

## **Rural Entrepreneurial Space and Identity: A study of Local Tour Operators and ‘the Nenets’ Indigenous Reindeer Herders**

### **Abstract**

The tourism industry is a capitalist activity concerned with the production, accumulation and distribution of wealth. Power is an important arena for research in this respect as diverse outcomes for the local economy in general, and its players specifically, provide important aspects to study when considering the lives of rural entrepreneurs. However, it may be argued that whilst Marxist theorists using critical approaches on power have tended to focus on issues around the equality of power relations between actors or stakeholders, the inherently spatial nature of power has received less emphasis. This paper focuses on an exploration of the spatiality of power which surrounds entrepreneurship and tourism industry development.

The conceptual framework, based on the application of Lefebvre’s (1991) concepts supplemented by Gaventa’s (2004) power cube, is placed within the broader context of Marx Political Economy and Historical Materialism. The main value of Lefebvre’s (1991) work for the current research is seen in his notion of space as an ‘ensemble’ formed from i) representational space (or our conception of it); ii) spatial practices, which are our interaction with physical and material aspects of space; and, iii) the

spaces of representation, or our lived space. They are intertwined dimensions and therefore intradependent (Theobald 1997). These three types of dialectically inter-related spaces are merged into a single ensemble which forms our experience of social space. Gaventa (2006) extends this further with the introduction of power through space and explores the visible, hidden, and invisible forms of power which are negotiated at different spatial scales and which are experienced as closed, invited, or (re)claimed.

The case study geographic area examined is in transition from Socialism to Capitalism with the tourism industry at early stages of its development. For this, reason entrepreneurial activity and power struggles over the key business asset, the landscape, are currently being played out. Literature theorising rural entrepreneurship (Marlow et al 2014) and especially the notion of skills and training for diversifying rural enterprise (Vik and McElwee 2011; Pyysiäinen *et al* 2006) is an important context here. This is particularly born out in the relationships between the indigenous reindeer herders, ‘the Nenets’, local tour operators, and the local government of Yamal in the the Yamal-Nenets Autonomous Okrug (YNAO) of the Russian Federation which provides the core material. The research has been conducted through an ethnographic field study with indigenous reindeer herder communities as well as interviews with local stakeholders.

This allows for insights into the spatiality of power surrounding rural entrepreneurial space and tourism enterprise to be gained.

## **Introduction**

At present the oil and gas industry plays a vital role in political and economic development of the Russian Federation. The energy sector has accounted for almost 70% of export revenues, 30% of Russia's GDP, and 40% of federal budget revenues (Sharples, 2012). Yamal in the Yamal-Nenets Autonomous Okrug (YNAO), located in the West Siberian north above the Arctic Circle, Russia, is one of the most important areas as it holds almost a quarter of the world's known gas deposits (Stammler & Beach, 2006) and in 2008 brought total revenues of around 3.5 trillion roubles which equals to £70m (Syugney, 2009). However, oil and gas extraction in and around traditional territories of indigenous people ('the Nenets') impacts upon their traditional economic activities - reindeer herding in particular. Constant pasture reductions, for the purposes of the oil and gas industry development, have led to problems of overgrazing. At present, 600,000 reindeer (the largest stock of reindeer population in Russia) are being grazed on 106,000 km<sup>2</sup> of the Yamal peninsula and this situation, according to Golovatin et al. (2012), has already led to the degradation of vegetation and desertification of tundra and in turn might lead to the collapse of reindeer herding which would destroy the natural basis of 'the Nenets' traditional life style.

Tourism provides a real alternative for ‘the Nenet’ herders, providing local enterprise and entrepreneurship opportunities, additional sources of income, and employment opportunities. Tourism also offers the potential to diversify the local economy and decrease the dependence on the natural resources. However, in order for such benefits to be realised by the local indigenous people, it requires not only their participation, but also it is dependent upon the spatiality of power surrounding the relationships between the indigenous community, local business (tour operators and travel agencies) and the local government which influences the modes of tourism industry development and the types of indigenous community involvement. For the Nenets geographic space, as is represented by the landscape, is an important asset but it also underpins their cultural heritage (Hirst, 2016; Krupnik, 2000; Stammler & Peskov, 2008). Herding livestock as opposed to farming is spatially intensive and as natural resources become synonymous with energy this will create tensions and power plays between local stakeholders. Whilst tourism offers employment and self-employment opportunities for the Nenets, with it comes a reduced claim for herding land. As such strategies for encouraging rural enterprise and entrepreneurship through tourism as an alternative to herding (as opposed to being an additional income stream or form of diversification), may be seen critically as a power play enacted through, and concerning, space.

This paper focuses on an exploration of the spatiality of power which surrounds tourism enterprise. The case study geographic area is in transition from Socialism to Capitalism with the tourism industry at early stages of its development. For this reason entrepreneurial activity and power struggles over the key business asset, the landscape, are currently being played out. Literature theorising rural entrepreneurship and especially the notion of skills and training for diversifying rural enterprise (Vik and McElwee 2011; Pyysiäinen et al 2006) is an important context here. This is particularly born out in the relationships between the indigenous reindeer herders, ‘the Nenets’, local tour operators, and the local government Yamal in the YNAO of the Russian Federation which provides the core material. The research has been conducted through an ethnographic field study with indigenous reindeer herder communities as well as interviews with local stakeholders.

### **Rural Entrepreneurship and place**

It has been claimed that, “rurality defines a territorially specific entrepreneurial milieu with distinct physical, social and economic characteristics.” (Stathopoulou *et al* 2004: 404). Rural entrepreneurship is described as a vital aspect of rural economic

development, diversification and agribusiness and an important part of revitalisation of rural communities. Rural entrepreneurship is an important part of the process of harnessing innovation, developing communities, and job creation however more studies are needed which focus on developing and/or remote rural environments (Newbery et al 2017). Korsgaard *et al* (2015: 5) define rural entrepreneurship as “all forms of entrepreneurship that take place in areas characterized by large open spaces and small population settlements relative to the national context”. Whilst there are no particular implicit constraints to distinguish rural entrepreneurship from non-rural, the notion of rurality, and its influence on the characteristics of enterprise, does have a tendency to be associated with certain key challenges. These include low population densities, limited diversity of infrastructure and resources, and lack of skilled workforce. However, as Korsgaard *et al* (2015) identify there is an increasing diversity of entrepreneurial activities in rural areas and so the term ‘rural entrepreneurship’ perhaps belies the multiplicity and plurality which is enacted beyond our immediate appreciation. Territorial characteristics do not have to limit the range of rural enterprise, however they will inevitably shape its nature and associated opportunities, and there are likely to be particular constraints which influence rural business models. Despite the potential challenges that rural entrepreneurs may face, academic literature and policy tends to present support for entrepreneurship as uncritically normative and an important driver for sustainable rural socio-economic development and resilience. In many ways this is

perhaps attributed to a view of rurality as simply a spatial dimension, where opportunity is limited by the constraints of location (Korsgaard et al 2015; Welter, 2011; Hindle, 2010). Furthermore, a key element which is often missing from rural entrepreneurship narrative is the notion of 'place', that is the "intimate link between the spatial context and the entrepreneurial activities" (Korsgaard et al 2015: 5). However, in their study of islands and remote rural environment economies, Burnett and Danson (2017) identify local culture as a key development resource. It may be assumed therefore that the study of more sensitive, remote rural environments both invites and requires the researcher to engage more directly with place and identity as intrinsically linked to entrepreneurial activity. Theobald (1997) presents the argument that communities and places have a level of 'intradependence' which is a critical part of place attachment and place-based identity. This is not merely the observation that one is dependent upon another for survival, but that each influences the other's intrinsic qualities and character. Whilst Burnett and Danson (2017: 26) refer specifically to islands and other places defined by the sea, we might consider other remote rural and wilderness places with a dramatic landscape context as offering "'otherness' and difference, especially in respect of tourism and culture". Rural entrepreneurship, especially in remote locations, may therefore be conceived as having an intradependent specificity whereby the role of enterprise and relationship with locality and place are delicately interwoven. It is argued

here that support for rural business and enterprise in such contexts must be sensitive to the intradependence of place and perhaps this has been previously lacking:

[scholars of] rural development have generally devoted only little attention to the finer details of entrepreneurial activities or restricted their view of entrepreneurship to profit-oriented and short-sighted opportunistic behaviour (Van Der Ploeg et al., 2000). Consequently, linking the concepts of space and place to rural entrepreneurship is important for establishing a more fine-grained and contextualized understanding of entrepreneurship in rural settings. (Korsgaard et al 2015: 6)

In this sense rural entrepreneurship is described as standing apart from other forms of entrepreneurship because of its particular spatial characteristics: “For scholars focusing on economic and social aspects of space and place, space typically means the movement and flow of capital, labour, resources and information (Castells, 1999; Hudson, 2010) [whereas] place is experienced through intimate dealings with surrounding objects and people” (Korsgaard et al 2015: 7). Vik and McElwee (2011) explore diversification in a Norwegian agricultural context and outline the wider context of rural entrepreneurship with social motivations being presented as equally important as economic motivations.



Therefore, this paper seeks to explore how rurality, and more specifically remote rural spatiality, is more than just the business context or set of business opportunities and challenges. It seeks to explore how rurality, in the case of tourism, also shapes notions of place and the very identity of communities and presents socio-economic development through enterprise support as a politically loaded arena. By encouraging a change in the herders' reliance on space, interventions aimed at building economic resilience are reducing their claim to power over the land, in turn this removes the strength of identity. The conflict with the oil and gas industries over land is not simply about the means of subsistence, it is about a way of life and whilst much entrepreneurship literature explores the overall economic benefits of rural enterprise support, comparatively little literature explores this critically in a context of globalisation. A more holistic perspective on entrepreneurship in a rural setting may identify the intricate connectivities between socio-economic development and cultural context. Interventions which respond sensitively to these matters are important so as to support growth which is place-based and mindful of embedded rural identity.

With respect to tourism industry development it is important to acknowledge that the possibility of indigenous people to benefit from participation in tourism industry development has been argued to depend on the 'spatiality of power' surrounding them (Simpson, 2008; Li, 2006; 2004; Holden, 2005; Bianchi, 2002). Dependency of

indigenous communities on international (multinational corporations) has been especially noted and place-based space has been essentially positioned as open to domination from non-indigenous actors.

Lefebvre (1991) explores the social production of space offering a valuable conceptualisation of space and place as an 'ensemble' formed from i) representational space (or our conception of it); ii) spatial practices, which are our interaction with physical and material aspects of space; and, iii) the spaces of representation, or our lived space. These three types of dialectically interrelated spaces are merged into a single ensemble which forms our experience of social space (or 'place'). Gaventa (2006) extends this further with the introduction of power through space and explores the visible, hidden, and invisible forms of power which are negotiated at different spatial scales and which are experienced as closed, invited, or (re)claimed. These theoretical perspectives are used complementarily in this work to help conceptualise the research material and is presented in Figure 1.

[fig1]

**Figure 1: A conceptual framework to represent spatialities of power (Authors' own, adapted from Lefebvre, 1991 and Gaventa, 2006)**

## **Research propositions**

In order to navigate or direct the research, the following set of tentative propositions were identified for exploration, based on the literature review and conceptual thinking:

1. The way that social space is produced and theorised is in line with Lefebvre's (1991) theory 'The Production of Space';
2. Formed under historical conditions, the political economy regime influences 'The Production of Space' (Lefebvre, 1991), of which spatiality of power is a key part;
3. Decentralised power facilitates a move towards a more participatory tourism industry development policy;
4. The possibility of indigenous people to engage in entrepreneurial opportunities generated by tourism industry development depends on the 'spatiality of power' surrounding them;
5. There is a dependency relationship between local tour operators and the indigenous community and entrepreneurs;

It was anticipated that these tentative research propositions might help to generate possible relationships that can be made between theories employed and what may emerge through data collection and analysis.

## **Methodology**

The research reported here is based on a two month field study using ethnographic tools in Yamal in the Yamal-Nenets Autonomous Okrug (YNAO), in the West Siberian north above the Arctic Circle, Russian Federation. It forms part of a wider research study focussed upon the perspectives of indigenous reindeer herder communities alongside other groups of local stakeholders: the local government; indigenous travel agencies; and non-indigenous tour operators. The fieldwork involved two months living alongside indigenous reindeer herder communities in camps remote from any settlements. A comprehensive, approved risk assessment and research ethics protocol were in place. Data was gathered using a range of qualitative techniques, including: informal conversations; semi-structured interviews; photographs and observation field notes (Patton, 2002; Daymon and Holloway, 2011). Discussions were conducted in Russian (the native language of the researcher in the field) and translated into English prior to transcription. A grounded theory approach to data analysis applying a 'Conditional / Consequential Matrix' sequential framework for theory building (Strauss and Corbin 1998; Mills et al 2006).

After an initial stage of familiarisation, analysis of the qualitative material followed the stages of 'open coding', 'axial coding' and 'selective coding' (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

The aim was to systematically develop a set of interrelated themes through constant comparison and clustering of concepts which would indicate relationships, thus helping build toward a theoretical framework to represent the spatiality of power surrounding the indigenous reindeer herder communities and other key local stakeholders. During the familiarisation stage of data analysis, the researcher took stock of the rich selection of material gathered and gained a level of sensitivity to the lives of participants, their feelings, perceptions, motivation and experience. Moving beyond this stage, the cohesiveness of the proposed theory emerged from grouping concepts at 'free', 'axial' and 'selective' stages of coding.

In total, the researcher met with thirty-three people, representatives from indigenous and non-indigenous population of the YNAO. Among them were the representatives from “the Nenets” indigenous reindeer herding community (eighteen respondents), indigenous travel agencies (two respondents), non-indigenous tour operators (four respondents), and people of other than “the Nenets” nationality (nine respondents). In total 74,695 words were collected and transcribed:

- 39,904 words from semi-structured interviews and informal conversations with the same representatives from “the Nenets”;

- 5,042 words from personal observations and informal conversations with the representatives of the indigenous and non-indigenous population of the region with whom semi-structured interviews were not undertaken because they were met by accident while waiting for the boat, on the boat, at the hotel, at the shops, on the way to a particular venue, at a specific venue;
- 15,124 words from semi-structured interviews and informal conversations with the representatives of two indigenous travel agencies;
- 14,625 words from semi-structured interviews and informal conversations with the representatives of two non-indigenous tour operators and state-owned tour operator.

The research adopted informal conversations or so called “ethnographic interviews” (Tracy & Geist-Martin, 2013; Spradley, 2016) as the primary means for data collection which is used in a number of entrepreneurship studies (Stayaert 1997; Hill and McGowan 1999; Rigg and O’Dwyer 2012). These were instigated by the researcher, but emerged naturally while sitting at the table and drinking tea for example, whilst walking, or simply waiting. Due to the informal nature of the setting, (particularly when outside in the natural landscape), this form of data collection proved to be enlightening as it enabled the researcher to gather somewhat unguarded and candid findings (Matthews & Ross, 2014).

In addition to the body of interview data, image-based material, mainly photographs, was also gathered. In total, one hundred and two photographs were made by the researcher and around one hundred additional photos were supplied by one of the respondents, a representative from “the Nenets” whose written permission on their usage was obtained. The photographs enabled a rich appreciation of the everyday lifestyle of "the Nenets". Thus, the utilisation of a palette of qualitative methods proved to be important as it enabled the collation of rich or ‘thick’ descriptions (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Denzin, 1989). Trustworthiness of the data was established through the notion of correspondence and coherence (Kirkham 1992; Conway et al 2004), in other words through triangulation of the informal conversations, semi-structured interviews, observation field notes, photographs, local journals and newspapers obtained at the locality (Yar-Sale and Salekhard) and the official documents available online (Lowe et al., 2000).

## **Findings**

It was discovered that the development of various industries in Yamal and spatiality of power that surrounds the relationships between the main stakeholders in these industries are grounded on the local government’s 'representations of space' (as mentally conceived) established through its economic interest in the diversification of

the local economy. Local government's representations of space are, in turn, based on the respondents' 'representational space' (directly lived space), influenced by the economic interests and/or mentally conceived representations of space of the federal government. The representations of space of the federal government are impacted by the macro-historical, politico-economic factor, namely, the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. The process of 'Perestroika' triggered the country's transition from a Socialist, centralised economy, to a Capitalist, decentralised economy. This resulted in the preserved power of the federal government. The mental aim of the state government (or 'representations of space') is to control and transform the space of Yamal in such a way that it would serve the state government's economic interests.

The connections between the local and federal governments' representations of space became evident from the local government "Strategy of Socio-Economic Development of the Yamalo-Nenets Autonomous Okrug to 2020" which reflected "The Federal Programme for the Implementation of Measures to Tackle the Crisis and Modernization of Russian Economy" approved by the Ministry of Economic Development of the Russian Federation in 27 January 2015 (The Ministry Of Economic Development, 2015). An emphasis on the economic potential of space was clearly evident.



Together with comments offered by respondents, the prevalence of 'democratic centralism' observed in this North-west economic region of Russian by Blakkisrud and Hønneland (2000) appears to still hold relevance. This was highlighted in terms of subsidies aimed at reindeer herding,

*“Various subsidies are allocated from the local and federal budget”* (Non-indigenous Tour Operator 1)

legislative powers to represent the interests of reindeer herders,

*“We don't have the law approved at the federal level yet that would protect the interests of the private, not registered as the private entrepreneurs or as the members of the community, reindeer herders. We are waiting for its approval for around 10 years already”* (Indigenous Travel Agency 2)

and tourism industry development,

*“This is the initiative of Vladimir Putin to develop tourism industry in the regions of the Russian Federation”* (Indigenous Travel Agency 1)

*“This is under the influence of Vladimir Putin the local, state-owned tour operator was transformed into the Tourist Informational Centre” (Indigenous Travel Agency 2)*

*“This Tourist Informational Centre will be supported by the government. This is what was said by the president. This came down from there” (State Tour Operator 1).*

In relation to reindeer herding industry development, the respondents highlighted that the situation has changed in the region. The space which had previously been open to the herders was now perceived to be 'closed' and 'inaccessible'. One example of this may be illustrated by reports that the reindeer herders are required by law to join artificially created communities or to register as entrepreneurs to be able to slaughter reindeer at the state-owned reindeer processing complexes to be able to receive government subsidies and social benefits. The traditional reindeer herders are no longer eligible to slaughter reindeer in the tundra and thus, have lost direct access to the free market. If they are not members of the artificially created communities, registered as entrepreneurs, or work for the state-owned reindeer farm, they are not eligible to receive governmental subsidies and social benefits. There were mainly negative views amongst

the reindeer herders as to the extent to which they believed (and trusted) the Association of Indigenous People of the North to help the Nenets to protect their interests:

*“There is nothing to do with them”* (Reindeer Herder 6);

*“They just exist, that’s it”* (Reindeer Herder 9);

*“They just pretend that they work”* (Reindeer Herder 12).

The process of building this picture from participant interviews is illustrated in Figure 2.

[fig2]

**Figure 2: Government interest in the involvement of entrepreneurs in the reindeer herding industry development (Authors’ own)**

The participants outlined how the greatest challenge faced by the reindeer herders in terms of loss of access to land through pasture reduction is seen as a direct impact of the development of the oil and gas industry and noted the perceived power of Gazprom:

*“Gazprom is a Giant Machine”* (Reindeer Herder 17);

*"Gazprom is a Tank that is impossible to stop"* (Reindeer Herder 2)

*"Is it possible to stop oil and gas industry development? No, it's impossible"*  
(Reindeer Herder 15)

*"Who will be able to stop it? Nobody"* (Reindeer Herder 14)

*"If they already came, they will not leave until everything is extracted"* (Reindeer Herder 9)

The Nenets also expressed a sense of powerlessness to influence decision-making processes and the 'hidden power' of Gazprom's representatives appeared to be a means of controlling local development agendas, particularly in the context of construction of a railway across the tundra previously used as reindeer pasture land:

*"If he said that the railway will be built it means it will be built and don't ask me any questions. What can we say?"* (Reindeer Herder 12)

These feelings of powerlessness were exacerbated by suggestions that the reindeer herders felt that they had nobody to whom they could address their objections:

*“What can ordinary people do? To whom can they complain?”* (Reindeer Herder 6)

Once again, the remote power of the Federal Government was raised:

*“If those who are in Moscow decided that the railway should be built across the tundra, it will be built by any means”* (Reindeer Herder 12)

Reduction or loss of pasture land was perceived to force the Nenets reindeer herders out of space that they have traditionally used to make way for other forms of economic development and attempts to take control of other spaces in the region were apparent:

*“More and more land is being developed for the industrial purposes* (Reindeer Herder 2)

*“Construction of the railway across the tundra, of the processing complexes, reduce the pastures”* (Indigenous Travel Agency 2)

*They already leave the territory where they used to herd their reindeer*  
(Reindeer Herder 17)

*They already move closer to places where other reindeer herders herd their*  
*reindeer* (Reindeer Herder 17)

*In the North they already occupied all the territory* (Reindeer Herder 14)

*At this moment the Northern part of Yamal is being explored* (Indigenous Travel  
Agency 1)

This poses a challenge for the development of tourism in the area as the Nenets reindeer herders are perceived to be a key attraction and part of the tourism product for the industry. It became clear throughout the fieldwork that the main initiators of the participation of the Nenets in a tourism industry were the representatives from the indigenous travel agencies acting as intermediaries between the non-indigenous tour operators and the Nenets. According to the Nenets, the main reasons for their participation in any local tourism industry development were in response to the threat of pasture reduction from other proposed forms of economic development. Some of the Nenets also sought financial gains where they only possessed a limited reindeer stock

but tourism was very clearly seen to offer an additional source of income and the Nenets were very clear about the desired primacy of reindeer herding over the tourism industry.

There was consensus across stakeholder groups (the Nenets reindeer herders, non-indigenous tour operators, state tour operators and indigenous travel agents) that tourism industry development helps to improve the Nenets general welfare, but attention was drawn to the limited spaces where the tourism industry could feasibly be developed - the Priuralsky and Shurishkarsky districts of the YNAO, districts which are located closer to Salekhard where the infrastructure is well developed and tourists can physically gain access. The absence of the tourists' flow in Yamal was reinforced by the representatives from the Nenets who stated that:

*“The tourism industry development happens there. Tourists do not reach Yamal”*

(Reindeer Herder 17);

*“Where are tourists?”* (Reindeer Herder 13).

In this context the nature of the peripheral, rural space was acknowledged to govern or restrict enterprise choices. The main concern of the Nenets in terms of their lived

experiences of space was the negative influence of space transformation on their livelihoods, heavily linked to and shaping their traditional lifestyles and culture.

However, because of the increased demands on land from the development of gas and oil, reindeer herders have been forced to consider additional sources of income with potential opportunities in the local tourism industry representing one of few alternatives. The representatives from “the Nenets” and indigenous travel agencies emphasised the value of the traditional means of production. The accumulation of a large herd of reindeer means prosperity, the ability to buy a house in the settlement, or indeed any mode of transport affording the power of movement over the land in this otherwise arduous environment. Restricted herd numbers due to pasture reduction means the inability to slaughter reindeer for commercial purposes and as a result “the Nenets” are reduced to subsistence herding, just about affording to support basic family needs such as food, clothes, and more traditional forms of transport. It was described that if “the Nenets” possess less than 100 reindeer, then changes in the social sphere might take place. It is at this point that an imbalance in the ecosystem is created forcing “the Nenets” to settle down and look for alternative employment since this number of reindeer is not enough for survival. Other opportunities are limited and for those who have already settled, they face social problems such as unemployment due to cheap-labour immigration to Yamal and support is slow to materialise:



*“We don’t have the law approved at the federal level yet that would protect the interests of the private, not registered as the private entrepreneurs or as the members of the community, reindeer herders. We are waiting for its approval for around 10 years already” (Reindeer Herder 2).*

For these reasons entrepreneurship is somewhat reluctantly sought by “the Nenets” leaving the community where employment and social benefits are hard to come by. However, this is a significant challenge in such an isolated region. As described by the respondents, this is not simply a challenge relating to space, but neither is it as simple as loss of sense of community or *genius loci* as Theobald (1997) describes since ‘community’ as a term is not quite applicable to “the Nenets” in the traditional sense due to their isolated lifestyle. Instead this is more about a loss of identity, sense of belonging to the same landscape, the ability to support each other, and intradependence with nature as ‘place’.

In many ways any increase of tourism in the region would appear to provide significant opportunities for “the Nenets”, despite significant spatial challenges, offering entrepreneurship potential, whilst maintaining landscape connectedness. However, local tour operators as well as the local municipality and local government find this

challenging to support in Yamal. The main reasons are the geographical location of Yamal resulting in long trip duration, high transportation, fuel, transportation repair cost, and underdeveloped infrastructure.

*“It is possible to develop tourism industry in Yamal, but in order to get there from Salekhard, it will take around an hour by helicopter or from eight to twenty-two hours by boat (from Aksarka or Salekhard respectively). That means the main target group of tourists should be the VIP tourists. Thus, to say that the tourism industry is currently being developed in Yamal is not be possible because of the remoteness of Yamal, problems of tourists’ safety and price of the trip there”. (Reindeer Herder 13)*

Geographical remoteness of Yamal along with the macro-environmental factors such as the harsh climatic conditions makes the trip to Yamal costly, and endangers the tourists’ safety. As a consequence, the regional tourism industry is currently being developed in the locations closer to the capital city of the YNAO. So, whilst entrepreneurship is seen as a positive socio-economic driver by local government agencies and tour operators, there is a significant shift in culture expected of “the Nenets” in terms of their relationship with the landscape. Whilst indigenous tour operators support tourism potential, the local operators and local municipality and government prefer tourists

being brought to state-owned trading posts equipped with accommodation, shops and other facilities.

*“Yes, the tourism industry development helps to improve “the Nenets” welfare, but we mean the development of the tourism industry in the Priuralsky and Shurishkarsky districts of the YNAO, the districts which are located closer to Salekhard where the infrastructure is well developed, when the tourists can be delivered by car, boat, bus” (Reindeer Herder 17)*

Based on the aforementioned analysis, a Conditional/Consequential flow chart was created (Figure 3). Using Strauss and Corbin's (1998) 'Conditional/Consequential Matrix' for analysis enabled the researcher to establish how the respondents connect these industries to each other and the consequent results that their development brings to the local economy and “the Nenets” welfare.

[fig3]

**Figure 3: Conditional/Consequential flow chart for tourism opportunity in Yamal**  
**(Authors' own)**

For those herders participating in the tourism industry, lack of access to traditional resources, pasture reduction leading to the possession of smaller herds and the absence of jobs in the settlements has been the main driver. However, it is interesting to note that whilst some entrepreneurs may have somewhat reluctantly sought service opportunities related to tourism (particularly offering guiding or infrastructural/transport support) as a means of subsistence, they have acted as vanguards paving the way for those “Nenets” who may still possess large reindeer herds but now see the tourism industry as an additional source of income. For this group, rural tourism enterprise offers the potential for greater stability through diversification without the need to participate on a constant basis or host large numbers of tourists thus distracting them from their primary economic activity. Pyysiäinen et al (2006) explore how Finnish farmers can become entrepreneurs through diversification and support Luthans and Ibrayeva (2006) in finding that self-efficacy (in a Central Asian context) is a mediating factor which impacts the performance of entrepreneurs in a transitional economy. Self-efficacy is an important consideration here when exploring entrepreneurial opportunity, entrepreneurial orientation, and acceptance amongst “the Nenets”. Self-efficacy here is closely related to the 'power over' produced social space (see Figure 1) and the ability of

the herders to maintain influence across each of Lefebvre's spatial spheres. It is here where we start to find a successful equitable balance being achieved by some if not all herders.

The study reveals that there is little or no collaboration between the local government, on one side, and indigenous travel agencies and non-indigenous tour operators, on another. Rather, they are competitors because the administration of the Department of International Relations and the state-owned tour operator possess key resources such as hotels and transport, and are eligible to organise and hold their own trips. Despite this, the local government assists private businesses in tourism industry development through participation in tourism devoted exhibitions to promote the region and allocates grants on a competitive basis to "the Nenets" working or wishing to work in tourism industry.

However, whilst the grants offered to entrepreneurs are sufficient for start-up, they are insufficient for the further development and growth of the business. Trapped in this situation it is understandable that participants see the local government as failing to sufficiently support successful acquisition of grants. They are critical that the government is purposefully in opposition citing hidden bureaucratisation, lack of advertising, and the absence of Internet in some localities as 'strategies' to limit their success in obtaining grants. Instead the participants emphasise the importance of

friendship and kinship networks and resources in grants' acquisition. One outcome of the obstacles faced by the representatives from the indigenous travel agencies, private entrepreneurs from "the Nenets" and non-indigenous tour operators is the collaboration between them to open up this closed space. For example, this might be achieved through greater cooperative working on business plan development in order to obtain a grant.

## **Discussion**

Reflecting on the tentative research propositions made prior to the data collection and analysis stages of the research a number of key observations may be highlighted. The findings support the way that social space is produced and theorised by Lefebvre (1991) in his theory 'The Production of Space'. In these terms, the findings do not support the ideas of Karl Marx and Georg Hegel, as well as their followers amongst entrepreneurship and tourism scholars, prioritizing material constructions of space over the mental (for example, regulationists, comparative and Marxist political economists) or vice versa (for example, advocates of cultural political economy and alternative/post-structural political economy). The relevance of both material and mental constructions of space was found.

Additionally, the findings confirm Marx' (Morrison, 2006), Lefebvre's (1991), Webster *et. al.*'s (2001) and O'Neil's (2007) belief that, formed under historical conditions, a political economy regime influences 'The Production of Space', of which spatiality of power is a key part (Lefebvre, 1991). Differences from the findings of other researchers were noted with respect to the concept of 'decentralisation of power' as employed in the context of tourism industry development, in particular. For example, researchers such as Yüksel & Yüksel (2000), Sharpley & Telfer (2014) and Buckley *et al.* (2016) believe that a shift to regional planning of tourism industry development would require decentralisation of power because otherwise "*tourism growth may not be sustainable and contribute to the national development*" (Tosun & Jenkins, 1996: 530 in Telfer, 2002). From their perspective, decentralised power will facilitate a move towards a more participatory tourism industry development policy and this may assist a locality in making timely decisions regarding tourism development. In contrast, the findings of this research study align with Pandey (2004), for example, who emphasised that it is the responsibility of the federal government to ensure that the duties are carried out properly at the local level, that the funds are used properly, and that decentralisation works in general. With respect to this, Karl Marx' and Frederick Engel's (1969) beliefs in an ability to erase Capitalism and the role of the government in it through economic decentralisation were not supported.

In relation to the focus on tourism industry development, it may be asserted that the findings support Simpson's (2008), Li's (2006; 2004), Holden's (2005) and Bianchi's (2002) beliefs in that the possibility of indigenous people to benefit from participation in tourism industry development depends on the 'spatiality of power' surrounding them. However, the present study challenged the notion of 'dependency' between international (the multinational corporations) and local (local indigenous community) levels, by considering the relationships at the local level, between local tour operators and indigenous community. The dependency of "the Nenets" on the local tour operators and indigenous travel agencies was not found. In fact, "the Nenets" indigenous reindeer herders were found to possess agency (Giddens 1984) and to be consciously aware of the power dynamics surrounding rural entrepreneurial space. In this sense we might observe the kind of duality of structure acknowledged by Giddens who proposed an alternative to the classical 'top-down' view of institutional power relations and dependency. The landscape here is both an asset and the medium through which kinship networks are bound and therefore the role of space/place as a means to facilitate agency is an important one.

## **Conclusions**

One consequence of the difficulties faced by the representatives from indigenous travel agencies and non-indigenous tour operators is concentration on the reindeer



herding and other economic activities. In this part of the Russian Federation tourism industry development is not extensive yet and its contribution to the local economy and “the Nenets” welfare is limited. However, any move toward greater levels of tourism support through rural entrepreneurship development needs to consider and reflect on the intricate and interdependent balance between lives, livelihood and landscape that exists for indigenous people in such remote regions. This study of rural entrepreneurial space and its exploration of the spatiality of power which surrounds tourism enterprise is useful in terms of highlighting the power struggles involved in employing the landscape as a key business asset where competing livelihoods and economic development interests coincide.

It is important to acknowledge some of the limitations of the research. Inevitably, the research was constrained in terms of time and financial cost and, due to the geographical context of the fieldwork, there were issues concerning the process of interview transcription. The remoteness of Yamal, YNAO, and the nomadic lifestyle of “the Nenets” migrating to the places located a distance away from any settlements meant that the digitally recorded interviews had to be transcribed post-fieldwork. Once the interviews were transcribed, they were immediately translated from Russian language into English language. Here it would be worthwhile to acknowledge the difficulty experienced by the researcher with this approach at the stage of the analysis.

The researcher had to keep constantly referring back to the sources in Russian language in order to ensure the accuracy of the translation made and that the meaning was not lost and was found to be quite time consuming. Translation may be seen as an influential part of logical construction and interpretation building (Temple and Young 2004) and so the role of translation in qualitative research is an important one. As a researcher's understanding of meaning and context is refined through the process of analysis, and further nuance of meaning revealed, previously translated material needs to be checked for accuracy and consistency. Therefore, it is highly recommended for future studies to analyze the data and establish the findings in the origin language before final translation is performed.

As far as the process of data analysis is concerned, apart from macro social, political, economic, and historical conditions offered by Corbin and Strauss (2008; 2015), the existence of 'macro geographical' and 'macro environmental' conditions that influence and shape the 'micro conditions' should be taken into account when further research on spatiality of power is undertaken. Moreover, unlike the simplified paradigm offered by Corbin & Strauss (2008; 2015), it is recommended that the presence of a more nuanced sequence between 'conditions, actions-interactions and outcomes' should be taken into consideration in future research studies.

In spite of these acknowledged limitations, it is recommended that a similar research approach is applied in other under-researched regions of the Russian Federation or in other post-communist countries to explore the extent to which the results of the present study might be applied or transferred beyond the specific contexts of this research. Theoretically, there is scope to further explore particular elements of the conceptual framework developed and presented in this paper (see Figure 1). For example, an in-depth focus might be placed on the rarely explored concepts of ‘power proximity and reach’ or ‘smothered’ spaces.

A spatiality approach might be applied in a different social or community context, for example, by focusing on local indigenous communities in more developed areas (i.e. industrial communities) (Jorgensen *et al* 2017). This is an entrepreneurship research area that has rarely been explored through the lens of the relationship between space and power, particularly in relation to tourism industry development. Application of a spatiality approach might be widened to the context of rural entrepreneurship to explore particular constraints which influence rural business models, for example. Here it is noted that a key element which is often missing from rural entrepreneurship narratives is the notion of ‘place’ as a link between spatial context and entrepreneurial activities.

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