

The Siberian Estonians in the 21st Century

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There are about four thousand Estonians living in Krasnoyarsk Territory. The first Estonian migrants appeared 150 years ago. On map of the Krasnoyarsk Territory you can see the old names of the primordial Estonian villages: Narva, Petseri, Estonia, Röpina, Verkhniy Suetuk. The very first Estonians were deported by the czarist authorities; then the migration to Siberia was connected with the lack of the land in 1890–1918; the third wave was the deportation in the 1940s–50s; and the last small part were the young people who came to realize all the Young Communist League Buildings Projects.

The Setu Estonians settled at the interfluves of the Khan and Mana rivers. The center of the Setu-land became Haidak of the Partisan district, where in 1915 the school and the church were built. In Siberia the linguistic barrier helped to save the Setu culture, national language, folklore and the identity. It is important that they were occupied with a natural economy, preserved partly until today. The Setu brought with them various agricultural implements, stocks, seeds. Looms taken along from homeland helped to save the national folk-costume tradition. Till the 1950s the Setus had no other clothes. Certainly, the climate and living conditions in Siberia changed some things in the Setu culture. The Setus mastered some new occupations as timber rafting, hunting, search for gold, fishing, etc.

The Estonians who had lived before at the Aban and Dzerdzhinsk districts have kept their Võru dialect of the Estonian language, typical of South Estonia, as it had been brought to Siberia in the 19th century.

The first Estonian settlement in the area was **Verkhniy Suetuk**. And just now it is an oasis of the Estonian culture in Siberia. In 2000 Verkhniy Suetuk marked its 150th anniversary. In the settlement there is the first Lutheran church in East Siberia built as long ago as in 1888. The only Estonian school in Siberia, or actually a school with Estonian in its curriculum since 2002, was opened there and the teacher from the University of Tartu has been working there for four years.

At the end of the 19th century Verkhniy Suetuk or the Lutheran colony, as it was called earlier, became well-known all over Russia. At the beginning of 1893 one peasant from Verkhniy Suetuk, Maxim Meller, had got an invitation to take part in the World Exhibition and to send his corn specimens of the 1892 harvest. It was the exhibition in Chicago, the USA, named after Columbus in honor of the 400th anniversary of the Discovery of America. Among the 11 Russian corn specimens, Meller's was the best. The famous corn-grower's offspring have been living in the settlement until today. Meller's grand-grand-grandson became a manager of the brass band and now he is the chairman of the settlement.

Every year the Estonians gather around their traditional Midsummer fire and there sounds the hundred years old famous brass band. It is the first brass band in the whole of the neighborhood. The idea of the brass band belongs to Jakov Käsk, a passionate lover of music. Together with the school-teacher they addressed Mr. J. G. Zimmerman, a big manufacturer in Leipzig, and asked him to make a gift of orchestra instruments. The frank letter from a Siberian remote place touched Mr. Zimmerman, and soon after a brass band was organized at the settlement. In 1941 the brass band musicians played their last song before being sent to the war where they were killed. In 1947 the children of the killed musicians made up their minds to restore the orchestra. On St. Mary's Day, 7 April 1947, the first performance of the restored orchestra took place. The brass band has influenced the cultural life not only of the

settlement but of the entire neighborhood. During the last 15 years the brass band has been managed by Äрни Lell. Under his guidance the brass band was awarded the title of a folk-orchestra. The brass band has been a participant of the World Music Festivals in 1992, 1995. In 1996 the brass band represented the Russian Estonians at the World Estonian Days in Stockholm (Esto 1996), and in 2004 in Riga (Esto 2004).

The Siberian Estonian culture differs from the Estonian culture of the native territory. Researchers call it the culture of the “Siberian Estonians”. The Estonians have enriched the multinational culture of Siberia. Estonians brought to Siberia new methods of agriculture, vegetable growing, their recipes of national cuisine and its long-term food preservation (sausage, cheese, and ham); they taught local women knitting of warm woolen clothes.

The Siberian Estonians’ culture is under the threat of extinction like other cultures of the small Siberian peoples. Under the conditions of long time isolation from their historical fatherland, an assimilation process is inevitable. If a nation loses its language, its culture – this nation goes blind. It becomes faceless, easy to be manipulated. Return to a perishing language is a very difficult act but it has a great value. In the world any culture or language is our common property we start to value and understand better in the time of globalization.

Museum-Village – this idea has existed for a long time. The draft regulations and registration documents have been just prepared, the project has been discussed with the Estonian ambassador and the Krasnoyarsk vice-governor on foreign relations. But the volume of work is too huge for one enthusiastic person. It is necessary to consolidate common efforts to save the unique national village and its way of life. On the initiative of Mark Moor, the Norwegian museologist, in August 2002 we visited the settlement to realize Antoin De Barry’s project “Mast of Oasis”. **The project “Mast of Oasis”** is of cultural importance for the whole territory. The project consolidates peace, symbolizes the Mast as a place of meeting cultures, nationalities. Antoine De Barry’s Masts of Oasis were established under the UNESCO patronage in Mali (1990), Canada (1992), Spain (1994), Germany (1997), France (1999); they are planned in Brazil, Ireland and for the first time in Russia. There appears to be a possibility to open to the World and communicate with it.

After a Sunday church service we told people about the project. The pastor Jaan Kenzap, the village chairman Äрни Lell, the teacher Anne Salm expressed their great willingness to help. Why the idea to establish a museum has come? The question seems to be needless. The history speaks for itself. Just now Verkhniy Suetuk resembles an open-air museum. The Mast will be erected near the church. After the foundation will have been made, but before the erection of the Mast there will take place a symbolic ceremony concerning all the villagers: they will be asked to bring any object reflecting best their past life, history, profession, tradition or their future. All people and their objects will be photographed and their stories will be written down. In that way a booklet or a paper will be published. It will be an illustration to the future generations of what a typical village and the history written by the village people themselves were. Besides, a manual written by the village masters will be issued in 30 copies. Two copies will be sent to the national libraries of all the three Oases. Thus the cultural exchange among the Oases starts operating.

In September 2002 we presented the project in the Krasnoyarsk International Museum Biennial exhibition “Glass and Window“, telling about the past, present and future of the settlement. In August 2003 we’ll visit the village with Antoine De Barry again and prepare the project together with the people of the village. We believe our project will help a lot to save the unique village and to create an Open Air Museum there.

The Krasnoyarsk Estonian Society

About a thousand of the Estonians living in the Krasnoyarsk territory live in the city of Krasnoyarsk. Besides, there are Estonian communities in Estonia, Novo-Petser, Haidak, Narva, Upper Bulanka and Upper Suetuk villages.

The Estonian Society of the Krasnoyarsk territory „Eesti“ began its work in February 1992 including also those Estonians living in the countryside. The Society gives instruction in Estonian taught by Elsa Wilde, Kuno Pergi, at present by Helvi Kuus. Since 1991 there is a Sunday school.

The cultural activities of the Society are versatile. In 1992 and 1993 the Society organized days of Estonian culture in Haidak and Novo-Petser, in 1996 the days of Finno-Ugric culture.

In 2001 there were days of Estonian culture in Krasnoyarsk, dedicated to the 83rd anniversary of the Republic of Estonia and the 10th anniversary of the Krasnoyarsk Estonian Society. There was a concert of the Krasnoyarsk Academic Symphonic Orchestra, conducted by Erki Pehk; an exhibition of Mare Piho, the researcher of the Estonian National Museum; a concert of the Siberian Estonians with the Setu choir from Haidak and the brass band from Upper Suetuk village, etc.

The 1997 Krasnoyarsk International Biennial of Museums highlighted the exhibition “Eestistyle” composed by Vera Nikolaeva. In December 1997 the society opened its exhibition of the Estonian postcards of the early 20th century and of the handicraft of the Krasnoyarsk Estonians. At the same show Olga Boenko, the artist from the Krasnoyarsk Art Academy, exposed her 20 water-colors with views on the Old Town of Tallinn.

On April 8, 1999 we opened the exhibition of Estonian graphic arts at the Russian Art Academy including the works by Arvo Kerend, Viive Tolli, Ilmar Torn, Peter Ulas, Aleksander Hoidre, Vello Vinn, Viive Kuks, Helgi Olvet, etc.

In April 2002 the Estonian Drama Theatre visited Krasnoyarsk and Upper Suetuk. In September 2002 the Society organized within the Krasnoyarsk Museum Biennial “The Window in the Museum” a show of Anna Nikolaeva reflecting the past, the present and the future of the Upper Suetuk village.

In February 2004 there was the exhibition “The Estonian Tapestry” by Vika Wilde from Zelenogorsk. The development project for the Setu Museum, a joint venture of the Haidak village school and the Estonian Society, won the competition of the Krasnoyarsk Territory.

In February 2006 there were the days of the Estonian culture; we marked the anniversary of the Republic of Estonia, and the 15th anniversary of the society. The exhibition “The Siberian Setu Art” was organized. Krasnoyarsk Academic Symphonic Orchestra with the Estonian piano-player Taniel Joamets, the Setu female choir “Kullerkupp”, the Setu children ensemble “Lill”, the mixed choir from Novo-Petser, and others performed at the Siberian Estonian Festival.