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CONTROL ID: 1779500

TITLE: Cultural Resilience of Nenets Social-Ecological Systems in Arctic Russia: A Focus on Reindeer Nomads of the Tundra

ABSTRACT BODY: Empirical data on resilience in social-ecological systems (SEs) are reviewed from local and regional scale case studies among full-time nomads in the neighbouring Nenets and Yamal-Nenets Autonomous Okrugs, Russia. The focus is on critical cultural factors contributing to SES resilience. In particular, this work presents an integrated view of people situated in specific tundra landscapes that face significantly different prospects for adaptation depending on existing or planned infrastructure associated with oil and gas development. Factors contributing to general resilience are compared to those that are adapted to certain spatial and temporal contexts. Environmental factors include ample space and an abundance of resources, such as fish and game (e.g. geese), to augment the diet of not only the migratory herders, but also residents from coastal settlements. In contrast to other regions, such as the Nenets Okrug, Yamal Nenets households consist of intact nuclear families with high retention among youth in the nomadic tundra population. Accepting attitudes toward exogenous drivers such as climate change and industrial development appear to play a significant role in how people react to both extreme weather events and piecemeal confiscation or degradation of territory. Consciousness of their role as responsible stewards of the territories they occupy has likely been a factor in maintaining viable wildlife populations over centuries. Institutions administering reindeer herding have remained flexible, especially on Yamal, and so accommodate decision-making that is sensitive to herders' needs and timetables. This affects factors such as herd demography, mobility and energetics. Resilience is further facilitated within the existing governance regimes by herders' own agency, most recently in the post-Soviet shift to smaller, privately managed herds that can better utilize available pastures in a highly dynamic environment experiencing rapid socio-economic, climate and land use change.

CURRENT SECTION/FOCUS GROUP: Global Environmental Change (GC)

CURRENT SESSION: GC049. Environmental, Socio-Economic and Climatic Changes in Northern Eurasia and their Feedbacks to the Global Earth System

INDEX TERMS: 1632 GLOBAL CHANGE Land cover change, 6309 POLICY SCIENCES Decision making under uncertainty, 0718 CRYOSPHERE Tundra, 1630 GLOBAL CHANGE Impacts of global change.

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TITLE OF TEAM:

(No Image Selected)

(No Table Selected)

PRESENTATION TYPE: Assigned by Committee (Oral or Poster)
