
IPS Update



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Arctic Human Development

Arctic societies have a well-deserved reputation for resilience in the face of change. But today they are facing an unprecedented combination of rapid and stressful changes involving environmental processes (e.g. the impacts of climate change), cultural developments (e.g. the erosion of indigenous languages), economic changes (e.g. the emergence of narrowly based mixed economies), industrial developments (e.g. the growing role of multinational corporations engaged in the extraction of natural resources), and political changes (e.g. the evolution of political authority).

Arctic Human Development Report, 2004:10

The Arctic Human Development Report (AHDR) was one of the main projects of the Icelandic Chairmanship of the Arctic Council. The AHDR was launched at a seminar in Reykjavik in November 2004. Even though the report was well received by the Arctic Council, its partners and allies, it did not receive as much focus in the media as another report, the Arctic Climate Impact Assessment (ACIA), which was launched at the same time. Information from the ACIA was summarised in a previous edition of Update.

The AHDR follows the path set out by former Arctic Council reports. It does not contain new research, but it does help create a new awareness of Arctic conditions by bringing together information from many sources, to identify trends in the development of the Arctic region. First it lays out basic information about the population of the Arctic, as far as it is known: how many people live there, how many are old, how many are young, how many are being born, and how soon they are likely to die.

A striking feature of the information in the AHDR is the difference between indigenous and non-indigenous populations in the Arctic. Although Arctic indigenous peoples already know of these differences, it is useful to have them all gathered together in a report that can be pointed to when talking to governments, and inter-governmental organizations.

It is useful to note, for instance, that indigenous peoples suffer more early deaths than other portions of the population, especially from accidents, suicides and murder.

It is also useful to note, as the authors do in their introduction that:

“The Arctic is not the place of unmitigated gloom and doom, ridden with pollution, social problems, and depression that popular accounts often portray.”

That is why the report does not focus on issues such as how much money people make, their education, and how long they live. As the authors write:

“Many Arctic residents – especially those who are indigenous to the region or long-term residents – associate a good life with the maintenance of traditional hunting, gathering, and herding practices... For many, well-being is to be found in a way of life that minimizes the need for the sorts of material goods and services included in calculations of GDP per capita [gross domestic product per person, a standard way of measuring wealth].”

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IN THIS ISSUE

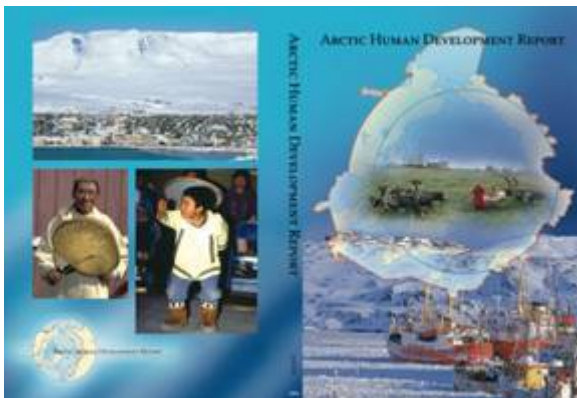
- 2 What is This Report and Why Should I Read It?
- 4 The Wealthy Arctic
- 5 Rights and Wrongs – Self-government, Land and resources
- 6 The Worldview of Gwich'in Subsistence
- 7 Cultural Change: Losses and Gains
- 8 Fountains of Youth, Rivers of Death – Indigenous Peoples by the Numbers

The Report's chapter on change and persistence also notes that despite massive change in the Arctic, "...indigenous cultures and societies have proven to be resistant and resilient." That is shown in cases such as the rise of the Saami language, and the increase in self government powers for indigenous peoples, after decades or even centuries of colonial control. The report also speaks of the increasing amount of international law that protects the rights of indigenous peoples, and of efforts to continue to expand legal protection for land, resources, and cultural rights.

As a basic briefing on the state of indigenous peoples' lives in the Arctic, the report touches on some important aspects. It contains ideas on possible approaches to land and resource rights that could flow from one region to others. It is not, however the last word on research into human development in the Arctic. The Report admits that, identifying gaps in knowledge that the authors believe should be filled. The co-chairs of the Report Steering Committee say:

"For our part, we see the report as an initial step in an ongoing process. It provides a point of departure, a baseline for measuring changes over time and for comparing conditions in the Arctic with those prevailing elsewhere."

It is to be hoped that the Arctic Council, and the Sustainable Development Working Group, see fit to take the next steps; filling in the knowledge gaps, to help policy-makers, both indigenous and non-indigenous, to take *informed* decisions.



The Arctic Human Development Report was delivered by Iceland during its Arctic Council Chairmanship 2002 - 2004

What Is This Report and Why Should I Read It?

The Arctic Human Development Report had a lot of indigenous input, perhaps more than any other report of the Arctic Council. That input included Rune Fjellheim, representing the Saami Council on the four-person Executive Committee that gave shape to the AHDR. He spoke with Update editor Clive Tesar.



Rune Fjellheim, Saami Council, was member of the AHDR Executive Committee.

What does the report mean for Arctic Indigenous Peoples?

The report is the first attempt to give a picture of the state of human development in the Arctic and as such it is important. It is the first comprehensive report to take into consideration indigenous aspect of issues. Not only did it have several indigenous authors, but the other authors also covered indigenous peoples' issues in quite a lot of detail. In my view, this is good not only for indigenous peoples, but also for the broader public.

Now that the Report is out, what actions do you expect as a result?

First of all, I hope it's a starting point. It is a description of different thematic topics done in a way that highlights some important issues to be looked into more. It is the first roadmap to getting a more comprehensive picture of the state of human settlement in the Arctic. It does not cover everything, but it was not intended to do that. Rather, it is a starting point for gaining more knowledge.

What are some of the issues that require more examination?

An example would be the cultures chapter, where it really spells out the richness of the cultures of the Arctic. The culture chapter also attacks many myths of the Arctic. If you go on to the health chapter, you see the comparison of success stories. These show that in areas where indigenous

peoples have more control, there are much better health indicators.

In the political systems chapter you see descriptions of innovative governing structures, structures that are not only new for the Arctic, but also are innovative in the global arena, showing the empowering of indigenous peoples. The economic chapter correctly spells out that the Arctic is a wealthy area. In natural resources, it's a huge exporter. That is the kind of description rarely used about the Arctic and it is something to bear in mind for all parties.

The 'doom and gloom' picture of the Arctic, the view of it as a place beyond civilization is not correct. That's one of the more general characteristics that the report has. Although it shows the huge differences between areas of Arctic, it also shows the Arctic as a vibrant, innovative, culturally and economically wealthy place. In that sense the report is extremely important.

What things should indigenous peoples take out and use from this report?

First of all pick it up, and read it. All of the chapters are interesting from different perspectives. I would not highlight single issues, as that's not fair to the scope of the report, pick it up and read through it, you'll find that you learn something new about your area, use it as an inspiration for future studies.

During the making of the report, at the early stages, it was a problem to get the right people interested in working on it. I think it is an obligation for future indigenous academics to take pride in the area they live in and join in on future studies. We had a hard time finding and committing our own indigenous experts for this report. That may be due to many reasons, but I think the report as it stands should inspire indigenous peoples to be proud of studying their own geographical and cultural domains. The Arctic is of global interest, although to the people there on a day-to-day basis, that may be hard to see.



*A very frosty day in Varangerbotn, Northern Norway.
Photography: Arne Olsen Siri*

IPS UPDATE

The Arctic Council Indigenous Peoples' Secretariat (IPS) was established in 1994. The main task of IPS is to facilitate the involvement of Arctic Indigenous Peoples' organisations - the Permanent Participants - in the Arctic Council, particularly with regard to sustainable development, the environment and traditional knowledge.

The Indigenous Peoples' organisations approved as Permanent Participants in the Arctic Council are:

- Aleut International Association (AIA)
- Arctic Athabaskan Council (AAC)
- Gwich'in Council International (GCI)
- Inuit Circumpolar Conference (ICC)
- Russian Association of the Indigenous Peoples of the North (RAIPON)
- Saami Council (SC)

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The Wealthy Arctic

One chapter of the AHDR focuses on the economics of the Arctic. For people used to hearing about how much money is spent on the north, it was surprising to read about how much money is taken *from* the north, in the form of resources. Gérard Duhaime of Laval University in Canada was the lead author of the chapter on the Economic Systems of the Arctic. He spoke with Update editor Clive Tesar.

Note: in Canada, the words 'aboriginal' and 'indigenous' are taken to mean the same thing.

"A comparison of outflows in the form of profits and rents and inflows in the form of transfer payments shows that the Arctic as a whole is a net exporter of wealth."

Arctic Human Development Report, 2004: 231

I found that your central idea of how much wealth is created in the Arctic and how little stays there very interesting. What did you find in terms of the numbers?

It's hard to say at the global level, because it's hard to have a system you can use where you can match the equations, but if we take examples, it's obvious that there's a huge gap between what is created as wealth, and what it costs to maintain in terms of public services. There are many examples, one we looked at that is fresh in my memory is the production value of electricity generated in Arctic Quebec (in Canada) is something like five billion dollars, and it costs less than one billion dollars for the public services for all the Arctic residents of Quebec, and including the James Bay area. So it means that if you compare this wealth creation, and we're just talking about hydro-electricity, there are other sources of wealth there, mining, the boreal forest, you can see there's a huge difference. The production value of diamonds in the Northwest Territories (in Canada) for instance, just that industry is more important in numbers than all the mineral industries in Alaska. Of course, the benefits are varying from one year to another, but if you compare that to what it costs for a public service, and consider that part of that public service is only there to open up the regions, you can see there's a clear gap between these two sides of the same reality.

You talk about the feeling and language of dependency that people have in the Arctic. People have all of these resources, but they still have this feeling of dependency. Why do you think that is?

I think it's the history. The process the people in the Arctic went through is they lost the capacity to have a say in their future. For decades, they have been working on regaining that but at the same time, working on the political front does not mean you have a clear view of what's going on

on the economic side. And to me it's quite clear that in northern Canada for instance, while we put a lot of effort on the constitutional front, during that time, there was huge development in the Arctic economy, in which the aboriginal people did not necessarily take part. There was a sense that it was development by others, for others, tapping resources that they did not own or have rights to, especially after the 1985 constitution that says aboriginal people have rights there, and they have a say to be exercised on the future of these resources.

Do you see a trend emerging where there is more capturing of that wealth by northern regions?

I think so, it is different from one region to another in the circumpolar arctic, but in north America there is such a trend because the political system there is allowing for it. You have a system that allows people to express their views, you have the capacity for people to use a legal basis, because they have indigenous rights, and that changes a lot of things. If you compare with the Saami for instance in Nordic countries, there is no such legal basis for asking for better economic benefits from resource exploitation. So there is a trend, but it's not equal in the circumpolar world. In Russia for instance, forget it, there's no recognition, large numbers of aboriginal people are not even recognized as aboriginal people.

What needs to happen for this to spread beyond North America?

First, we need to have a clear view of the situation and the (Arctic Human Development) report can do that. And I think it is absolutely necessary that we increase our capacity to follow up this information. And the second main device to change the situation would be to exchange the information, to spread out the information, to make it possible for indigenous people from different countries to compare their situations. Up to now it was more or less a matter of chance. Some individuals met other individuals at meetings like the Arctic Council. But it's quite rare that people from different parts of the circumpolar world can discuss their situations in connection with resource development. This should be something that could be created from the Arctic Human Development report.

So you are suggesting something like a circumpolar development conference for indigenous peoples?

Yes, something like that, to put on the agenda also that we need to monitor the social consequences of resource exploitation. If we can have a kind of forum for that, then aboriginal people can come there and express their views. For some that have very little say, it will be possible to see that they can change their situation.

Rights and Wrongs – Self-government, Land and Resources

“Today, the indigenous peoples of the Arctic constitute only a fraction of the region’s permanent human residents (though they are the majority in some subregions). Under these circumstances, a major issue facing those responsible for making decisions about the Arctic is the clarification of the rights of the region’s indigenous peoples, including not only human and political rights but also the rights to the land and natural resources of those who have never relinquished their aboriginal rights despite the absorption of their homelands into the jurisdictions of modern nation states.”

Arctic Human Development Report 2004:23

Several chapters of the Arctic Human Development Report touch on a subject central to many of the Arctic’s indigenous peoples today; their ability to govern themselves, and their rights to traditional lands and resources. While these ideas can be separated by western governance and legal systems, indigenous peoples tend to look at the land, its resources, and the rules governing the people on that land as parts of the same whole. When the control of land, government and jurisdiction over resources was taken away from them, indigenous peoples began the struggle to regain those things.

The responses of Arctic states to the desire of indigenous peoples to gain more local control have been very different. In Norway, Finland and Sweden, there are Saami Parliaments, elected only by Saami, to look after the interests of Saami. To date, these parliaments only have the power to advise the national governments, not to make their own binding laws. However, the report says that the Norwegian Saami Parliament in particular is getting closer to exercising real governmental powers.

In Canada, there are different paths that indigenous peoples are following to self-government and control of land and resources. In Nunavut, for instance, Inuit have a land claim that gives them total ownership over some of the land (about 18%). The claim also contained an agreement to set up a separate public government for Nunavut, that is, a government for which anyone in Nunavut, not just Inuit, can vote. Since Inuit make up about 85% of Nunavut’s population, they effectively control the government. The claim also set up ‘co-management boards’ to look after resources on public lands. For example, of nine members on the Nunavut Wildlife Management Board, Inuit organizations get to appoint four members, the Nunavut Government appoints one, and the national government appoints three, with an independent chair being nominated by the members.

Greenland’s ‘Home Rule’ government is similar to the Nunavut government. It also is a government for all of the

people in the territory, but because Inuit are again the vast majority in the territory, it is effectively an indigenous government.

ILO Convention #169, Article 7

1. The peoples concerned shall have the right to decide their own priorities for the process of development as it affects their lives, beliefs, institutions and spiritual well-being and the lands they occupy or otherwise use, and to exercise control, to the extent possible, over their own economic, social and cultural development. In addition, they shall participate in the formulation, implementation and evaluation of plans and programmes for national and regional development which may affect them directly.

2. The improvement of the conditions of life and work and levels of health and education of the peoples concerned, with their participation and co-operation, shall be a matter of priority in plans for the overall economic development of areas they inhabit. Special projects for development of the areas in question shall also be so designed as to promote such improvement.

3. Governments shall ensure that, whenever appropriate, studies are carried out, in co-operation with the peoples concerned, to assess the social, spiritual, cultural and environmental impact on them of planned development activities. The results of these studies shall be considered as fundamental criteria for the implementation of these activities.

4. Governments shall take measures, in co-operation with the peoples concerned, to protect and preserve the environment of the territories they inhabit.

In Yukon, and among other first nations territories in Canada, some indigenous peoples have chosen a different path to self-government. While they have also completed land claims, giving them total ownership over a portion of their traditional lands, they have opted for a government based on their own traditions, to be exercised over their own communities. Only members of the First Nations will be able to form such governments.

Alaska has a similar system, where tribal governments operate alongside public governments, after land claims had settled land ownership in the State.

In the 1990’s Russia also began to recognize land rights for indigenous peoples. The “obshchinas” were created, small indigenous fishing or reindeer-herding enterprises that could ask the government for land. Russia has also begun to set aside some lands where indigenous peoples have a say in managing the resources on the land. Finally, the Russian government adopted three laws that set out rights of Russian Indigenous peoples. However, the Report

states that both the laws and the obshchinas have not been as successful as indigenous peoples has hoped, "Mechanisms in Russia for implementing these rights are lacking and powerful political forces resist their implementation."

Despite the difficulties, some indigenous communities in Russia have managed to negotiate a form of self-government. According to the Report, the Yukagir, one of the smallest of Russia's 'minority peoples' managed to establish a form of self-government ('suktul' in Yukagir) in two communities in the Sakha Republic. This was negotiated with the Sakha Republic Government.

While the Arctic states are making all of these different responses, there is activity at the international level that may also improve indigenous peoples' access to land, resources and governance rights. The United Nations is still working on a draft of a Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. The draft includes a right of self-determination and control of lands and resources, including a right to say no to proposed developments on traditional lands. However, the draft has been around for more than ten years already, and the report says, "Progress is painfully slow, and there remain disagreements on foundational articles."

The International Labour Organization has also taken up the issue of indigenous land rights. The Organization has developed an agreement known as 'Convention 169'. This has been ratified by Denmark and Norway, while Sweden and Finland are said to be continuing to 'study ratification. The Report says Russia has started work related to ratification.

ILO Convention #169, Article 14

1. The rights of ownership and possession of the peoples concerned over the lands which they traditionally occupy shall be recognised. In addition, measures shall be taken in appropriate cases to safeguard the right of the peoples concerned to use lands not exclusively occupied by them, but to which they have traditionally had access for their subsistence and traditional activities. Particular attention shall be paid to the situation of nomadic peoples and shifting cultivators in this respect.
2. Governments shall take steps as necessary to identify the lands which the peoples concerned traditionally occupy, and to guarantee effective protection of their rights of ownership and possession.
3. Adequate procedures shall be established within the national legal system to resolve land claims by the peoples concerned.

The Worldview of Gwich'in Subsistence

by Craig L. Fleener, Gwich'in Council International, Arctic Human Development Report, 2004: 58

Subsistence, narrowly defined, means to survive. To the Gwich'in, it means far more. Besides our spiritual relationship with God, the Creator of all that is, subsistence is the essence of the Gwich'in Nation. It is how we are sustained physically. It serves to support us economically and spiritually and is a key to our sustainability as a people. We are fed by plants and animals of the water, air, and land. Wood provides warmth and housing and the raw materials for tools and transportation devices, such as boats, snowshoes, and toboggans [runnerless sleds widely used by Native Americans]. The cash component of our economy is a small but important element of our subsistence lifestyle.

We harvest wood, fur, and wildlife for barter or sale, mostly locally, but occasionally abroad. While some have assumed the role of full-time workers, many rely mostly on natural resources they catch or cut to meet their economic needs. Our spirituality is tied inextricably to the water, land, air, and resources within them. Our relationship to the spiritual realm has always been conducted through the beauty and awe of nature around us. We are sustained as individuals and as a people through our subsistence lifestyle.

Our resource-dependent culture is sustained by unfettered mobility and access to the resources we depend on. Unfettered mobility means that we pursue resources where they are most abundant and where there is easy access. Unfettered access means that we gather resources when we need them and in the most economical and feasible manner possible. As we continue this lifestyle, we build and maintain our close and interdependent ties to the resources around us.

Gwich'in identity is a picture of integration with the land and resources. We see ourselves as an integral part of the diversity of the landscape. We believe that we would not be whole if we were separated from this land. We also believe that this land would not be whole without our presence. Our well-being is linked closely with our ability to live on and adapt with the land. Our family and land-based bonds are strengthened, restored, and invigorated as we continue our subsistence lifestyle. A tremendous sense of belonging and purpose is experienced as we survive on the land.

Subsistence encompasses all areas of Gwich'in life from the cradle to the grave. Gwich'in youth are trained early on the intricacies of our relationship with the natural environment and the harvesting, processing, and distribution of wild resources. These relationships are

strengthened when our youth mature into leaders. The cycle of life continues as they pass what they have learned from their elders and through trial and error to their children and relatives.

Cultural Change: Losses and Gains

“Outsiders and Arctic residents have been bemoaning ‘culture loss’ for decades. This kind of judgment fits with the measurable decline in linguistic and religious knowledge, the fact that certain songs, dances and other art forms were pushed out of use, that languages became extinct, and worldviews replaced. However, ‘culture gain’ and ‘culture creation’ are also part of the cultural realities of the Arctic. Vocabularies, dialects and languages were replaced by others, as were religions and art forms. Also, many aspects of Arctic worldviews have persisted despite processes of change and replacement.”

Arctic Human Development Report 2004: 60

The statistics clearly show that in some aspects of indigenous life, such as the speaking of indigenous languages, the picture around the Arctic has been one of language loss. Most indigenous peoples have seen their languages steadily slip away, replaced by languages from the south, English, Russian, Norwegian, and others.

Some languages have been lost already, others are nearly lost. The Alaskan language of Eyak, for instance only has one recorded speaker, and the Kerek language in north-eastern Russia has only 2 recorded speakers.

This loss of language is not happening everywhere, however. Some languages have remained strong in their original lands, such as Greenlandic, which is a language of Inuit. Although Greenland was controlled for many years by Danish-speakers, the Danes encouraged the use of the local language; missionaries used Greenlandic to speak to the people they were trying to attract, and written forms of Greenlandic were encouraged as early as the mid-1800s.

Other languages are becoming stronger after a period of decline, such as Saami. A school-based revival of the Saami language has been taking place since the 1970s, leading to more use of the language.

What does the strength of an indigenous language mean to a culture? The report suggests that even a small use of indigenous languages is important. It notes that even in cases such as the Inupiat in Alaska, where many people no longer speak the Inupiat language, particular words and phrases from Inupiat have been kept, mingled with English.

Of course, language is not the only cultural change to confront indigenous peoples in the Arctic. The report also speaks of changes in religion. It says that almost all peoples in the Arctic are now Christian, which is a change from most of the original religions and spiritual beliefs of indigenous peoples. However, it notes that some spiritual practices and beliefs from former times remain, mixed in with Christianity. Ties to the land, particularly to some sacred sites, and to the animals of the Arctic, are still strong among many indigenous peoples.

In the same way that indigenous peoples have taken to using the new snowmobiles and rifles to continue traditional hunting activities, they have in some cases adopted new languages and other cultural practices. This does not necessarily mean a loss of culture or identity, but a change in how the culture is expressed. The report concludes:

“Arctic societies and cultures are highly adaptable and resilient and thus well-equipped for integrating change. The fact that they integrate modernity should be viewed positively rather than with nostalgia for traditions lost. The concept of traditions should be seen as a dynamic one: traditions do not and should not hinder development.”

The report also concludes that perhaps the best way to reduce social and cultural problems that come with rapid change is to give more powers to local people. However, it cautions that:

“To reverse negative trends that have their origins decades or centuries ago...requires a lengthy ‘normalization’ period. Thus, one cannot expect things to improve immediately.”



*Sun in February by Varanger Fjord, Northern Norway.
Photography: Arne Olsen Siri*

Fountains of Youth, Rivers of Death – Indigenous Peoples by the Numbers

First it should be said that counting indigenous peoples in the Arctic, and keeping track of their rates of birth, death, or anything else is easier in some countries than in others. This is due to the different methods of collecting statistics, and different definitions of what makes a person 'indigenous'. For instance, Saami are not counted separately from other people by the governments of Norway, Sweden, or Finland. In Russia, groups of people that have populations of more than 50,000 are not counted as 'indigenous peoples', even though they may fit into general international definitions. That makes it very difficult to estimate how many of the Arctic's 4 million people are indigenous. The AHDR estimates about 325,000 of the Arctic's people are indigenous, about one person out of every twelve. In some countries or regions, the proportion of indigenous people is high. In Greenland, and in the Canadian territory of Nunavut, Inuit make up the biggest part of the population. In Russia, indigenous peoples are estimated to make up less than 4% of the population.

Although some of the numbers are uncertain, and some of the definitions of 'indigenous' differ, there are some interesting statistics about Arctic indigenous peoples collected in the AHDR. One of the most striking statistics is the percentage of young indigenous people. In Arctic Canada, 37% of the indigenous population is aged 0-14 years. That compares to 19% among the non indigenous population.

This large share of children in indigenous communities is backed up by a high fertility rate. Fertility rates are an expression of how many children an average woman will have in her life. For Alaskan indigenous peoples, the fertility rate is 3.5, that means each indigenous woman in Alaska has an average of more than three children. The rates of fertility in indigenous peoples in the Arctic seem to be higher than for non-indigenous people.

While indigenous peoples are having more babies than their non-indigenous neighbours, they are also dying earlier on average, and dying from causes that could be prevented. The life expectancy (how long an average person could be expected to live) is lower in Arctic indigenous people than in the non-indigenous population. For instance, Greenlanders (the majority of whom are indigenous) can expect to live about 65 years on average according to figures from the late 1990s. That is about 11 years less than people living in Denmark.

A lot of deaths in indigenous populations are still from what are called 'non-natural causes'. This phrase covers such things as accidents, murders, and suicides. In Alaska, one indigenous person in every four who die, dies from

non-natural causes. That compares to one person in seven deaths for non-indigenous Alaskans. In Russia, the numbers are even higher. In the Tumen region, which includes the Yamalo-Nenets Okrug, out of every three indigenous people who died from 1998-2001, one death was from non-natural causes. That compares to one death in every seven for the general Russian population.