

UTILISATION OF RUSSIA'S FORESTS: RESOURCE PERIPHERIES, CONSERVED AREAS OR TARGETS FOR ENVIRONMENTALLY SENSITIVE INVESTMENTS?

Many of today's topical global environmental issues from biodiversity conservation to climatic change are connected to forests and deforestation. A major part of the world's forested areas are located in Russia. In this situation, it is worthwhile exploring the social processes affecting the use of Russia's forests. It is useful to point out two facets for studying such issues from a perspective of environmental politics. First, it is worth emphasising the interaction of key actors who have played a central role in promoting changes in environmental performance and, secondly, it is useful to examine local developments. In this paper, I will provide a brief overview of the situation.

Although the transformations in environmental politics and performance at the federal scale in Russia may point to decreasing effectiveness of environmental political impact (e.g. Peterson & Bielke 2001), there are other developments at the local and regional scales – sometimes affected by transnational influences – that are contrary to the general federal scale developments. However, the positions of social actors affecting environmental policies and politics, socio-economic circumstances, as well as external connections created by social actors vary to a large extent between places and regions. Moreover, there are two external aspirations coming from outside Russia: the aim to use Russia's forests as raw-material, and the wish to protect them, especially those forests categorised as old-growth. Hence, the following research questions can be posed: How do environmental debates affect the forest industrial sector of the economy in Russia? Who are the key actors and what are their roles in environmental politics? What kind of regional and local variation is to be found within the sphere of environmental politics concerning the Russian forest industrial sector?

The research reported in detail in Kortelainen and Kotilainen (2005a) seeks to address these issues. The territorial focus of the study was mostly on Northwest Russia, although, as comparison, case studies

from the Russian Far East were included as well. Regionally, the Republics of Karelia and Komi; Leningrad, Vologda and Pskov Oblasts; and Primorskiy Krai received most attention. Regarding paper mill towns, the main focus was on the cases of Svetogorsk in Leningrad Oblast and Sokol in Vologda Oblast. Forestry was represented by several case studies including two model forest areas in Pskov Oblast and the Republic of Komi, which are sites for the introduction of new forestry methods and forest certification schemes. Three case studies in the Primorsk Krai in the Far East were also investigated and, in addition, a discussion of a forest certification process in Kovernino leskhov in Nizhegorodsk Oblast was included.

The forest industry in Russia has been through foundational changes during the last decade. The role of central and regional governments in controlling and organising this industrial sector has been changing, and significant new actors, including Russian forest corporations, investment funds and transnational companies, have taken active roles in managing the forest industry and forest resources. These new actors' varying business cultures and trading connections affect the ways in which environmental issues, among other things, are taken into account.

Generally speaking, from a global perspective, one of the recent changes within the forest industrial sector has been that certain environmental discourses and practices have become part of every-day enterprise culture (see e.g. Rytteri 2002; Saether 1998; Kotilainen 1996). Pressure from critical customers and consumers have forced companies to put emphasis on their environmental performance. To a lesser extent, this kind of greening of business is to be found in Russia as well, for various actors have sought to construct green markets for products exported from Russia. However, thus far, such situations seem to be exceptions from the rule. Two cases, the Karelian forest campaign in the late 1990s and the forest certification process in Kovernino leskhov at the turn of 21st century (see also Kortelainen & Kotilainen 2005b), serve as examples of the –admittedly so far rather limited –emergence of “green markets” for Russian wood products. Companies exporting to Western Europe have been increasingly struggling with demands for forest certification and transparency of the origin of their raw material, whereas producers selling to less “critical markets” domestically or to China have not been forced to do so.

On the other hand, different socio-economic contexts affect the operational environments of non-governmental organisations. By analysing case studies that deal with forest certification and prevention of illegal logging in the activities of WWF in the European Russia and in the Russian Far East (Kortelainen & Kotilainen 2005a), it has been possible to show that WWF's efforts in European Russia find support from the nearby environmentally sensitive markets of Western Europe, mainly countries such as Germany and the Netherlands, while, on the contrary, different environmental values in Northeast Asian markets hinder sustainable forestry initiatives.

Debates and conflicts over forests have connected rather broad networks of actors to the Russian forest issues. Overall, according to the case studies presented in Kortelainen & Kotilainen (2005a), environmental organisations have been struggling, with partial success, against undesirable logging practices. The Karelian forest conflict was an illustrative and perhaps the most successful example of this. Some organisations possess a co-operative stance towards industry as the studied examples of model forest projects show. The more co-operative organisations try to enhance environmental performances by promoting forest certification, improving images of certain companies and helping them to create contacts with customers. Moreover, some environmentalists have been able to raise themselves to the position of environmental experts and consultants. The success regarding the agreements on forest issues between major environmental organisations and the forest industry companies can be understood through the concept of discourse-coalitions introduced by Hajer (1995) in the spirit of the reflexive modernisation tradition (see Kotilainen 2004), according to which actors form discourse coalitions that are based on multi-interpretable discourses and concepts that can be adopted and modified by different actors for varying purposes.

As a conclusion, it can be stated that a certain "archipelago" environmental politics and policies has been formed while most of Russia has remained outside these environmental political networks. In other words, there are currently different, and competing, forest regimes in Russia (Kotilainen 2004). However, it seems likely that the environmental political networks demanding explicit environmental policies from companies will keep extending in Russia. Recently, the decision by Russia's largest forest industrial enterprise, Ilim Pulp

Enterprise, to adopt the non-governmental Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) certification system is a clear sign of this process. On the basis of the research carried out, it can be stated that international environmental debates are likely to become a more influential part of the forest industrial sector in Russia in the future. As a consequence, also the Karelian forest industrial complex would probably draw long term economic benefits from the inclusion of explicit environmental policies into its practices. This would improve the potential of seeing Karelia's forests as targets for environmentally sensitive investments rather than through the contradiction of resource peripheries and conserved areas.

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