

## **Pan-Uralism**

The following is an introductory essay into the philosophy of Pan-Uralism. It begins with an overview of the Uralic languages and their history, followed by the development of Pan-Uralism as a philosophy, the characteristics of Pan-Uralism, and concluding with the current implications of the philosophy.

### *The Uralic languages*

The group of languages now known as the Uralic family consists of around 40 languages, extending geographically from the Baltic Sea to the River Yenissei and from the Arctic Sea to the Eurasian Steppe. An exception to this is the Hungarian nation, which migrated over a thousand years ago from their homeland at the southern end of the Ural Mountains to their current home in the Carpathian Basin. I dare say that the Latvian audience is most familiar with the Livonians, who have inhabited Vidzeme and northern Kurzeme since the Iron Age.

The Uralic languages are a genetic language family, meaning that they are traced linguistically to a common ancestor (and, by extension, to a common nation). This common ancestral language, called Proto-Uralic, has been currently dated to around 2000 BC, according to newer chronologies presented by historical linguists. This new dating might change the consensus on the location of Proto-Uralic, but the most accepted proposition is still that the language was spoken along the River Volga. From here the Proto-Uralic people spread along the Boreal forest both east and west, reaching the Altai mountains in the east and the Baltic sea in the west and later both north and south, eventually creating the world of the Uralic peoples in North Eurasia as we know it today.

The Uralic languages have diverged for at least 4000 years, leading to languages being unintelligible with each other without bilingualism. Still, the similarity of Uralic languages was discovered already in the 18<sup>th</sup> century by the Hungarian scholar Janos Sajnovics, who during an astronomical expedition in northern Norway recorded also the local Sami language. He concluded from his findings that the Hungarians are related to northern nations of Europe. Somewhat later in the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Finnish and Estonian romanticists embarked on a quest to find the origins of their respective Finnic nations. A notable achievement of these scholars was the compilation of Finnish and Estonian national epics. The material for these epics was collected also from related nations to the immediate east, but the national romantic passion drove scholars further and further east in pursuit of answers on the origins of the Finnic peoples. An essential method of researching this origin was the historical-comparative method of linguistics, which sought to reconstruct the common linguistic ancestor of the Uralic nations. By the end of the century, an understanding was reached that the Finnish, Estonian and Hungarian languages were related to many other nations from North Europe to Siberia.

At first called the Finno-Ugric languages, later scholarship in fields of linguistics, archaeology, physical anthropology and genetics has further determined the outlook of this diverse family of languages, now called the Uralic languages, referring to the homeland of the language family that was spoken by the Ural mountains. It includes not only various linguistic branches, but also different races from the Dinarid Hungarians to the Siberid Samoyeds. Modern genetics has outlined a Siberian influx of genes that can be correlated with archaeology and linguistics, which allows us to trace the Uralic peoples to a single nation in the Bronze Age.

### *The first Pan-Uralic movement*

The accumulation of knowledge on the Uralic nations coincided with rising national awakenings so characteristic of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Drawing on the national epics and folklore as inspiration, new impulses of art, literature and culture were developed enthusiastically and vigorously. Neologisms were coined for modern concepts of the era and inter-cultural co-operation became an active aspect

of the different Uralic movements. An example of such movements was the late-19<sup>th</sup> century Finnish style of Karelianism, which as an artistic style drew inspiration from the Karelian landscape, ornamentation and culture.

National movements for cultural sovereignty among individual Uralic nations translated into calls for political autonomy in the aftermath of the First World War, when it was apparent to everyone that the multi-ethnic empires of Austria-Hungary and Russia were to be no more. Some nations, such as the Finns, Estonians and Hungarians gained full sovereignty, while the more eastern nations in Russia achieved their own ethnic republics during the period of ethnic pluralism in the Soviet Union in the 1920's. Nevertheless, in the case of a fledgling idea of Pan-Uralism, contacts between the western Uralic nations of the Finns, Estonians and Hungarians on the one hand and the more eastern nations in the Soviet Union on the other, that had developed when all these nations were under the Russian Empire, became minimal during the interbellum period.

The outcome of political independence for Uralic nations came as somewhat of a surprise for many nationally minded people, also because the events that led up to such an outcome unravelled very quickly. What followed then was immense optimism on the Finnish and Estonian side, since these nations had not experienced sovereignty for their ethnoses for centuries. A consequence of the Finnish and Estonian Wars of Independence was energetic self-confidence and belief in a Uralic (at the time called Finno-Ugric) future. As the Uralic nations (besides the Hungarians) lacked a history of political independence, the emphasis in a Pan-Uralic culture was of tradition, folklore and language.

A Pan-Uralic movement manifested in a number of ways between the world wars, itself called the 'tribal movement' in Estonian (*hõimuliikumine*), 'tribal work' in Finnish (*heimotyö*) and 'kindred nation movement' in Hungarian (*rokonnépek mozgalma*). Organisations were founded in Hungary (The Turan Society), Estonia (Fenno-Ugria, Academic Tribal Club) and Finland (also Academic Tribal Club) and the movements became part of their countries' official policies, many activists becoming prominent politicians in their governments, such as Count Pal Teleki as the Hungarian prime minister, Konstantin Päts as the head of state in Estonia, or Emil Nestor Setälä as the Finnish minister for education.

As mentioned above, contacts across the Uralic world that had been developed during the Russian imperial times, were greatly hindered. This forced the Finnish-Estonian-Hungarian co-operation to find alternative means of expression. Such a case was found in the Livonian nation that lived in Latvia. Although small in number (around 2,000 people between the World Wars), the Livonians were active in developing their literary culture. Such ventures were supported by the University of Tartu, an important centre of Pan-Uralic activism, as well as Finnish organisations by printing Livonian publications and supporting Livonian children learning their native language. Noteworthy to mention is the Livonian National House in Mazirbe (Livonian: *Irē*) as a prime example of Finnish-Estonian-Hungarian co-operation. The house was designed by the Finnish architect Erkki Huttunen (with the Latvian architect Visvaldis Paegle) and it was funded by money collections in Finland, Estonia and Hungary. The house was opened on 6 August 1939, and this day has become the date for the Livonian national holiday.

The most important events in the Uralic world during the interbellum period were the Finno-Ugric congresses. These were initiated by the Finns, and the first such congress (called the Finno-Ugric school congress) was organised in 1921 in Helsinki. The second, called the Finno-Ugric educational congress, was organised in 1924 in Tallinn. The congresses were called the Finno-Ugric cultural congresses from the third (1928 in Budapest) onwards (4<sup>th</sup> in Helsinki in 1931, 5<sup>th</sup> in Tallinn in 1936). Despite their name(s), the congresses were an all-encompassing event for Uralic intellectuals from the three Uralic countries to discuss matters and share thoughts and knowledge on a wide range of societal topics: history, economy, industry, literature, musicology, medicine and healthcare, etc. The main directions of development were outlined in the congresses and committees were appointed to enact decisions of the congresses. The congresses can be said to have coordinated Finnish-Estonian-Hungarian cooperation. Other organisations dedicated to Uralic cooperation were, for example, the Estonian-Finnish-Hungarian Union (founded by Konstantin Päts in 1925) or the

Estonian-Finnish-Hungarian Union of Teachers.

It can be said that the first expression of Pan-Uralism was more based on individual nationalist movements among the Uralic people. These movements started to converge once Estonia, Finland and Hungary achieved independence. Between the world wars, the first steps towards a common Uralic identity were made. However, this upward trend was cut short by the Second World War, when the Uralic nations were occupied by the Soviet Union to various extent and Pan-Uralic movements were banned as fascist and/or nationalist.

### *The Uralic mentality*

The aftermath of the Second World War changed the circumstances of the Pan-Uralic movement. It could no longer continue as a co-operation between member states, because Estonia came under the direct rule of the Soviet Union, and Hungary and Finland joining a Soviet-led bloc to varying degrees (Hungary becoming a member of the Warsaw Pact and the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (CoMEcon), and Finland signing the Finno-Soviet treaty of 1948, eventually leading to an inward-turning ideology known as 'Finlandisation'). This greatly reduced the direct economic and educational exchange that was developed during the interbellum, hindering the Pan-Uralic movement. Nevertheless, the Soviet rule in Estonia provided the Estonian scholars with an opportunity to reconnect with the eastern Uralic nations, which was understood by the Estonian linguist Paul Ariste, head of the Finno-Ugric department in the University of Tartu.

Ariste's personal interest was the Votic nation and language, but he also founded the Finno-Ugric department in the University of Tartu after WWII. Ariste created many networks of Uralic intellectuals. One such network was to appoint pupils of his to Uralic nations in the Soviet Union to study the languages. In addition, Ariste taught many academics from other Uralic nations in Tartu, many of whom would eventually become the heads of Finno-Ugric departments in the universities of their titular republics. This situation further enhanced the role of Tartu as a Pan-Uralic centre.

Furthermore, a century of scholarly work had built the foundation for the Uralic nations to start converging with each other, drawing on the understanding of a shared origin and history and a language family that is very different from most other European languages. As the foundation for this identity was linguistic, philosophical work that discussed this common Uralic identity was focused not only on the shared grammatical and lexical features of the languages, but also on the distinctive characteristics of the languages and how these characteristics influenced thinking in the languages. This work had begun to take form already during the interbellum period, but it would mature into a worldview known as *Borealism* (coined by *Uku Masing*).

Borealism as a philosophy is founded in linguistic relativism, which as a philosophical thought can be traced to the ideas of Johann Gottfried von Herder, who also laid the foundation for national romanticism. An important argument is that since thinking depends on language, language also influences the way how we image the world, thus creating worldviews dependent on language. In North America, this manifested in the works of Francis Boas and his students.

As the Uralic languages are closer in structure to eastern language families such as the Turkic, Mongolic, Tungusic, Japonic or even Sinitic languages, the Uralic worldview can also be said to be closer to philosophies and cultures of these nations. The other argument is that human culture is dependent on the environment with which it interacts, thus also shaping human thinking and perception of the world. The Uralic languages are mainly within the Boreal climate zone, characterised by the Eurasian taiga, an area where cultures across the continent share similar, shamanic cultures. In short, Borealism emphasises the importance of the eastern origin and northern climate on the Uralic worldview and mentality.

This philosophy as well as the study of Uralic immaterial, that is, spiritual culture was developed by many Uralic intellectuals: Estonian scholars as Oskar Loorits, *Paul Ariste* and *Uku Masing*; Finnish scholars such as *Kustaa Vilkuna* and *Martti Haavio*; Hungarian scholars such as *Gyula Ortutay*; and Komi scholars such as *Kallistrat Zhakov*. The three scholars highlighted above would organise the first International Congress for Finno-Ugric Studies (ICFUS) in Budapest in

1960, which convenes every five years. Thanks to the tradition of the ICFUS, the concept of Finno-Ugristics as a field expanded to include all aspects of immaterial and material culture, in essence continuing the mental work begun during the first congresses. Nowadays the theoretical basis of the Uralic mentality is discussed by such authors as the Estonian Jaan Kaplinski, or the Hungarian György Kádár. It should be noted that Uralic studies have been discussed also by students interested in all matters Uralic within the framework of the International Finno-Ugric Student Conference (IFUSCO), organised first in Göttingen, Germany in 1982.

### *The current Pan-Uralic movement*

Apart from the unbroken tradition of scholarly interest into the Uralic worldview and mentality, the modern expression of Pan-Uralism manifested itself in the 1980's and has continued ever since. The essence of Pan-Uralism has changed rather significantly from its preceding manifestation in ideology and worldview to a more symbolic expression. It can be argued that the philosophy has found a grounding in the mental image of the Uralic nations and the concept of Pan-Uralism is of a more unifying nature than in its first period during the interbellum period.

First of all, it is necessary to note that there was a period of rapid development among the Uralic nations starting from the perestroika in the Soviet Union and continuing in Russia during the 1990's. This affected all citizens of the Soviet bloc, but the general opening up of public discourse allowed the Uralic nations to reassert their independent worldview in the open once again.

Pan-Uralism expressed itself artistically and also philosophically in the *Ethnofuturist* movement that was formed in the 1980's in Estonia. Contemporarily, similar movements were formed in Udmurtia and Mari El, and style became to include also styles of literature. The underlying philosophy was to answer the question of preserving a Uralic identity – that relied heavily on an agrarian foundation – in an urban environment under the pressure of assimilation. The three regions experienced a similar influence of Sovietisation, which itself was an ideological continuation of Russian imperialism. As the name of the philosophy might suggest, Ethnofuturism sought to answer this societal challenge by combining tradition, folklore and mythology in a post-modern way of inter-textuality, copying and mixture of styles.

The end of the Soviet Union saw the rebirth of Uralic co-operation in the form of the Youth Association of the Finno-Ugric Peoples (MAFUN), founded in 1990, and the World Congress of Finno-Ugric Peoples, organised in Syktyvkar, Komi Republic in 1992. The Congress is a representative forum for all Uralic nations with the aim of furthering Uralic co-operation, protecting and developing national sciences, cultures and languages of the Uralic nations and working with current issues the Uralic world is facing. The Congress convenes every four years.

In addition to the 20<sup>th</sup> century Finno-Ugric institutions, 21<sup>st</sup> century Pan-Uralism manifests itself in such symbols as the common *Uralic flag*, developed by the Polish Finno-Ugrist Szymon Pawlas in 2012 and promoted by the Estonian activist Rein Sikk. The colouring is based on the Finnish, Estonian, Hungarian and Udmurt flags in the shape of the Uralic octagonal star on a Nordic cross. (The author of this essay would argue, however, that such a symbol is religiously slightly biased because of the Nordic cross referring to Christianity, a religion that is not native to the Uralic nations, but more of a symbol of the old conqueror, at least in Estonia, where the Nordic cross originated as a symbol, due to the Battle of Dannebrog in 1219, where the Danish conquerors near Tallinn (*Rävälä* at the time) won the Estonian tribes gathered against them. According to Danish legend, the flag fell from the heavens as a sign for the Christian Danish as victory in battle, after which they adopted it as their national flag. Still, this flag design was later adopted by the Swedish, Norwegians, Icelanders, Faroese, Finnish, Ålanders, Karelians, Veps, Lude, Ingrians, and Seto. In the eastern Finnic cases, the design is also to emphasise their nation's Christian religion. In the Seto case, it is reflected in the flag of the Võro, whose design features a white Uralic octagonal star on a green background.)

This leads to another Uralic symbol, the octagonal star as a symbol of native faith and culture. The symbol itself is based on mythology, and can therefore be also interpreted as a

historical symbol, in the case of Christian Uralic nations. Still, there are Uralic nations that have preserved their ancestral faith, despite Christian pressure for centuries. As mentioned above, the Võro feature the octagonal star in their national flag, and indeed the Võro are more involved in the Estonian native faith movement *Maavalla Koda*, which is a founding member of the Uralic communion (*Urali Ühendus*), a loose umbrella organisation for Uralic native faiths founded in 2001. Other nations that feature the octagonal star in their national symbols are the Szekely, Mordvins, Udmurts, Mari, and the Karelians. The Uralic native faith is preserved also among the Udmurts and the Mari. The flag of the Society for Finnish Culture and Identity (*Suomalaisuuden liitto*) uses the design of the octagonal star and the colours of the Finnish national flag.

The Pan-Uralic movement is founded on a linguistic basis, and this has manifested itself in a modern movement for the promotion of a Uralic *lingua franca* called *Budinos*. It is a 'Uralic Esperanto' of sorts, combining the lexicon and grammar of Finnish, Estonian, Hungarian, Mari, Mansi, Erzya, Moksha, and Udmurt. It has been developed by the Udmurt Arzami Otchey in 2009 and it is similar in form to the Proto-Uralic reconstructed by the Russian linguist Sergey Starostin.

The linguistic aspect of Pan-Uralism has also been developed by a recent project of a creation of a common Uralic writing system based on *Anbur*, the Old Permic alphabet. Anbur itself was used by the Komi during the Iron Age and even after the adoption of Christianity as their national religion in the 15<sup>th</sup> century it was used in Christian icons and liturgy until the 17<sup>th</sup> century reformation within the Russian Orthodox Church, leading to it becoming a crypto-alphabet for a few generations, only to be later revived by national romantic Komi intellectuals in the 19<sup>th</sup> century as their national writing system. This writing system is nowadays promoted as an alternative Pan-Uralic writing system by the Finnish Anbur Society (*Suomen Anbur-Seura*).

### *The significance of Pan-Uralism*

The evolution of Pan-Uralism began as an understanding of a shared linguistic origin of peoples across North Eurasia. This understanding that began in scholarly research manifested itself as co-operation of newly independent Uralic nations on all fields of life.

The Pan-Uralic movement can be compared to another similar movement that was born under the same circumstances, namely, Pan-Slavism. However, one key difference is that the Pan-Slavic movement has ran into a number of ideological obstacles for its development. One such obstacle is religious, with the Catholics and Orthodox Slavic nations more often that emphasising their religious differences from those of their kindred nations (for example, Serbs and Croats, or Poles and Russians). In some cases, there is also a history of political sovereignty, the history of which is used as a basis for a nation's modern identity (Poland, Russia). A Pan-Slavic ideology could be seen to diminish the importance of such a historical experience, especially if political sovereignty was lost at some point (as in the Polish case).

Such obstacles do not occur among the Pan-Uralic movement. Apart from the Hungarians, only the Finnish and Estonian nations have gained full political autonomy. This development, as outlined above, was not based on the memory of a past kingdom, but on the living traditional languages and cultures of the nations. This was the basis for Uralic movements all across North Eurasia, and is therefore a rather pluralistic approach to finding a common ground between different related nations, no matter how large or small they are. Indeed, the Pan-Uralic movement has lacked a clear alternative as a one overarching language or culture to which others should assimilate (*Budinos* being too limited in its influence and reach for this goal), and modern Pan-Uralic movements emphasise the necessity to develop all Uralic languages. In this approach, Pan-Uralism is necessary for the Uralic nations as an ideological backbone to develop the nations of the language family both individually and as a whole.

The elements of Pan-Uralism have resulted in an understanding of a family of nations that are united in their history, language, and worldview. This ideology serves as an inspiration for the culture of those nations to influence each other, while respecting the right of each nation to exist. In this way, Pan-Uralism can serve as a model for other groups of nations to find ways of co-operation.