

# ETHNO-FUTURISM AS A NEW IDEOLOGY

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**Abstract:** Nowadays it is not easy to invent a new tradition. Modern conditions demand new approaches and reasoning.

In the 1980s, in Estonia, a new ideology, ethno-futurism, appeared. It was an avant-garde movement that offered a bridge between the past and future of contemporary ethnic culture. The notion defines “ethno” as indigenous, authentic, and prehistoric; and “futurism” as cosmopolitan and urban. Very soon this idea extended across boundaries of this country and reached the Udmurts. Just at this time, in Udmurtia (Russia), some young artists, writers, journalists, and scientists wished to create something very new in a changing world. They wanted to maintain and develop ethnicity and ethnic culture within the context of globalisation. Udmurtia became a symbolic centre of ethno-futurism. It was necessary to bring this ideology to all others and make it attractive. In a short time, megaproject organizers focused on creating ethno-futuristic festivals (it organized eleven festivals); the next step turned into a new megaproject (it conducted five symposia) in recent years. This year, a new project on video-art has started.

The new ideology “took up residence” in the conscious mind and the ritual calendar was enriched by new ethno-futuristic events.

**Keywords:** ethno-futurism, ethnicity, festivals, mega-project, Udmurts.

Not all ever-changing fashion is interpreted positively and perceived as process that can contribute to regional or global development. And the current attempts to revive and reconstruct some old traditions are not always successful. But the aspiration for search towards the further development is without boundaries, and some new steps can satisfy one’s curiosity.

Nowadays it is not easy to invent any new tradition in a society that proposes or orders too much, is too diverse, or is too seductive. Modern conditions demand new approaches and new reasoning. It is difficult to know how such things could be ordered or how a concept— rational, well-timed, and appropriate—must be fabricated that could provoke the interests of a group, let alone a majority. In spite of different kinds of hindrances, a new movement could manifest itself and is currently in progress in Udmurtia (Russia).

In the 1980s in Tartu, Estonia, a new ideology, ethno-futurism, appeared. It was an avant-garde movement that offered a bridge between the past and future of contemporary ethnic culture. The notion defines “ethno” as indigenous, authentic, and prehistoric; and “futurism” as cosmopolitan and urban.<sup>1</sup> In order to turn the idea into a durable custom it was necessary to manifest activity, develop and expand the idea. One of these developments is the organizing of events, both cultural and scientific. The ethno-futuristic ideologist-beginners

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1 HEINAPUU et al n.d.; MIHKELEV 2002.

organized a conference, the First Conference of Young Finno-Ugrian Authors on Ethno-Futurism, which took place May 5-9, 1994 in Tartu. "The conference was held in the honour of the fifth anniversary of the Estonian Kostabi Society, which itself was founded in the spirit of ethno-futurism. The aim of the conference was to introduce ethno-futurism to young Finno-Ugric artists and writers by means of speeches, films, exhibitions, songs and meetings. The last day of the conference was entirely dedicated to the discussion of intentions, common and individual, concerning ethno-futurism and the planning of co-operation".<sup>2</sup> In the following years there were organized other conferences and seminars in Estonia: Ethnofutu 2, Ethnofutu 3, "10 years of the EthnoFuturist Era", 1999; Ethnofutu IV, 2001, etc.

Very soon this idea extended across the boundaries of this country and developed among other Finno-Ugric-speaking people in Russia. Shortly it reached the Udmurts and occupied minds of the youth. Right at this time, in Udmurtia, some young artists, writers, journalists, and scientists wished to create something very new in a changing world that was in need of assistance, both ideologically and financially. They gathered together and united with others, so was set up an unofficial creative group Odomaa (the Odo- is Ud(murt), maa is land); the coordinators of the group are Kuchyran Yuri and Kuzi Sergi.

They wanted to focus more efforts and energy on what they wanted: to achieve their goal to maintain and develop ethnicity and ethnic culture within the context of globalisation. Udmurtia became a symbolic centre of ethno-futurism. By that period, different ideas and tendencies existed and were functioning in the republic. In a short time, the Odomaa group invented a megaproject, the "Ethno-futuristic festival", and the organizers focused on creating such festivals. It was necessary to bring this ideology to all others and make it attractive. According to the megaproject's program, it organized eleven festivals.

The main idea of this project would contribute to increasing knowledge about their own culture as the basis of their identity, and would provide an opportunity to support and carry out such activities that would ensure the "future for ethno" (survival of peoples in the future).

Traditional ethnic values must be preserved for the future and for further development. In the modern world, along with various cultures, ethno-futurism creates a channel for ethno-cultural consciousness of belonging to the Finno-Ugric peoples. In addition, it provides insight into ancient and modern layers of cultures of these peoples.

At the very beginning, the organizers wanted to provoke the interests of people intensively and in a short space of time the curiosity and desire of the involved activists and the outsiders-observers to continue and carry on the new tradition did not begin to fade but, on the contrary, developed and increased. Therefore, the first three festivals were held in the same year in the capital city of Udmurtia, Izhevsk. After that, the festivals were conducted annually including various ethno-futuristic tendencies of the movement, such as songs and melodies,

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<sup>2</sup> KAUKSI et al. n.d.,

dances, performances, exhibitions, architectural projects, fashion, fiction, journalism, video art and computer graphics, installations, happenings, etc. Later festivals have been accompanied by scientific conferences, where participants discussed problems of ethno-futurism, music and literature, art, philosophy, etc.

Besides this, the organizers (i.e., the activists of the creative group “Odomaa”) planned that each festival would be devoted to a certain theme, and first of all it should reflect the traditional worldview of the Udmurt people, relating to mythology, history, customs, etc. as a part of Finno-Ugric culture. And at the same time, another Finno-Ugric people should be involved in every festival conducted in Udmurtia, but relevant to the themes and symbolism of the festival. In this way, an interchange of ideas, opinions and cultures of the Finno-Ugrians in general could be carried on. From year to year, more and more people took part in these events, and more and more new activists joined in this movement.

Over time, the organizers began to organize these events also in the countryside, and every year they planned for it to take place in another district of the republic. But the capital city Izhevsk remained as the centre of the “Odomaa” group and the main museums of the republic located there, like the National Museum of the Udmurt Republic under the name Kuzebay Gerd and the Udmurt Republic Museum of Fine Arts, hosted the ethno-futuristic exhibitions and took part in the arrangement of the festival events.

Below will be given the themes of the ethno-futuristic festivals organized in Udmurtia within the framework of the megaproject and its programs:

1. According to the megaproject, the first ethno-futuristic festival “Egit gondyr veme”<sup>3</sup> was organized in Izhevsk between 25<sup>th</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup> June, 1998. This festival, as well as the following annual ones, was attended by several thousand people.
2. The second festival was named Odomaa—the land of Udmurts.<sup>4</sup> It was also held in Izhevsk, between 13<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> July, 1998.
3. Erumaa—the land of love—considers and interprets our homeland as the centre of the world and the universe; we sprang from love and from the land of love. The festival took place in Izhevsk between 16<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> October, 1998.
4. Kalmez—a human-fish; in Finno-Ugric mythology, a fish is related to the three elements: Heaven, Earth and the underworld. A fish is also one of the totems of the Udmurts. The festival was held in Izhevsk on the 20<sup>th</sup> of March, 1999.
5. Mushomu—the land of bees. Bees are associated with ambition, hard work, family life, and multitude. This is a pattern/model of the perfect organization of the social structure of a family. The festival was organized in the National Museum of Udmurtia, in Izhevsk, and in the village Mon’ya, Selta district, between 25<sup>th</sup> May and 18<sup>th</sup> June, 2000.
6. Tangyra—the Udmurt “Tam-Tam”, an ancient musical instrument which called all together and should awaken love for ancestors and to our own history,

3 A house for a young bear; there is a custom to provide mutual help by house building; here it has symbolic meaning that at the very beginning one needs assistance to create something new.

4 “Odo” is an ancient ethnic name, “Maa” – Earth (Odomaa is a new ethno-futuristic word).

- as well as meet with the future. The festival was organized in the village Vuzh Mon'ya, Pichi Purga district, and in Izhevsk, between 26<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup> May, 2001.
7. Idna—the Udmurt mythological hero, who should show a new way of life. This festival was held in Izhevsk, in the town Glazov, in the township Igra, and in the villages Uzey-Tukl'ya of Uva district and Sep' of Igra district between 23<sup>rd</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup> May, 2002.
  8. Pel'n'an'—an Udmurt national dish. The word “pel'n'an'” means “a bread in the shape of an ear” in the Udmurt and Komi languages. In the past, this dish was a sort of generic frozen food of hunters who roamed the forests in search of game in winter. In the traditional culture the ears have a particular semiotic meaning. The meat of bear, pike, and ram was used for preparing the dish pel'n'an', and this idea was based on the beliefs of the Finno-Ugric peoples, who believe that the ears hear everything and they know about everything. The ears are also an erotic part of a human body. The Festival was held in Izhevsk, in the district centre Alnash, in the villages Asan and Vuzh Yum'ya, and in the town Elabuga of the Republic of Tatarstan between 18<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> June, 2003.
  9. Yur-yar—the traditional game of the Udmurts. The game creates particularly favourable circumstances to express the positive or negative emotions of partners in the game; it allows the ritual action to express new models of behaviour. The festival program included new musical performances, so-called “folk performances”, which attracted the audience. In addition, the programme included the boreal (northern) performance-show as a new trend in theatrical art. It was held in the Museum of Fine Arts, in Izhevsk and in the village Bayterek, Alnash district between 9<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> July, 2004.
  10. Artana is “woodpile” in the Udmurt language, it represents some kind of order or harmony; for this event it means the cordial, warm-hearted area of art. It is a cultural product that reveals the cultural pieces and layers of different ethnic groups and displays the ethno-futuristic movement on a professional level with clear theoretical arguments, understandable for average people. It was organized in the village Zozlud-Kaksya, Vavozh district, in the town Sarapul and Sarapul district between 15<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> August, 2005.
  11. Kuara langa means in the Udmurt language an echo of the past times embodied in new forms. It is the call of the future, the manifestation of art of light with positive energy; it is a model of peaceful coexistence of cultures and religions in Russia through realization and recognition of general tendencies in culture. This festival was held in the villages Syr'ezshur, Piseygurt, Vuzh Yumya, Bayterek, Alnash district of Udmurtia, and in the village Enaberde, Mendeley district of Tatarstan between 23<sup>rd</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> March, 2007.

The festival Kuara langa was the last one in the mega-project “Ethno-futuristic festival”, and it laid the foundation for the next step that turned into a new mega-project “Ethno-futuristic symposium: The art of light”, which has conducted five symposia on ethno-futurism in recent years.

Here are the symposium's themes: the first symposium: Ser no Tur (the rapid, frisky, hasty translational movement), 2007; the second symposium: Urman Arte (the art behind the wood), 2008; the fourth symposium: Kynar kabon (catching the force, potency, resources and status), 2011; the fifth symposium: Kemikamhemhe (this word consists of river-names—the Finnish Kemijoki, the Udmurt Vatka Kam, the White Töd'y Kam and the Great Kam, the Tuva Biy-Hem, Bash-Hem, and Ulug-Hem, the Chinese Huang He (Yellow River); it literally means a river, water stream, continual movement).

Ethno-futurism became more and more popular. Nowadays ethno-futurism is widely discussed and interpreted.<sup>5</sup> At the very beginning it was realized as a new style, and then later it was interpreted that ethno-futurism is a new direction in art. Today, one of the main ideologists of ethno-futurism, Kuzi Sergi, describes it as an ideology that is based on love for one's own roots, people, culture, and language, with openness to the world. O. Genisaretskiy evaluates ethno-futurism as a "post-national ethnicity".<sup>6</sup> "An ethnic culture serves as a basis, a source of creativity of the artist. The artist as an active piece of the cultural process interprets the tradition and represents the artistic/imaginative product to a society; the artist proves its value, the society perceives artistic interpretation and shows interest concerning the sources that brings demand for the ethnic cultures".<sup>7</sup>

The ethno-futuristic movement has had an influence on the participants of those festivals. The initiative to organize festivals proceeds not from above but from below, from ordinary people, teachers, students, schoolchildren, and even from farmers. And this is a very large army of audiences, ordinary villagers, and school pupils. It is the provinces of Russia. This is the animating effect of the light of ethno-futurism. "Activity of such creative associations possesses the great practical and scientific values in realization of national and regional components in education, in mobilization of intellectual and creative capacity of the inhabitants of the region, in solution of ethical challenges".<sup>8</sup>

Ethno-futurism as a new ideology has emerged among the Finno-Ugric peoples in the late twentieth century and become an international phenomenon.

Today, in Udmurtia, in neighbouring regions, and in many other parts of Russia, the ethno-futuristic art is "the required program" in most exhibitions and museums as well as in concerts and performances. As an international resonance of the ethno-futuristic movement, a song "Party for Everybody", was performed by the Udmurt Grandmas on the Eurovision Song Contest in Baku, 2012, when they came second in the qualifying contest.

The talent of the ideology's inspirer, Kuchyran Yuri, is appreciated, and he is acknowledged as one of the most charismatic leaders of ethno-futurism in Udmurtia. The Udmurt Republic is considered to be the birthplace of Russian ethno-futurism.

5 SALLAMAA 2001; ROSENBERG et al 2005; SEMYONOV 2007; KÖMMUS 2010; ANFINOGENOV 2012.

6 SHIBANOV; KUCHYRAN 2008.

7 ANDYU 2007.

8 SHUTOVA 2012. 100.

The new ideology took up residence in the conscious mind and the ritual calendar was enriched by new ethno-futuristic events. Nowadays the first ethno-futuristic festival on video-art, Zhon-zhon, has started in Udmurtia, and the ideology is developing.

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