

Exploring the Finno-Ugric Sensitivity

Art Leete (University of Tartu)

When I started my trips to the Khanty people while being an ethnography student, their mode of world perception captured my attention overwhelmingly. Over time, the northern Finno-Ugric sensitivity started to appear much more mundane to me. I got used to the ways people in the Western Siberia and Komi territory treated their environment and other than human beings, but also the Russian Orthodox Church and other Christian groups, surviving or appearing in these regions. I still admitted that the sense of the world around us was different there, but this did not amuse me anymore as extraordinary or shocking. But today, all this becomes somehow mysterious, again. My annual trips were interrupted first by travel prohibitions during the COVID-19 pandemic and then by the outbreak of full-scale war of Russia against Ukraine. Anyhow, our Laboratory of Arctic Studies at the University of Tartu continues efforts to approach the Finno-Ugric people of Russia. The question is, what have we learned during these years, which research methods are the most adequate today and what are our perspectives in both, cognitive and ethical frameworks. Similar problems are widely discussed among the scholars dealing with the Finno-Ugric and Arctic peoples of Russia. Still, as the international situation is dynamic, these issues should be addresses continuously. There exists a possibility that current troubles with exploration of the Indigenous groups and ethnic minorities of Russia lead us towards new scholarly methodologies as the war has brought a critical need to think more about our cognitive limits.