite the ban on speak-

ing Evenk at school, they willingly continued speaking Evenk in secret among themselves. But when this generation had children, as the Evenk testified, many of them were ashamed of their language or did not want their children to suffer the same ban, and have not transmitted the Evenk language to their children. In addition, when the ban on Evenk speaking at school disappeared, the one to two hours of standard Evenk lessons were not sufficient to maintain the language. So, indirectly, the boarding schools were to a considerable degree responsible for the reduction in the numbers of Evenk speakers (see also Dudeck, *this volume*).

In addition, nomadic and settled Evenk say that boarding school triggered the appearance of what they call 'a lost generation of children', i.e. a generation which is able to live neither the nomadic lifestyle nor a rural/urban one. They explain that during the short holiday time they were able to spend in the taiga, children could not receive the tremendous amount of knowledge needed for surviving in this extreme environment. In addition, nomadic children tend to develop psychological problems for several reasons. First, they suffer psychological and cultural trauma at the age of 7 years from the abrupt separation from their parents and from the nomadic realm when entering the boarding school. Consequently, they tend to become introverted. Second, as members of an under-appreciated minority surrounded by a Slavic pedagogical team, most of who give them to understand they haven't the same intellectual capacities as Russians (see *below*), they get a negative view of themselves. Those inferiority complexes caused by this social atmosphere don't help those children to feel self-confident in the rural / urban lifestyle. Although this portrait is a bit stereotypical and there are exceptions, it represents well the idea of the 'lost generation'.

The Evenk nomadic school project finally got lucky at the end of 2005, when we obtained the first funding from the German NGO 'ProSibiria',¹⁸ which allowed the school to start for a year. Simultaneously, the Amur region Ministry of Education attributed to this nomadic school the status of 'Regional pedagogical platform'. The school could then start at the beginning of 2006. From the conception of the school project in the 1990s until funding was finally granted, the concerned Evenk lost hope, but the ProSibiria funding resulted in an enthusiastic response by the local authorities and all the participants. Seeing that a foreign institution was funding this project, the local Department of Education immediately decided to help with one teacher's position by funding some equipment and offering some logistic help. In January 2006, while we had not yet received the funding from ProSibiria (because of the time necessitated by the money transfer), we decided to leave for the taiga to help get the school functioning. The participants agreed to receive their salary later, and I spent my last money to buy food for the team. The nomadic parents were also very enthusiastic, helping with transport (lending reindeer), constructing school tables, etc. At that time we did not even know if the school would exist for more than one year, but all involved Evenk, nomads and villagers said: "The most important thing is to start!" So we opened the school for the eight children of one nomadic group.

Some months before, I had applied to the Rolex Awards for Enterprise, not really hoping for success. So, it was a great surprise and joy for all of the participants to see, the helicopter arrive in June 2006 in the nomadic camp in the middle of the forest with the Rolex team to announce to us that we would receive the funding which would allow the school to function for several years longer.

From paper to reality

During the first year we were very aware of how difficult it was to pass from the written version of the project to its realisation. We had to change various logistic details, taking into account all remarks from both the nomads and the local authorities at the Ministry of Education. It appeared that the organisation of the school had to be flexible and needed to be modelled on the nomadic society in order that the school would function successfully. For instance, the first year the staff was too expensive in relation to the number of pupils and transport from one camp to another was too complicated. Now, the organisation, based on alternating direct and indirect teaching (i. e. alternatively, directly with professional teachers and with parent-educators) is the following: if the camps are near each other, the teachers move from one camp to another every ten to twenty days; while, if the camps are too far from each other, teachers stay in one camp for three months before being replaced by another teacher or by parent-educators. During the absence of the teachers, some nomadic parents act as educators to give homework or lectures to the children. Some of them had started a degree in their previous life and are able to teach at a good level.

Thanks to the nomadic school, eleven positions were created: two for the professional teachers, one for the coordinator, one for the cashier-accountant, one for the reindeer herder guide and six for the parent-educators. Monthly salaries vary from 3,000 to 15,000 roubles according to the type of position and the effective working time. I should explain that in the Amur region, thanks to the proximity to the railway network, the cost of living is much lower than in northern Siberian regions, which explains the low salaries.

According to their own system, the nomadic families are making from one to four trips per year to the village in order to obtain fresh supplies, and during this time, they bring the children to the village school in order that their level of education can be checked. Today the school covers eight camps over a territory of 1,200 km² and from the beginning 56 children benefitted from this nomadic school. The participants of the project are nomadic communities, the Evenk *intelligentsia* of the village, two Evenk professional teachers from the region's nomadic families (Gabyshev A. I. – educated as a primary school pedagogue at Yakutsk University, Goncharova T. D. – educated as a primary school and Evenk teacher at St. Petersburg University, the Department of Education of the Amur region (Siberia) (Russians) and the Primary school of the

village (Russians). Legally, the nomadic school is an administrative subdivision of the village school (boarding school included) which greatly simplifies the expenses and administrative management of the nomadic school and avoids the huge difficulties a nomadic school would have to obtain an education licence. With the agreement of the local Department of Education and the village boarding school, the pupils from kindergarten age up to the fifth class (according to the Russian system) (from approximately four years old to eleven or twelve years old) can attend the nomadic school if their parents wish. After that age, the pupils are obliged to attend the boarding school because of the complexity of the Federal teaching programme.

Let me explain that, in various publications on nomadic school issues, it is said that some parents do not wish their children to study in such original schools. We also faced some scepticism among some parents at the very beginning, because parents worried about the quality of teaching. First of all, parents demanded the teaching of computing and foreign languages in the nomadic school. Surprising as it may seem, while in the beginning all parents asked for the creation of a nomadic school, when we were finally able to start implementing this project, some parents were sceptical the first year and waited for the first year's evaluation results before deciding to join the project. In addition, I argue that it is very important to make such schools non-compulsory, because, as we noticed, at certain times of the year, for instance during the exhausting period of sable hunting (on which the yearly financial budget of the family depends), some parents prefer to leave their children at the boarding school for a month. There is also another advantage, because according to the parents and the local pedagogues, children also need to get used to being in crowded classrooms and to the social atmosphere of the settled lifestyle.

In order to meet the requirements of the parents the pupils have more teaching hours in the nomadic school than in the boarding school. They study all the subjects of the Federal Programme, such as Russian, Mathematics, Life and Earth Sciences, History, Literature and so on, the same as the village pupils. In addition, they learn and practice computing, Evenk and English language in the specific way described below.

Creation of multimedia documentation products

In addition, according to the pedagogical programme of this nomadic school and the willingness to involve children in preserving and documenting their language and culture, the children create multimedia documentation products and have access to some ethnographic archives on Evenk culture (records of songs, stories; videos of technical processes, ritual practices; pictures of ancient expeditions, documentary films, etc).

The nomads didn't want their children, being nomadic school pupils, to be isolated in the role of 'traditional nomads', away from the current technologies. So, we



[16] During the nomadic school process, parents and children access a set of ethnographic multimedia documentation in the nomadic realm.



[17] Sample of language talking manual made in Power Point programme by the children of the French-Evenk nomadic school.

decided to create pedagogical activities according to the principle of two (or more) in one – the children learn current electronic technologies (and foreign languages) through concrete tasks and realisations for documenting language and culture. Since the nomadic families value their own Evenk dialect, it was decided that these multimedia documentation products will be made in their own Evenk dialect and with their own orthography.

Children use various tools such as fold-away school tables, laptops, digital cameras, microphones and software such as Power Point, Word with integrated pictures, sound and written texts (see *Illustration 16*). With the help of teachers and parents, children created multimedia manuals with speech examples (see *Illustration 17*), little encyclopaedias, life-journals, Evenk calendars, etc.

Let me now present some positive results as well as questions and found solutions in various social spheres involved in this project: the nomads, the village and town indigenous *intelligentsia*, the local and main regional town authorities in education. All those partners correspond to very different socio-economic, cultural realms and lifestyles.

Positive results

After six years of existence, we can observe diverse positive results, such as the healthy psychological development of the children because of the closeness to their parent's affection. We also noticed that parents took an active part in these education processes. In addition to their active involvement in the logistic organisation, they spontaneously took part in multimedia productions, local epic poetry theatre, nomadic technologies and Evenk language lessons, and in collective games organised by professional teachers.

Obviously, the fact that children live a nomadic lifestyle allows for good maintenance and development of cultural and linguistic knowledge, transmitted through traditional modes of transmission (observation, imitation by playing, implementation). In addition, the educational level (in terms of the Russian Federal programme) of the nomadic school children is often higher than among the village boarding school children, because they receive individualised teaching and because they learn to create their own projects and realise them. Pedagogically, thanks to the direct / indirect way of teaching, the children get used to doing their school work independently.

Besides the creation of eleven jobs, significant in the context of the financial crisis in the villages and among the nomads (see *above*), there are also unexpected positive results such as the creation of a social and psychological dynamism among both children and parents. Children grow to be proud of themselves and self-confident. For instance, they know computing programmes that their village boarding school teachers do not know and also nomads (who are often disparaged by allochtonous institutions) have their own special school. All of this counteracts the hang-ups (see *above*) they had in the village school as members of an ethnic minority. In addition, some of the parents, reassured by their successful experience as educators in the nomadic school, decided to found a little nomadic enterprise (ru. *rodovaia obshchina*) or to study to become nomadic teachers. Others decided to adopt orphans from a neighbouring Evenk village. Among those orphans there was one little Russian girl who was learning in the nomadic school for five years. Even some children living in the village were willing to join the nomadic school, but the nomadic school didn't have the legal status needed to implement this wish.

Questions and solutions

But let me now explain what kind of questions we had to resolve in order to attain these results.

Firstly, we had several ethical questions. The question was from the unsolved dilemmas of applied anthropology: Although one knows that societies are continuously changing and that the social anthropologist has a certain influence on the studied society anyway (see *above*), is it ethically correct for a foreign anthropologist to risk causing changes to a nomadic society by creating such a project? Low and Merry (2010: 211–212) recognise that there is no easy answer to such a dilemma:

“The first dilemma concerns the extent to which the researcher should act as a participant, including becoming engaged in activism that seeks to reform features of social life to enhance social justice rather than being a disengaged outsider observing and recording social life. Some argue that participation of this kind changes the society being studied and question the ethical right to seek to change other ways of life. Others argue that those who fail to respond to the need for intervention are acting unethically. Some point out that all societies are now economically and politically interconnected such that isolation is not a possibility, and many suffer from the effects of this interconnection. How, and to what extent, the anthropologist should seek change is uncertain.”

In our case study, one of the answers to this dilemma was the fact that it was a project of the Evenk themselves. Secondly, this question was resolved by the fact that all the decision-making was led by, or in close collaboration with, the nomads. Regarding the introduction of computers into the nomadic lifestyle and the risk of this changing their society (a critique that I have heard from some anthropologists), I argue that, firstly it was an Evenk decision; secondly, nomads have for several decades used various new technologies, such as radio, communication systems with the villages, music players, and more recently mp3 players, DVD players, and mobile and satellite phones.¹⁹

Secondly, the organisation of the school was adapted to the nomadic society and did not require any change in the nomads' mobility as the taiga/tundra settled remote schools did. So, this society's organisation did not have to change in order to receive the services of the school. And, through the years, the project management was gradually being transferred to the Evenk themselves. So, while I devoted most of my time to this project for two to three years from 2006 (solving administrative, pedagogical, methodological, logistic, financial and social issues, and being temporary teacher), since 2008 this project is entirely collaboratively led by nomadic families and the village boarding school. Since western financial support is still needed, the French-Evenk association Sekalan is still funding the nomadic school and controls the use of the money, and regularly surveys the level of satisfaction among the project's partners. I argue that it is very satisfying that the applied anthropologist is not needed anymore in this project.

Furthermore, in order to avoid the risk of unintentionally imposing a new 'norm' on 'Evenk culture', during the pedagogical programmes (access to ethnographic archives and multimedia creation), like the Soviet Union had in their Evenk manuals, it was decided to give simple access to the ethnographic and archive data, without further commentaries or directions.²⁰ It was especially important for me as a western anthropologist showing these materials and teaching multimedia technologies. These materials should be only opened as windows on the archive about some Evenk groups. Furthermore, I argue that it is very important that children and parents decide themselves about the content and forms of the multimedia documentation products. Indeed, Evenk regional groups have all cultural and linguistic specifications which are very important to them. For instance, Evenk dialectal differences, even linguistic innovations based on crossing roots and suffixes from Russian and Evenk, or based on borrowings from Yakut, are all very important markers of regional identities as are differences in motifs decorating clothes and other items (Lavrillier 2005: 436–438).

In the area of politics and governance, we met important obstacles. Firstly, there is an important lack of communication and collaboration between the various governmental institutions of the administrative regions. Indeed, the initial project was to cover all the nomadic camps in a huge area situated in the South of Yakutia and the North of the Amur region. Because of this lack of communication, it was decided to create the school only in the Amur region. Secondly, in another sphere, we had to cope with the lack of communication and mutual understanding between the nomads, the local governmental authorities and the urban indigenous *intelligentsia*. In those relations, as an anthropologist, and a 'neutral' (as much as possible) foreigner, I had to be a kind of ambassador between these social spheres and to act in each of these spheres according to its specific social behaviours, discourse and convincing arguments.

I had the initial feeling that the local government was sceptical of indigenous projects and I guess that the local government might be afraid of a too powerful and organised indigenous society. Indeed, the main stake concerns the lands in use by the nomads that are coveted by the mining enterprises. The state usually seems to avoid funding any project likely to raise decision-making skills among the indigenous people or to create a strong political consciousness and identity. The state funds festivals, cultural and artistic events quite readily (cf. Kasten, *this volume*). Another possible reason for the local government's scepticism can be that the nomads represent a demographic minority in comparison with the more numerous allochthonous population which also meets with serious socio-economic problems and needs government help. In order to cope with this political atmosphere, we had to prove that the project was apolitical and to provide the already obtained foreign funding. Let me insist here on the need for foreign funding for indigenous projects. Here, the figure of a foreign scientist involved in the defence of this kind of project seems to somehow impress the local authorities and help in obtaining support, as some connections from the local government told me.

From a social point of view, we had to resolve various questions. Firstly, there was a lack of such project planning and management among the concerned nomads, so we decided to directly involve the indigenous people in all the project management tasks and decisions. One of the obstacles was the important differences in favourite/recognised modes of communication that allow for the establishment of definitive agreement and decisions among each concerned social/administrative sphere. Among the local authorities, the written texts and official discussions within the framework of the time available are the most valued modes of communication. In contrast, among the nomads, the most valued and usual mode of communication is individual oral discussion with each family at anytime, in any place. For example, most agreements between the nomads and the village boarding school were not made during the official meetings in the school director's office, but at any time, in the middle of the street or at partners' private houses. In addition, most of the nomadic logistic agreements were made between the school team and the nomads, sometimes several months before, in the middle of the forest on the road or in a tent. I must stress the fact that such verbal agreements made in impromptu sites (to the western mind) are strictly respected by the nomads and have the same value for the nomads as a signed document for the school administration. So, here, anthropological knowledge of the rules and behaviours of both social spheres helped in adapting the mode of communication to each specific social realm involved in the project for obtaining agreement and help in communication between nomads and local authorities.

We also had to avoid some situations likely to raise competition and conflicts in various social spheres. Within the realm of the village boarding school classes, the number of children is very small and boarding school teachers are often afraid of not having enough children. In the beginning they were afraid that the creation of the nomadic school would encourage children to leave the village school and make their number of pupils smaller, thereby endangering their positions. So, we had to find an administrative solution to avoid the loss of salary for boarding school teachers. Thus, the nomadic school children remain administratively attached to their village school class, where they must pass school tests anyway and spend some weeks while their parents go shopping or do administrative tasks in the village. Some of the allochthonous boarding school teachers felt seriously offended by the fact that some nomadic parents (who had never completed a degree) were teaching pupils, receiving salaries and having good results, while they themselves had completed degrees and had many years of teaching experience. So, for several years, boarding school teachers were against the nomadic school and tried to discredit it. But seeing that nomadic school pupils got good evaluations, some of them changed their mind. Of course, without the strong support of the director of the boarding school, the opposition of those teachers could have seriously endangered the nomadic school's existence. By the way, the same problem has prevented the creation of a nomadic school in the neighbouring village.

Within the realm of the nomadic society, there is a traditional spirit of competition that may create serious tensions and jealousies between nomadic families. With the collaboration of some indigenous villagers, we found three ways to avoid conflicts. The first is that the nomadic school would provide strictly equal services and rules to all families. The second was to use this spirit of competition in order to improve the performance of the project and the third was to install older indigenous persons (traditionally respected and listened to by all kin groups) as coordinators of the project. In essence, we used the traditional social rules in the project's structure.

While offering a high quality of education in the context of the nomadic taiga, we had, of course, to answer numerous educational questions. One of the biggest problems for all nomadic school projects was the lack of teachers ready to live the nomadic lifestyle.

According to the study of nomadic school projects in Siberia we did in order to create our project (see *above*), the lack of teachers ready to work in nomadic schools is one of the biggest obstacles to the project's success. The UNESCO initiative in late 2006 towards developing nomadic schools in Yakutia, later supported by the Yakut Government, resulted in the creation of a specific section for educating nomadic teachers two years ago at the Yakut State University Pedagogical Institute. This has raised hopes for the development of nomadic schools in general.

No Slavic teacher wants to live this life (considered uncomfortable), they told us. Only Evenk teachers can accept it, because they are used to this lifestyle, but there are very few of them in this region. Let me explain that in this region the number of Evenk having completed graduate studies is low, while in some Evenk villages almost the whole of the village institutional workforce (hospital, administration, museum, school and so on) is Evenk. Here the villagers and the nomadic population, with their very good knowledge of everyone's life and skills, really helped identify potential teachers. Here also, the nomadic mode of communication for agreement was the only one to use. Thus, identifying a potential candidate for the position of nomadic teacher, we usually went to him at home, along with some involved nomadic parents, with relatives and friends of this potential teacher, and started with long collective discussions to convince him/her to take up the position. We argued that they would receive good salary, they would act for the future of their own people, they would lead a healthy life and eat good food from hunting and herding. Besides the salary, one of the successful arguments was that this work would allow them to re-establish their traditional knowledge and relationship with nomadic life, which they often lose in their childhood or in later urban student life. It is quite important because they grew up in the taiga with their own nomadic parents. This loss of knowledge of the nomadic lifestyle can really influence the decision of the potential nomadic teacher. Indeed, we had the case where an Evenk village teacher had to be convinced by the nomadic fathers that they wouldn't make fun of him because he didn't even know "how to approach a reindeer" (according to his own expression), that they would teach him everything.

After two years of work in the nomadic school this teacher knew reindeer herding and hunting tasks well and really liked his work and lifestyle in the taiga. Another way of coping with this lack of teachers was to train the nomadic parents by practice and by funding higher education. Indeed they actively help (at their educational skill level) the teachers in education and some of them asked for additional higher education. During the period of absence of the teachers, and during the whole pedagogical process, the nomadic school also used digital teaching programmes in all subjects (Russian, Math, Sciences and so on) that we found in shops in big towns.

Regarding modern computing training, we had a real challenge, because in small villages in this part of Siberia, computing skills are not developed (the situation is currently improving), even in the village boarding school, and we had to face a real lack of computing knowledge among teachers. But nomads adore technology and we trained the teachers, the parents and the children with concrete tasks.

In order to have electricity, we used small, easily transportable electric mini-stations and one set of solar panels and batteries. In addition, there was the psychological danger of introducing computers to the taiga, as suggested by local pedagogues: i. e. as in the West, children could become addicted to the computer and lose interest in the traditional knowledge and teaching programme. In order to avoid this, we decided to use the computer not as an aim in itself, but as a 'tool' for educational training purposes, for realising various concrete tasks and projects (language and cultural documentation products, life journals, etc).

Regarding the Federal programme, as an ethnic school, we thought teaching all subjects in Evenk language would be very helpful for language preservation (as it was done for instance in Yakutia or in the successful Breton school *Diwan* in France). But there is no standard Russian Federal programme in Evenk language. This is an important issue for all minority languages. On the other hand, in other Siberian examples of ethnic schools, in particular Yakut ones, teaching the federal programme in indigenous languages has shown that such children have adaptation difficulties at university afterwards, as a Yakut State University lecturer explained. Nevertheless, if the teaching of the Federal programme is in Russian, the nomadic teachers keep using Evenk for common words and phrases, such as "listen!, sit down!, be attentive!, don't worry, you will do it" and so on. Teachers say that using Evenk language is very important to create a comfortable familial atmosphere for the children, within which they feel self-confident. Indeed, some of the children started school before the creation of the nomadic school and have been traumatised by the boarding school. One of them even said: "I am not able to do math exercises since I am Evenk, math is for clever Russians, not for Evenk!" Furthermore, some minor changes in the programme were needed, such as translating a math exercise put in terms of jam pots sold in a shop (a bit difficult for a child rarely in the village shop to understand) to the same exercise (with the same numbers and operations) into terms of reindeers that enter or exit the camp enclosure (easier to figure out). In order to help the children understand the village

lifestyle, Evenk teachers invented a game in the middle of the camp – the shop game: a shop was represented by items collected from the tents; children played alternatively the seller and the buyer and thus were receiving training in both mathematics and village lifestyle.

As a result of previous decades where children were forced to spend most of their life separated from their parents and culture in the boarding school, as a result also of globalisation whereby children are attracted to new cultural offerings (radio, TV, modern music, electronic games), there was a strain in intergenerational interactions in some domains.²¹ In order to reinforce those links and cultural transmission within Evenk speaking communities, nomadic school children take dynamic part in traditional activities throughout the year. In addition, the nomadic school involves older nomadic people in the educational process, for instance by telling stories, leading discussion groups, organising training in traditional techniques and taking part in social education.

In spite of the proven efficiency of this nomadic school, in spite of the huge amount of work already done and obstacles removed, and in spite of the willingness of nomads from other villages of this huge region to benefit from the same nomadic school, after six years of existence, this school is now endangered. During the last few years, the local administration has increased its support to the nomadic school. In 2005, the Department of Education of the region attributed a 'diploma of Pedagogical Platform of the Amur region' and offered financial support in the amount of 10 % of the total annual budget. In 2009, after an academic inspection in the taiga, this Department officially declared this school successful and essential for nomadic people. Unfortunately, the financial support still isn't coming from the centre – the Amur region (as it should be), but from its small and poor district where the school is established. Despite this situation, the local Department of Education is now meeting 40 % of the nomadic school's annual costs, which is quite good (two teacher positions, one parent-educator position, school books, transportation from the edge of the nomadic area to the village, oil for the mini-station and so on). The rest, 60 % of the cost, is met by the French – Evenk Association Sekalan (i. e. the rest of the Rolex funding). The annual operating cost for foreign funding corresponds to a sum of twelve to fifteen thousand euros, depending on the number of pupils and the number of camps covered. In addition, the school currently needs around seven thousand euros to renew the technical material. Nowadays, the rest of the Rolex funding ensures the existence of the nomadic school only to the end of the 2011–2012 school year, and a recent small donation from the Association d'Aide Humanitaire is funding part of the 2012–2013 school year. The French-Evenk association Sekalan is still actively looking for funding in the West.²²

Conclusion

In conclusion, I argue that risk-free projects do not exist. As this case study has shown, even a simple nomadic school project raises many questions in various spheres (political, ethical, social). It appears that there are three kinds of major difficulties. The first is to convince the local authorities to fully fund an indigenous minority project. The second is to instil into indigenous populations the self-trust in their project management skills so that they can fully lead a project for their community at all levels (discussions with authorities, nomadic logistic organisation, etc.) and the third is to create real communication and understanding between nomads and local government. It is also important to stress the fact that the creation of such a project requires a lot of time and energy, a long presence there for the foreigner, and many trips to villages, nomadic camps and local towns to meet with the concerned authorities. It took me around two to three years of almost continuous work. From my own experience in this nomadic school, I argue that any applied anthropology project needs to be the initiative of the society itself. It is very important also that the project be adapted to the model of the concerned society and not the opposite. Last but not least, foreigners or allochthonous persons involved in a project and the decision makers have to know and understand very well the functioning of the society and of the concerned governmental institutions. For that, anthropological expertise and historical knowledge of the country are essential tools for helping in the creation and development of indigenous projects.

In addition, in order to act efficiently for language revitalisation, such projects should be better supported by the Russian government, which could integrate such indigenous language multimedia manuals within the set of officially and largely used school manuals. Also, several things seem to be indispensable for revitalisation, like intensive training of local teachers in the use of computing tools and creating multimedia pedagogical manuals, as well as funding for scientific collaborative work with local pedagogical institutions (local government and funding institutions).

Notes

- 1 Fabian 1983.
- 2 Aiello 2010: 201.
- 3 For the detailed history of engaged anthropology in the USA, see Low and Merry 2010: 204–207.
- 4 http://icr.arcticportal.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=245&Itemid=86&lang=en
- 5 Cf. link UNESCO <http://www.unesco.org/culture/languages-atlas/en/atlasmap.html>.
- 6 Decree of the Russian Government Nr 255 *On the Unified Register of Indigenous Small-Numbered Peoples of the Russian Federation*, 24 March 2000 (Postonavlennie Pravitel'stva RF ot 24 marta

- 2000 g. N 255 *O Edinom perechne korennykh malochislennykh narodov Rossiiskoi Federatsii* [Russian]) <http://base.garant.ru/181870.htm>.
- 7 Suliandziga R. V., Kudriashova D. A., Suliandziga P. V. 2003. Malochislennye narody Severa, Sibiri i Dal'nego Vostoka Rossiiskoi Federatsii. *Obzor sovremennogo polozeniia*, p. 142.
 - 8 The Russian Association of the Indigenous Peoples of the North (RAIPON) <http://www.raipon.info/en/>
 - 9 Lavrillier 2005: 436.
 - 10 From 2010 census for Russian data and from 1995 census for Chinese data (quoted in Bilik 1996: 64).
 - 11 For more detailed analysis of the language situation of this Evenk group, see Lavrillier 2005.
 - 12 Bulatova N. and Grenoble L. 1999: 3.
 - 13 Nedjalkov 1997, Vasilevich G. M. 1969: 767–770.
 - 14 Lavrillier 2005: 439–445.
 - 15 Center of support for Indigenous Peoples of the North / Russian Indigenous Training Centre.
 - 16 Buda records, collection 'Siberia' (http://www.budamusique.com/en/search?orderby=position&orderway=desc&search_query=sib%C3%A9rie&submit_search=Search).
 - 17 French-Evenk Association Sekalan: <http://ecolenomadeevenk.over-blog.com>
 - 18 <http://www.prosibiria.de/>
 - 19 There are very interesting studies about the use of new technologies by nomads in various places of Siberia, see Stammler 2009.
 - 20 As it is shown in the paper by Kasten, DVD learning tools made and distributed by the Foundation for Siberian Cultures were translated and presented with the same approach.
 - 21 About this issue, see Dudeck *this volume*.
 - 22 A film about this nomadic school was made in the winter of 2008 by Michel Debats with the collaboration of the nomads, H. Lecomte and A. Lavrillier (Debats 2008).

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