

# Urbanization and Cultural Resilience of Indigenous Urbanites: Naryan-Mar, Russia

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*A composition designed by the Nenets Indigenous students,  
Pyrerki Boarding School in Naryan-Mar.*

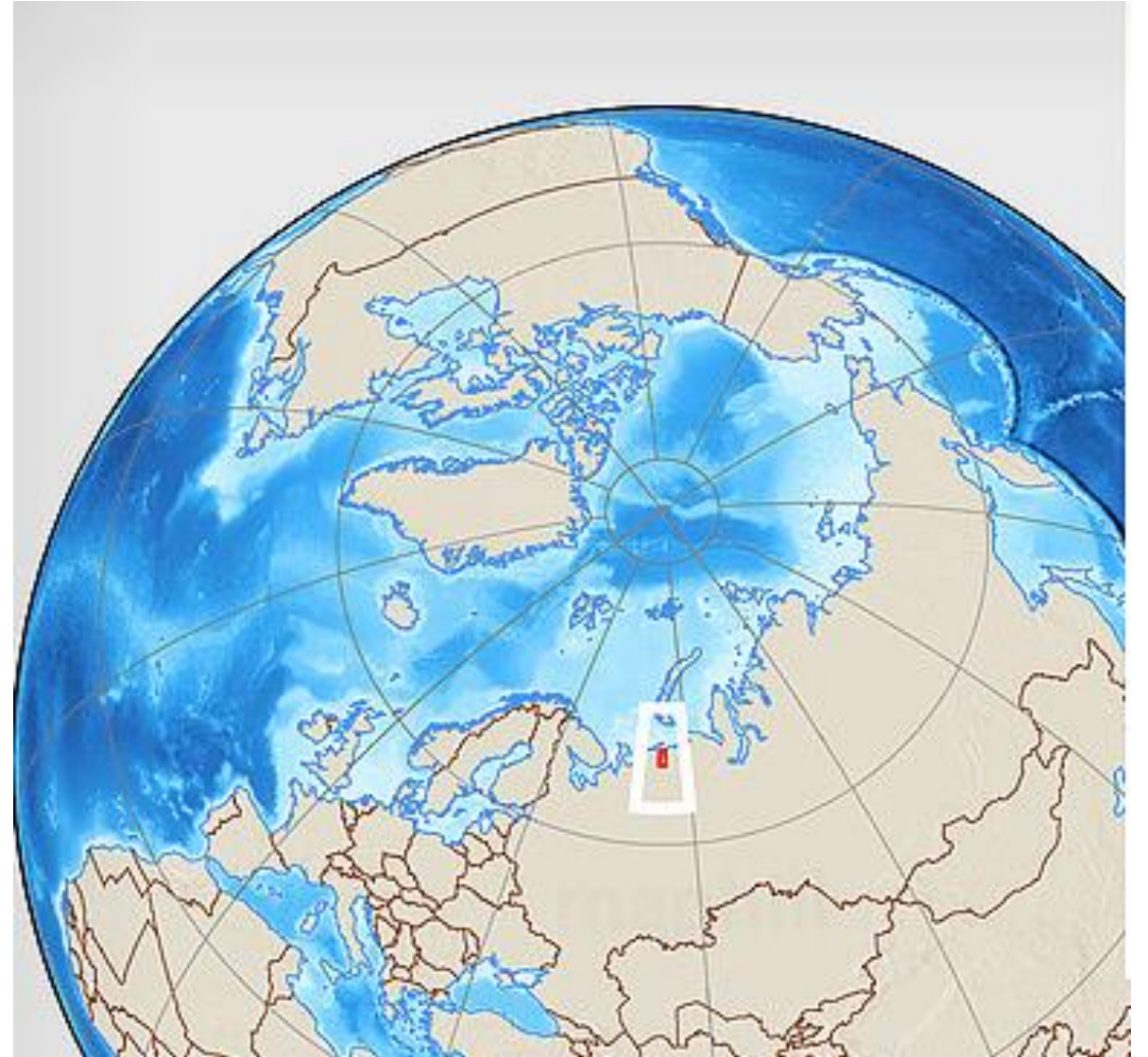
*Supported by NSF, award PLR 2127364.*

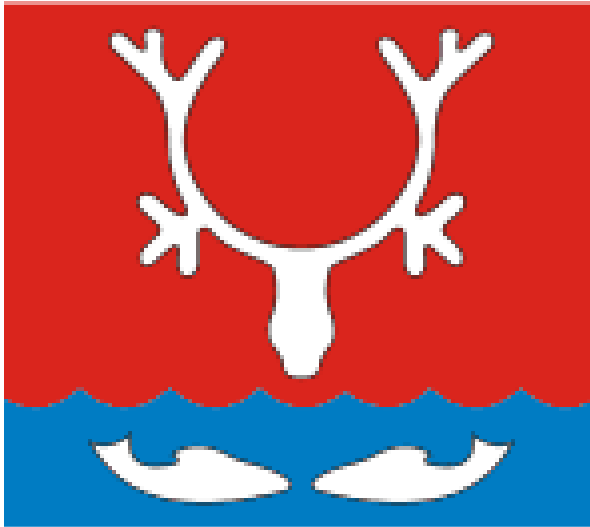
# Naryan-Mar

“Red Town” in the Nenets language

(founded in 1931)

- An administrative center of Nenets District, Russia
- The city lies above the Arctic Circle
- Population of Naryan-Mar:  
25,536 (Rosstat, 2021)
- Indigenous urban population:  
Nenets (6.7%) and Komi (7.3%)
- Nenets traditional practices:  
Reindeer herding, hunting, fishing, gathering.
- The most common pull factors of rural-to-urban migration:  
employment and educational opportunities.





## NAO Government's Vision: Recognition of Indigenous Peoples

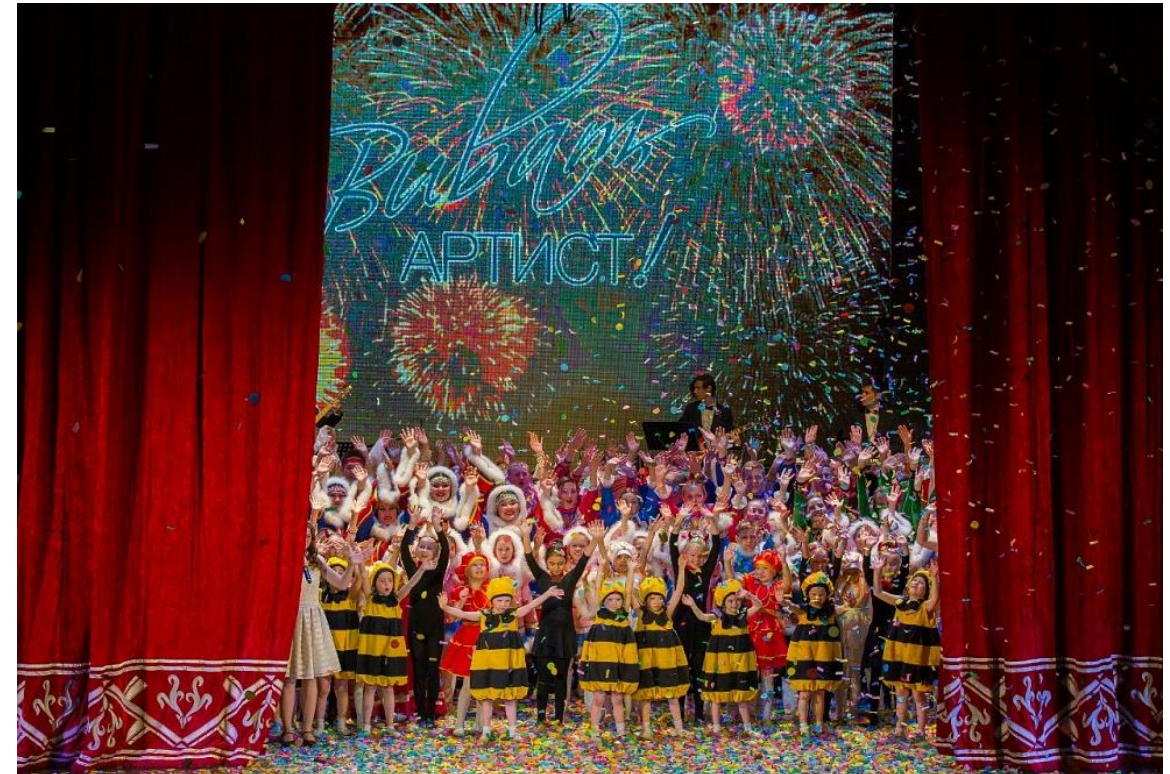
# NAO Government's Vision: Recognition of Indigenous Peoples





NAO Government's support of Indigenous Cultural Activities:  
Nenets Ensemble "Khayar" (Naryan-Mar)

# NAO Government's support of Indigenous Cultural Activities: Nenets Folklore, Crafts, Festivals (Naryan-Mar)





**Celebration of the  
*Year of Reindeer Herding*  
in Naryan-Mar, Russia**

# NAO Government's Vision: Recognition of Indigenous Peoples



**Monument to “The Feat of the Participants of the Reindeer Transport Battalions during the Great Patriotic War of 1941–1945,”** 2012, sculptor S. Syukhin. Source: Iurii Kanev, “Oleni na voine, olennaia armii VOV: Pamiatnik olenno-transportnym batal'onam” [Deer in War, Deer Army of the World War II: Monument to the Deer Transport Battalions], *National Explorer*, February 18, 2018, [http://www.nexplorer.ru/news\\_\\_12277.htm](http://www.nexplorer.ru/news__12277.htm).



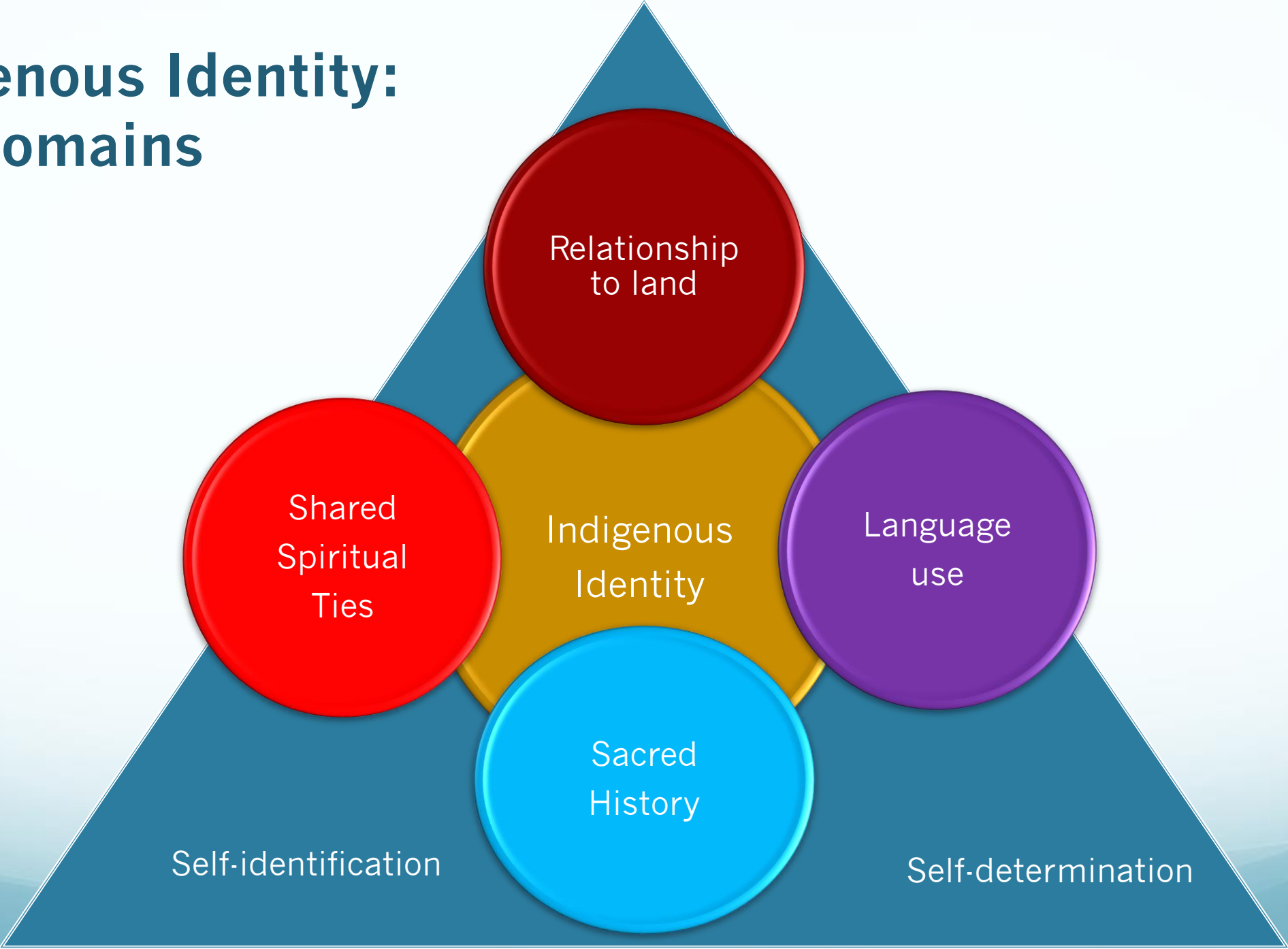
# Unaddressed historical trauma



***"Hebidy Ten" (Sacred Memory) Monument, 1999.***

Source: Irina Khanzerova, "Spoi zhizn' roda svoego" [Sing your kin life], Niar'iana Vynder. January 21, 2017, <http://nvinder.ru/article/vypusk-no-5-20494-ot-21-yanvary-a-2017-g/14714-spoi-zhizn-roda-svoego>.

# Indigenous Identity: Key Domains



# Results: Connection to Land

*"We try to have more fish in our diet, and it is preferable that we catch ourselves. Every year we try to go fishing, especially for smelt, and we also collect goose and partridge eggs and pick cloudberry" (Naryan-Mar, F, 33).*

*"I grew up in the village, and I have relatives who are reindeer herders, so I went fishing and hunting all my childhood. My parents taught me. You can say that I was perfectly proficient in this. Now it is difficult because you must get a hunting permit and a rifle. These days, there is only fishing with friends. But it is happening more and more rarely" (Naryan-Mar, M, 28).*

*"Relatives bring us meat from the tundra. It is important [to keep this tradition – A.]. In our childhood, we did not get sick as we consumed our traditional food." (Naryan-Mar, F, 27).*



# Results: Language Use

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*“No, I do not speak Nenets, just a few phrases. My mother and grandmother speak freely. In my childhood, in my family, the parents communicated with us [children – A.] in Russian and among themselves in Nenets (Naryan-Mar, M, 28).”*



## Results: Spiritual Ties

*"The Nenets have become modern <...>. I know some customs, but they are not followed. Sacred places remain [in rural areas – A.], but few rituals are held even in the Kanin tundra" (Naryan-Mar, M, 28).*

*"I participate in traditional celebrations only outside Naryan-Mar. For example, we fly off to celebrate the Day of the Reindeer in the chum. It is the collective farm Ya Erv that organizes [the trip –A]. I also participate in the winter races on a snowmobile in Nelmin Nos - our shops sponsor this event. It is not interesting to participate in Naryan-Mar; they [festivals –A.] are always the same and more tourist-oriented (Naryan-Mar, M, 21).*



Syamyankhat Mereta, Naryan-Mar

# Results of the Interviews: Identified Types of Indigenous Urban Identities

Positive	Negative	Ambivalent	Hybrid
Proficiency in Nenets language	Lack of proficiency in Nenets language	Bilingualism	Regional (Arctic, Northern)
Strong ties to rural communities		Both Nenets and Russian identity	
Strong ethnic identity		Elements of Nenets Indigenous and non-Indigenous cultures and traditions	
Self-(re)construction			

# Conclusions



A composition designed by Indigenous students of the Pyrerki Boarding School in Naryan-Mar.

Marya's photo. Naryan-Mar.

- It is important to pay attention not only to rural but also urban Indigenous communities
- Urban Indigenous identities are complex, hybrid, yet resilient and thriving
- They are shaped by the relationship to the land, shared spiritual ties, language use, and shared history
- For cultural recognition, NAO Government uses a narrow definition of “culture” and top-down rather than bottom-up approach
- There should be a discussion about historical trauma, truth-and-reconciliation hearings, and meaningful discussion on land management
- Indigenous urban experiences may be less problematic if there are stronger ties to rural communities, culture and tradition as well as availability traditional food, Nenets language courses, and Indigenous social infrastructure in the city.

# Acknowledgements

I would like to express a deep gratitude to all interview participants in Naryan-Mar, who shared their perspectives on living in a city, visions of their cultures, hopes, and concerns.

This research was supported by the U.S. National Science Foundation (award award PLR 2127364).





Mahsi,  
Quyananni,  
Merci, Thank you!

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