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Original Article

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“THE END OF PERMAFROST?”: THE IMPACT OF PERMAFROST DEGRADATION ON LOCAL LIFE SUPPORT SYSTEMS OF RURAL SETTLEMENTS IN SOUTHWESTERN YAKUTIA (THE CASE OF THE YUNKYUR VILLAGE)

The article discusses the consequences of the intensifying processes of underground ice (thermokarst) thawing for the population of the Yunkyr village (Olekminsky district of Yakutia). The study is based mainly on the materials obtained by the author during the annual field researches in this locality, carried out in 2019–2023. It was found that the development of thermokarst in recent decades on the territory and in the vicinity of the Yunkyr village has a significant negative impact on the life of the local population. The degradation of permafrost results in the deformation of buildings, so the local population is forced to regularly repair some of the damaged structures or rebuild them in a new location. This naturally has a negative impact on the financial situation of the people, influencing, among other things, their life strategies. Significant costs, including reputational ones, also fall on local authorities. The degradation of permafrost, superimposed on the general decline of agriculture in the post-Soviet period, limits the possibilities of engaging in traditional economic activities, although this settlement has one of the richest agricultural traditions in Yakutia. While independently searching for answers to emerging natural challenges, the local population develops original adaptation solutions that transform the material environment familiar to the local community.

Keywords: Yakutia, cryoanthropology, local rural communities, permafrost, thermokarst, climate change

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