2012

Importing Democracy: Promoting Participatory Decision Making in Russian Forest Communities

Maria Tysiachniouk
Centre for Independent Social Research

Errol E. Meidinger
eemeid@buffalo.edu

Importing Democracy

Promoting Participatory Decision Making in Russian Forest Communities[1]

Maria TYSIACHNIOUK* and Errol MEIDINGER**

**Researcher, centre for independent social research, St Petersburg, Russia,*
***Professor, State University of New York at Buffalo, USA*

In the 1990s, after Perestroika opened up the borders of the former Soviet Union, Western interests acted quickly to link Russia into global markets and institutions. An array of multinational companies promoted the restructuring of Russia's legal and economic infrastructure to facilitate their operations in the country. Large transnational environmental organisations established active subsidiaries in Russia as quickly as commercial interests did. Bringing with them Western money, values and knowledge, these organisations officially sought to become important players in Russia's political and economic spheres.

For modern approaches to forestry to be imported, management practices developed in the West needed to be adapted to Russia's unique post-Soviet context. For example, many of the social aspects of sustainable forestry, such as community participation in forestry decision-making, found little pre-existing social infrastructure in rural Russian forestry communities, making for a significant institutional challenge.

In the 2000s the official period of transition to the market economy came to an end, as did the inflow of funding for building democratic institutions. Yet the expectations of global markets, particularly European ones, continued to include a high level of community participation in forest management. To sustain their growing involvement in

[1] This work was sponsored by the MacArthur Foundation in 2002-2003, and by a grant from the Academy of Finland (No. 208144) in 2004-2005 as part of the project on "Governance of Renewable Natural Resources in Northwest Russia". In 2006-2007 the project was supported by the Moscow Public Scientific Fund and in 2008-2009 by a grant from the Academy of Finland (No. 121428) as part of the project "Transnationalisation of Forest Governance".

international trade, forestry holdings in Northwestern Russia became involved in Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) certification; FSC institutional designs and rules of the game were institutionalised in a continually expanding area. Russia now has the second most FSC certified land in the world, indicating that community participation in local forest decision-making should have increased considerably as well. Based on longitudinal research conducted from 2002 to 2009, we can now assess the outcomes of Western efforts to import democracy to Russian forest settlements. While we find that the adoption of forest certification has indeed led to significant increases in community participation in some forest management areas, that process has required a complex amalgamation of western practices and assumptions with pre-existing Russian ones. This was done to a large extent by engaging pre-existing community authorities in expanded networks of participation.

The lack of pre-existing civil society infrastructure made the transplantation of FSC institutional designs difficult in Russian villages. Many of the social aspects of FSC certification, primarily community participation in forestry decision-making, are supposed to be built from the ground up. This created a major hindrance to environmental organisations, which were trying to import democratic institutions to Russian forest settlements from more environmentally and socially advanced countries and to build democratic institutions from the top down. Civil society in the villages was limited to the existence of a few social and youth activists, hunting societies, veterans' organisations and teachers. These groups did not traditionally cooperate with one another and could not mobilise as a mass in order to express their grievances to governments and businesses. Neither were they accustomed to participating in forest management processes; they had no tradition of acting as real stakeholders in the surrounding forests.

This paper shows how the World Wildlife Fund for Nature (WWF) used market forces to jump-start democratic institutions in Russian rural communities to create a basis for social, environmental and economic modernisation within Russia's forestry sector. To analyse this effort at building grassroots democracy we describe the networks, local communities and cultural understandings – "social imaginaries" – involved in instituting more democratic management practices in Russian forestry.

Actors and networks

Transnational: Forest certification has been promoted by transnational NGOs as a way of institutionalising sustainable forest management around the world. Its transmission to communities in Russia relied on agents acting at the transnational, national-regional and local levels. The dynamic that made this possible was transnational – the rapid

incorporation of Russia into global timber markets following Perestroika. Multinational corporations purchased Russian subsidiaries and established logging operations in Russia. Russian holding companies were formed and became engaged in trade on European markets. Global NGOs responded by promoting forest certification and providing incentives for sustainable forest management that include stakeholder participation as an integral part. NGOs did this in two primary ways. First, they created transnational-national-local coalitions in favour of sustainable forest management and certification. Second, they used international markets to threaten the viability of Russian exports. To a remarkable degree, the transnational NGOs played differentiated roles in the process that reflected their different organisational cultures. Thus, the WWF took the primary role in building intersectoral partnerships. As will become evident in the case studies below, the WWF supported the growth of a variety of national and local NGO networks, as well as the forestry research and development necessary to buttress them.

Greenpeace and the Taiga Rescue Network, on the other hand, focused more on directly challenging environmentally harmful forest practices – particularly the destruction of old growth forests – and raising costs for those carrying them out. It did this largely by threatening Russian access to "green" European markets if Russian timber was not produced in an acceptable manner (Tysiachniouk and Reisman, 2006; Tysiachniouk, 2009). Thus, Greenpeace can be seen as the "bad cop" threatening to punish violators of sustainable forestry standards while the WWF can be seen as the "good cop", giving them a way of bringing their operations into compliance and retaining their markets. The full picture is of course more complicated, with the WWF also playing more aggressive roles at times. But nonetheless, at the general level a division of labour is apparent. The result of this coordination is that a number of Russian companies have been impelled to develop local environmental and social policies consistent with international standards – thus locally institutionalising the global processes of forest certification.

National-Regional: Both the WWF and Greenpeace have established Russian offices and supported other partners in the course of promoting forest certification in Russia. The forest products companies and their trade networks were also important national and regional actors. These economic actors tend to behave more like negotiating, mutually adjusting partners than like unitary economic actors, but variations among them have played an important role in shaping the effects of forest certification. In the process, a new organisational field[2] has been estab-

[2] By "organisational field" we mean an interconnected group of organisations that are aware of and interact with each other, ordinarily with the assumption that they are

lished. Among the most important of these organisations were local ones that formed the FSC institutional infrastructure, including a Russian national FSC initiative, with the tripartite environmental-social-economic chambers characteristic of the international FSC system, as well as several regional working groups. The creation of these initiatives fostered dialogue between businesses and NGOs at different levels, both federal and regional. An FSC national office and FSC consulting community have been formed. All of these organisations were engaged in adapting the FSC's International Principles and Criteria (FSC n.d.) to Russian conditions by defining locally applicable indicators and verifiers (Tysiachniouk, 2006). Finally, in 2008, the Russian national FSC standard was accredited, with a strong emphasis on public participation in forest management. As FSC standards contradicted Russian national legislation, NGOs tried to change Russian legislation to conform to international standards. In order to change the legislation, both business actors and NGOs were engaged in dialogue with governmental agencies about the Forest Codes of 1997 and 2007. Therefore, the FSC significantly fostered stakeholder participation in national forest policy.

Local: timber is harvested at the local level, of course, and much important social activity in forestry is necessarily organised at this level. Important local actors include the Lesnichestva – local governmental units responsible for control over forest management in the district –[3] and the various local Forest Enterprises responsible for organising harvest activities (under the close supervision of leskhozes) and delivering timber. Finally, there are a variety of other local community groups and civic initiatives – ranging from educational institutions to advocacy groups that affect and are affected by forest certification.

Communities

While our research focuses on local "communities", using this term necessarily involves significant difficulties. The main problem is that the word carries heavily romanticised and nostalgic connotations, often invoking a traditional, stable, authentic and impliedly "good" and environmentally appropriate set of relationships maintained by relatively innocent, uncalculating individuals, in face-to-face interaction with each other. We are not prepared to include these connotations in our use of

somewhat interdependent and are part of a common larger process. See, e.g., Dingwerth and Pattberg 2009.

[3] Leskhozes survived from the Soviet era, when they combined oversight and limited operational functions. The Forest Code of 2007 transformed them into Lestnichestvo that are allowed only to oversee forest leases, and are not yet allowed to undertake forest operations.

the term. Rather, we use it in the minimalist sense to refer to "patterned interactions among people in a local geographic setting". We are thus using a form of the "field of interaction" conception of community advocated by Roland Warren in his later work to replace the "concrete collectivity" conception with which he was originally associated (1978: 417-418).

Several related points are important. First, while it may be true that people always interact locally, and that community therefore always exists (Wilkinson, 1991), there can be enormous differences in the content and quality of community life; we are trying to see whether the introduction of forest certification affects these variables. Second, it is helpful to characterise communities in terms of vertical and horizontal integration as advocated by Warren, but it is not necessarily the case that there is a linear trade-off between the two. The work of Warren and many other community sociologists sought to connect a decline in community autonomy to the rise of centralised governments and national and multinational corporations during the "great change". While these developments may indeed have decreased the self-determination of many local communities, over the longer term they have also triggered a variety of counter-reactions, particularly in the past two decades, seeking to revitalise communities. Forest certification is a case in point, as transnational market relationships have been used to try to leverage increases in the voice and power of local actors. Whether this effort might turn out to be fruitless in the long run is impossible to say, but our data indicate that it may be significant in changes in community political interaction and understandings of how communities should be engaged in forest policy-making.

Social imaginaries

The effort to develop a local "civil society" that can affect forest policy where such a thing did not exist previously raises the question of new cultural understandings. Local communities can act systematically only to the extent that their actions are guided by intelligible images of appropriate social processes. In Russia, forest certification is trying to create something new in local communities, and it must do so by creating plausible cultural models. In our view, both community and environmental sociology have been overly conservative and often reductionist in dealing with new cultural understandings. Much environmental sociology, for example, has taken the cultural understandings of environmental movements to be natural responses when they connected environmental problems with rational self-interest. Similarly, community sociology has tended to take understandings of community as a natural outgrowth of community interaction – as a more or less natural

given (e.g. Wilkinson, 1991). Since we wish to understand the use of alternative interaction models to change community dynamics in a non-reductionist way, we are drawing on the emerging concept of "social imaginaries" as articulated by Castoriadis (1987), Gaonkar (2002), Taylor (2004), and others. While there is nothing stunningly original about this awkwardly named concept, the basic idea is that social groups organise themselves with images of how people should relate to each other, and that these images take on a life of their own. Social imaginaries are not generally closed and determinate, but rather are fairly open and amenable to innovation. Thus, groups with different traditions will draw on common ideas and produce similar yet distinct social practices. This is the process we are seeing in the establishment of forest certification. Major concepts, such as old growth forests and public consultation, have been brought into Russian communities. When they have been successfully implemented they appear both to have changed the social imaginaries of those communities and to have been implemented in distinctive ways, reflecting pre-existing understandings.

Methodology

A case study approach was used in this paper. Similar cases in two regions of Russia were selected and compared in order to investigate the role of NGOs and other transnational actors in building democratic institutions in Russian rural settlements. In each of the case study areas, three field expeditions were conducted (from two weeks to two months each) in 2002, 2006 and 2007. During these expeditions, semi-structured interviews and participant observation were used. The researcher attended working groups, stakeholder meetings, public hearings and other events. Field notes were maintained and used for the analysis. The data includes 47 individual interviews for the Pskov Model Forest and 68 for the Preluzie Model Forest. The interviews were held with major groups of stakeholders, representatives of forest management units, governmental agencies of different levels, NGOs, local activists and business representatives.

Case studies

The Pskov Model Forest

Context: the Strugy-Krasnie region has a population of 18,500, about half of whom live in the regional centre, Strugy-Krasnie. This settlement is in the Pskov oblast[4] and lies 68 km northeast of the city of Pskov,

[4] An oblast is an administrative unit of the Russian Federation. Oblasts are further subdivided into districts. "Oblast" is often translated as "province".

which is in far western Russia near the Estonian and Latvian borders, about 250 km south-south-west of St. Petersburg. Before Perestroika, much of the economic activity in the region consisted of work for St. Petersburg, Moscow or Riga enterprises specialising in the Soviet military-industrial complex. Since the late 1980s, however, many of these operations have disbanded or become unstable. The regional economy has declined severely and there is significant unemployment. Logging companies in the region are export-oriented and make use of the good railway transportation to Latvia and Estonia. Accordingly, until 2007-2008, when the Russian government introduced high taxes on round wood, the Strugy-Krasnie district was an important raw material provider for the international timber industry of Europe. The Pskov Model Forest consists of 46,000 hectares on the Strugy-Krasnie Leskhoz, which STF-Strug, a subsidiary of the large Swedish-Finnish company Stora Enso, was leasing.

Company Characteristics: Stora Enso subsidiaries have been conducting export-oriented logging operations in Russia since Soviet times. Stora Enso was created in 1998 as a result of the merger of the Swedish company Stora and the Finnish company Enso. Enso began preparations for a Russian joint venture in Karelia in 1988. In 1990 this enterprise (called Ladenso) was put into operation.

In 1995 Stora-Enso established STF-Strug in the Pskov district and leased land for 49 years, with the goal of meeting international sustainability criteria. In the 2000s Stora Enso had a series of logging subsidiaries located in the Pskov, Leningrad and Novgorod regions, and in the republic of Karelia, and was eager to standardise its operations to help make the subsidiaries more efficient and profitable.

For a corporation in these conditions, the Pskov model forest became an opportunity not only to adjust its business to Russia with simultaneous development and introduction of innovation, but also to try to advance the development of a new normative base in Russia and to make an effort to change Russian conditions on behalf of its business. The participation of Stora Enso in the Pskov Model Forest project was an innovative strategy of business integration into another country. Stora Enso in Russia had to solve the problems encountered in the post-socialist transition period: continual reform of state governing bodies and forest legislation, institutional turbulence, and other realities of the time. From 1995 until the project ended in 2008[5] the company made significant progress in its path towards sustainability due to both FSC certification and Stora-Enso corporate social responsibility efforts. The

[5] It was closed because of high tariffs on round wood and the economic crisis of 2008.

added value of this process was public involvement in decision-making processes.

Model Forest and Certification: Stora Enso planned that STF-Strug would use Scandinavian logging technologies in Russia and meet FSC standards of sustainability. In practice, however, these standards frequently conflicted with the Russian Forest Codes of 1997 and 2007. Failing to log a whole plot, for example, and leaving behind "downed woody debris" to promote nutrient recycling and ecological regeneration, was inconsistent with traditional standards. In 2000 the WWF came to the region and partnered with the company. Together they were able to alter local views of acceptable forest practices. In essence, the WWF and Stora Enso, two monumental Western organisations, descended on a small, ordinary Russian locality and modified the commercial environment to comply with FSC standards. The WWF created a plan of action for the company based on scientific research and coordinated each move with government officials and civil society groups. STF-Strug carried out its logging according to the plan.

The Pskov Model Forest Project lasted from 2000 until 2008 with an annual budget of around one million dollars. Stora Enso contributed 20%; WWF Germany contributed another 20%, and the remaining 60% came from the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA). In summer 2003 the Pskov Model Forest received an FSC certificate following an audit by the US-based certification body Smartwood. Thereafter the Pskov Model Forest became an educational model of sustainable forestry.

Public participation in decision-making: Russia has no history or traditional mechanisms of public involvement in resource management, and the people have no past experience with it. From the beginning, STF-Strug experienced many conflicts in Russian localities. In general, people living near the leased land were suspicious of the foreign company, which they felt was coming to cut and send their forests abroad. In working with the community, it became the WWF's job to soothe public opposition to forestry as such by illustrating the difference between conventional Russian forestry and FSC sustainable forestry. In effect, through an extensive PR campaign, the WWF argued that by switching to the new, imported way of doing things, Russia's economy, environment, and society would benefit. The WWF used television programmes and newspaper publications, and organised seminars and workshops.

In 2000 the WWF launched a campaign to network with all stakeholders in the forest and educate them about sustainable forestry. The WWF held seminars and workshops, distributed written information about the FSC, and organised a few trips to Sweden so that government

officials could study logging sites similar to those that the WWF and Stora Enso wished to set up. The Model Forest's demonstration plots became a key instrument with which to educate forest stakeholders.

The WWF established a small grants programme to pay for any creative project that pertained to the Pskov Model Forest. The WWF used the local intelligentsia as a mechanism for linking with the rest of the population. The small grants programme was focused on scientists, teachers, educators, a museum curator and librarians. These people were often community leaders who helped shape the views and practices of the rest of the community. For this reason, a social expert working with the WWF called such citizens a "golden fund", which would "help to form public opinion".[6] Teachers and educators especially helped spread knowledge and ideas, and ultimately shaped the social imaginaries of other residents and succeeding generations. The WWF brought its Model Forest, its money and its panda logo into the classroom by funding teachers' environmental education initiatives through the project's small grants programme. This included such programmes as recycling, nature calendars, computer education and a Children's Club of Friends of the WWF. The WWF contributed to the adaptation of a Swedish textbook on forestry *Principles of Sustainable Forest Management* to Russian conditions. In 2007, after its approval for use in secondary schools, the book was published and disseminated throughout northwestern Russia. In 2008 Stora Enso printed additional copies and disseminated them in schools situated close to their leases in different regions.

One of the WWF's main strategies with the small grants programme was to take activities that already existed and enhance their quality, while steering them towards environmental awareness and support of the Model Forest. During the project's lifetime, 32 small grants were financed. They were an effective tool to involve the local population in the project and a means of disseminating information about it. Grants funded ecological summer camps and environmental clubs, and even turned a traditional community holiday that involved saying "goodbye" to winter into an "environmental goodbye". One interesting advertising strategy saw the WWF sponsor a local school's soccer team. The team was called Panda, and the uniforms carried the WWF panda logo as well as the label of the Pskov Model Forest. The WWF further impressed the local population by bringing a famous football team, Zeneet, from St. Petersburg to play with the Panda team. Many people expressed excitement about this game, which also had a theme and symbol of nature. In short, the WWF used the project's extensive funds to establish the panda

[6] Interview with the museum curator, 2002.

logo as a lasting visual fixture and the phrase "sustainable forestry" as a lasting linguistic fixture in the social imaginary of the Strugy-Krasnie community.

The WWF also made efforts to reshape public understanding of its role in forestry policy-making. FSC criteria demand that the local community have a voice in forestry decisions. By raising public interest in the Model Forest, the WWF laid the groundwork for official public participation. The Model Forest created a Forest Club that sought to bring all forest stakeholders together in a productive dialogue. The Forest Club met regularly throughout the project. Attendees included representatives of STF-Strug, forest management unit representatives, administrators, forest scientists, WWF staff and all interested local citizens. This arrangement, however, served more as an exchange of information between the project implementers and WWF grantees rather than public participation in decision-making.

Inclusion of the public in decision-making about forest management was a necessary measure, on the one hand, because this was one of the requirements for certification; and on the other hand, because all experts and visitors coming to the model forest from abroad were interested in questions of public participation in forestry-related decision-making: "In the West it is a favourite subject. They come and immediately inquire whether our public is involved in the decision-making process."[7] Involving the public, however, faced many barriers. For instance, the project tried to create a real, widespread interest in managing the forests; people often only became involved after their interests were hurt. Public participation, as defined under international certification norms, should be preemptive of conflict. This was hard to achieve. For example, the project tried to consider hunting interests where STF-Strug logged. They made an effort to involve hunters in the development of logging plans; still, they received little input. Hunters only raised their voices after logging plans were published and their hunting places were threatened.[8] The project implementers were themselves suspicious of the issue of public participation: "Maybe it is important to involve the public in Western countries, but here we have a different mentality."[9]

Public hearings were held to discuss the forest management plan during the state forest inventory process in 2002. Organisers used the experience of one of the World Bank's projects, asking participants to choose one of eight scenarios of landscape-environmental planning for the model forest. The discussion during the hearings resulted in a plan

7 Interview with participant of the Project, 2002.

8 Interview with social expert in forest certification, 2002.

9 Interview with one of the PMF staff, 2002.

that represented a compromise between economic components, on the one hand, and environmental and social ones, on the other. At the same time, a more environmentally-oriented scenario, which provided for preservation of wood grouse mating areas, was accepted.[10] Such a model of hearings is hardly applicable to other regions, since existing rigid federal regulation in forest management has limited the range of possible scenarios.[11]

In sum, the WWF sought to use existing social networks and understandings to reshape environmental and public participation practices. The WWF understood the importance of linking new ideas and symbols to existing ones in reshaping community practices. This case demonstrates the importance of NGO sophistication and legwork for the success of Western commercial interests in obtaining Russia's natural resources. We cannot say, however, what the long-term effects of this initiative will be, as the financial support for the project ended and STF-Strug sold its interests to another company in 2010. It is thus very difficult to predict whether the local community will continue to expand its role as an active participant in local forest decision-making, although we think it likely that there will be some carryover.

The Preluzie Model Forest

Local context: the Komi Republic consists of 416,800 square kilometres just west of the northern Ural Mountains, approximately 900 km northwest of St. Petersburg. In villages throughout Komi, the economies are slow and many forest communities are dependent on forestry. Since 1917 the forestry sector has been the primary source of income, employing one third of the Republic's working population (Karakchiev, 2000).

Throughout the 20th century, inadequate reforestation practices have negatively affected both local villagers and the profitability of industrial harvesting. In the 1990s, 200,000 hectares of Komi's forests were clear-cut, while leskhozes and forest producers planted trees on 20-23,000 hectares – roughly 10% of deforested land. Between 1990 and 1994 Komi lost many of its traditional forest markets in central and southern Russia, Moldova and Ukraine, and production decreased catastrophically. Reforestation also fell to a fifth of its former level (Karakchiev, 2002).

The Preluzie Model Forest consists of 800,000 hectares in the Preluzie forest management unit territory in southern Komi. Within this

[10] Interview with research director of the Project, March 2008.

[11] Interview with research director of the Project, St. Petersburg, March 2008.

territory are permanent settlements, various industries and logging companies. The regional centre is Obiatchevo.

The project was sponsored by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation with around $1.5 million per year. It lasted from 1996 to 2006. The Model Forest was actively built from 1999 to 2006. From 1999 to 2002 the project was implemented by the WWF. After 2002 it was implemented by Silver Taiga, a local NGO made up of the staff of the original WWF Komi office, thus providing continuity in management.

The Preluzie Model Forest is located in a region built on forestry, but not on exports. The Komi Republic is much farther east than Pskov Oblast, resulting in sharp differences between the two model forests. Pskov is close to Russia's European border, and so attracts export-oriented subsidiaries of multinational corporations. Preluzie is much farther away, with very limited transportation systems, and therefore offers limited near-term export potential. Roundwood (logs) cannot be economically exported, although high quality processed wood products can.

Industry Characteristics: There were several short-term forest leasers, varying in number from 12 to 17 working in the territory of the Preluzie Model Forest. These companies also varied in size and interest in trading in international markets. Forest certification was nonetheless successfully implemented because the certificate holder was a Leskhoz and was funded by grants. Mondi Business Paper, a key purchaser of wood pulp in Komi, significantly stimulated certification in Komi when it purchased the Siktivkar Pulp and Paper Mill and demanded that all its pulp suppliers be certified after 2009. A small amount of Komi's pulp wood goes to Kotlass Pulp and Paper Mill in Arhangelsk oblast, which is relatively far and involves high transportation costs. Sawed wood from Komi goes to both Russian and European markets. European markets provide an incentive for companies to get certified.

Certification: The Preluzie Model Forest obtained FSC certification through Smartwood in March 2003. During the certification process, Silver Taiga's main partner was the governmental forest management unit. The aim of the project was to certify not just the leased land of one company, as in the Pskov Model Forest with STF-Strug, but rather to certify the forest management of the entire territory. Regardless of the economic ramifications, the FSC system has gained much legitimacy with the government, which perceives the project as an important contributor to achieving sustainable forest management.

The main objective of the Preluzie Model Forest in obtaining certification was to improve the economic, social and ecological conditions of the Preluzie region by introducing sustainable forestry into forest management and social relations. One of its main goals was to establish new decision-making mechanisms for balancing the interests of the various stakeholders, including industry, government and local interests. As in the Pskov case, WWF Komi worked to establish networks with each of the interested parties and tried to engage them in an intersectoral dialogue about forest management. Thus the certification process was part of a larger sustainable institution-building effort.

Silver Taiga communicated with logging firms leasing territory in Preluzie and tried to interest them in certification. Silver Taiga's partnership with the industry intensified in 2003, when they started to help Mondi Business Paper to prepare their subsidiaries with leased territories and Forest Management Units with Mondi suppliers in order to become certified. The certification of forest management units also facilitated chain of custody certification of small logging firms in the region.

Stakeholder Participation: Silver Taiga linked with the local public through the use of educational institutions, its own educational programmes, media and discussion groups. It tried to involve the local public by promoting environmental education, self-governance structures, involvement in the Model Forest project and decision-making. Government agencies on the regional and oblast level, primarily the Ministry of Natural Resources, supported the project from its start and worked with the Model Forest in a working group.

The strategies and orientation set by this working group were then implemented on the regional level by the coordinating council of the Preluzie Model Forest. This council consisted of Silver Taiga employees who coordinated the activities of the Model Forest. This council was broken up into eight thematic groups, each with a specific focus. The innovation group worked closely with the forest management unit, hosted and organised the work of all experts on the project, implemented demonstration forest plots and put all Model Forest innovations into practice. The ecology group focused on virgin forests and biodiversity. The economy group dealt with economic questions and improving the effectiveness of forest use. The education group organised courses and training programmes. The forestry group facilitated the work being done by researchers from scientific institutions on improving forest management. The public outreach group organised discussions and tried to interest local populations in the project. The geographical information systems (GIS) group worked on producing a database and maps of the

territory. The information group published bulletins and worked with journalists and the media. Representatives of the Preluzie Model Forest were part of the Regional FSC working group, preparing FSC standards specific to the Komi Republic. This group worked closely with the Russian national FSC initiative.

Important actors involved in the Model Forest include the regional administration, representatives of local groups interested in self-governance and research institutions. The Preluzie Model Forest maintained an intensive engagement with the local community. It had an environmental information centre in the library in the Obiatchevo settlement, which distributed information to all libraries in the settlements of Preluzie. The newspaper *Banner of Labor* published a special page with news related to the Model Forest. Educational seminars related to the Model Forest took place regularly, as did public hearings on forestry-related issues, when leasers were competing for land. The Model Forest also helped the local community with new technology and support, including new computers and fax machines for the libraries and new furniture, buses and equipment for the school. Also, by encouraging companies to meet the preconditions of FSC certification, the Model Forest helped to improve working conditions for some of the region's population employed in the forestry sector. One company, for example, built two new dining rooms serving hot food and constructed a small hut to shelter loggers in the forest.[12]

The project encountered similar barriers with the public to those met by the Pskov Model Forest, including a widespread suspicion of forestry in general. WWF/Silver Taiga overcame this perception by preaching the Western gospel of sustainable forestry, especially its promotion of social sustainability to better the public's lot. They circulated information through libraries and schools, created discussion clubs and used media such as television programmes, newspaper articles and art shows dedicated to loving and preserving nature. A similar small grants programme was established, funding local civic initiatives.

In order to involve the public in forestry, WWF/Silver Taiga created a club similar to Pskov's Forest Club called Shuvge Parma ("the sound of wind through the taiga forest" in the Komi language). Club meetings engaged various members of the local public, leskhoz workers, scientists and government officials in discussions about forests and their uses. One difference between this and Pskov's Forest Club was the larger size of Preluzie leskhoz and the fact that it contained dispersed villages, all of which were involved in Shuvge Parma. For this reason, the club was

[12] Participant observation, meeting at Preluzye Leskhoz, 2002.

mobile and travelled to different villages throughout the region, holding meetings and promoting public participation.

An example of successful public participation stimulated by this club involved old growth forests. Here, WWF/Silver Taiga was able to mobilise members of the population to protect a pristine area that had already been rented for logging by the large company LuzaLes. While WWF/Silver Taiga first had to explain the concept of old-growth forest, it was easily accepted by much of Komi's native rural population, which is generally against industrial harvesting of any kind. WWF/Silver Taiga was also able to persuade other community groups, often by starting with the intelligentsia, as it had in Pskov. Although LuzaLes had already begun building an access road to log the plot, it gave up on most of the plot in the end, accepting a compromise that allowed it to log four small sections.[13]

One development illustrates the different possible uses of public participation. Silver Taiga, with the help of local citizens, identified places where people collect berries and mushrooms and promoted special logging regimes in these territories. They published recommendations approved by the government throughout Komi.[14]

The Club existed only until 2003, as did the small grants programme for community support. However, some community initiatives continued. A Forest Council, involving local leaders and former grantees of the project, was formed under the forest management unit. It continued to link up the general public with other stakeholders in forest management.[15]

When the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation stopped financing the Model Forest project in 2006, Mondi Business Paper financed Silver Taiga so that it could continue to facilitate interaction with stakeholders. Several other grants also supported Silver Taiga in their work with local communities in Komi.[16]

Overall, the certification process in Preluzie Leskhoz has led to increased public involvement in forest decision-making, and may have laid the foundations for a general expansion of community participation in policy-making. Citizens and groups have been linked into discussion and action networks that were relatively new to them, and they have enjoyed some success not only in influencing outcomes, but also in reconceptualising forests and forestry. It seems likely that they were also

---

13 It should be noted that while FSC standards seek to protect "high conservation value forests," they do not necessarily ban harvesting of old-growth timber.

14 Interview with the representative of the local community, October 2006.

15 Interview with a member of the Forest Council, November 2008.

16 Interview with Silver Taiga staff, May 2009.

reconceptualising economic relationships and their potential roles in them. Thus, we can postulate that certification may have played a significant role in triggering a reconfiguration of the community's social imaginaries, although describing the specifics of this reconfiguration must await further research.

Conclusion

Forest certification was promoted by specific actors with specific goals. The actors that promoted the FSC are located predominantly outside Russia, but in their efforts they also interacted with and reshaped networks, organisational capacities and social imaginaries inside Russia, even in small forest settlements in resource peripheries. Both case studies show the growth of significant new networks across local, regional and national borders, as well as across traditionally distinct social sectors. Organised around both market relationships and transnational NGOs, these networks have played an important role in defining acceptable policy and reshaping community relations in Russia.

Transnational NGO networks were essential to promoting local public participation in the cases described in this paper. WWF and Silver Taiga made the social connections and mobilised the resources necessary to propagate effective public participation in local communities. Government and business involvement were also important in some ways, but not essential to changing community practices. Government involvement was essential to getting the Preluzie forest management unit certified, but the community impact was orchestrated by Silver Taiga.

We need to consider the possibility that there is an "actor" not directly present in the communities, who, roughly put, is the imagined European consumer. In the westernmost case studies the actors' understanding of "the European market" was very important in shaping their decisions. Often, this understanding was indirect at best, with rumours and stereotypes playing as large a role as actual market actors in some cases. But in every case, this somewhat shadowy actor was called upon as an ally by some. Greenpeace, in particular, invoked it by threatening to make European consumers hostile to certain timber operations if they did not adopt more ecological practices and achieve FSC certification.

The WWF and FSC strategy of building stakeholder groups, while aimed primarily at promoting environmental protection, seems to have had broader social effects. The intersectoral dialogue and stakeholder involvement promoted by the WWF in the Model Forest cases seems to have laid the foundations for democratic institutions – particularly institutionalised stakeholder dialogue – which did not previously exist in

Russia.[17] As noted above, the WWF has acted largely through existing Russian epistemic communities: scientists on the national level, and librarians, school teachers and the like on the local level. But while using and strengthening these communities, it has also transformed them and linked them to others in new relationships. Particularly interesting has been the linkage to business interests.

Finally, perhaps the most intriguing questions posed by our research concern the longer-term effects on community relationships and decision-making processes resulting from the introduction of public participation and intersectoral dialogue into local forestry. FSC certification in Russia has grown steadily, even during the crisis of 2008-2009. It continues to provide the infrastructure for stakeholder dialogue and public participation. At the same time, funding for the WWF's interventions and Model Forest building expired in 2006-2008. We can immediately observe a decrease in the community initiatives that were previously supported by small grants. Resources have been important in the two model forests, and their withdrawal has certainly affected community dynamics. On the other hand, social institutions have a tendency to persist, and are rarely simple functions of money. Here it is interesting to note that the certification process had social effects, partially independent of which actors participated (although a strong NGO role appears to have been essential for planting the seeds of local democracy), and somewhat independent of the level of external funding. Thus it seems plausible that the certification process itself, when properly implemented to include community participation, has effects on local social institutions.

An important question for the next stage of our research is to determine whether a properly participatory certification process has long-term effects on community relationships and patterns of interaction, and if so, to work out how. The primary appeal of the concept of social imaginaries is that it focuses on the ways in which the images people use to make sense of social practices in fact enable and help to institutionalise those practices. In each of the case studies, the Model Forest

[17] It is important to clarify that public participation per se is not new. People in socialist Russia were politically active, and enthusiastic about building a bright communist future. In the villages they were much less sceptical then in the cities. Villagers regularly held big collective meetings and participated in many collective institutions, including collective farms and lespromchozes – basically collective forest enterprises. The central change with forest certification is the acceptance of conflicting interests and stakeholder processes to deal with them. In the Soviet system there was only one stakeholder – the people moving together toward a bright future. There was much participation in building this future and many decisions, but no interest groups. It was presumed that businesses, citizens and government all had the same interests and were working toward the same goals.

development incorporating forest certification has helped to introduce key elements of a western social imaginary involving the market economy, public participation and stakeholder dialogue. It has also put that imaginary into practice by engaging key community members in participatory processes and social dialogue in relation to new forms of economic transactions.

It is essential to remember here that western social imaginaries are being combined with Russian ones to constitute images and expectations unique to the local context. One of the most fascinating parts of our research is that the most successful implementation of the western social imaginaries seems to have been built on socialist ones. The successful promoters of forest certification did not seek to build new social institutions from scratch. Rather, they drew upon and sought to renovate social imaginaries that were built during socialism – thereby creating recognisable but still unique new configurations. We hypothesise that these social imaginaries are likely to be more persistent as a result of this double foundation of intertwined images. If so, then the new assumptions about the propriety of community participation, intersectoral dialogue and public deliberation are likely to become well institutionalised; we can anticipate an important reshaping of forestry community life.

References

Castoriadis C. (Kathleen Blamey, trans), *The Imaginary Institution of Society*, Cambridge, MIT Press, 1987.

Dingwerth K., Pattberg P., "World Politics and Organizational Fields: the Case of Transnational Sustainability Governance", *European Journal of International Relation*, 15, 4, 2009, pp. 707-743.

FSC (n.d.), *FSC Principles and Criteria of Forest Stewardship*, http://www.fsc.org/fsc/how_fsc_works/policy_standards/princ_criteria, last visited 31 July 2004.

Gaonkar, Dilip Parameshwar, "Toward New Imaginaries: an Introduction", *Public Culture*, 14, 1, 2002, pp. 1-19.

Karakchiev, A., "First Vice-chair of the Head of theRepublic of Komi, Siktifkar", *Proceedings of the Conference on Forest Certification and Sustainable Forest Management in the North of European Russia*, 2-4 February 2000, pp. 64-74.

Meidinger E., Elliott C., Oesten G., "The Fundamentals of Forest Certification", in Meidinger E., Elliott C., Oesten G. (eds.), *Social and Political Dimensions of Forest Certification. Remagen-Oberwinter*, Forstbuch, 2003.

Petrov, A.P., "Topical Goals in Reforming the Russian Forest Administration and Management System", *Institutional Changes in Forest Management in Countries with Transition Economies: Problems and Solutions*, workshop proceedings from a conference held in Moscow, Russia, 25 February 2003, http://www.profor.info/pdf/InstitutionalChangeWorkshopProceedings.pdf.

Platteau J.P., Anita A., "Participatory Development in the Presence of Endogenous Community Imperfections", *The Journal of Development Studies*, 39, 2, 2002, pp. 104-136.

Schofield B., "Partners in Power: Governing the Self-sustaining Community", *Sociology*, 36, 3, 2002, pp. 663-683.

Taylor C., *Modern Social Imaginaries*, Durham, NC, Duke University Press, 2004.

Tysiachniouk M., "Forest Certification in Russia", in Cashore B., Gale F., Meidinger E., Newsom D. (eds.), *Confronting Sustainability: Forest Certification in Developing and Transitioning Countries*, New Haven, Yale School of Forestry and Environmental Studies, 2006, pp. 261-295.

Tysiachniouk M., "Adaptation of the Business of Transnational Corporation to Russian Business Environment on the Example of Stora Enso", *Economic Sociology*, 9, 4, 2008, pp. 56-72.

Tysiachniouk M., "Conflict as a Form of Governance: the Market Campaign to Save the Karelian Forests", in Nystén-Haarala, S. (ed.), *The Changing Governance of Renewable Natural Resources in Northwest Russia*, London, Ashgate, 2009, pp. 169-196.

Tysiachniouk M., Reisman J., "Co-managing the Taiga: Russian Forests and the Challenge of International Environmentalism", in Lehtinen A., Sæther B., Donner-Amnell J. (eds.), *Politics of Forests: Northern Forest Industry Regimes in the Age of Globalization*, Ashgate, Aldershot, 2004, pp. 157-175.

Warren R.L., *The Community in America*, 3rd ed., Chicago, Rand McNally, 1978.

Wilkinson K.P., *The Community in Rural America*, Westport, CT, Greenwood Press, 1991.

Worobec C.D., *Peasant Russia: Family and Community in the Post-Emancipation Period*, Princeton, NJ, Princeton University Press, 1991.

WWF, "Virgin Forests", *WWF Bulletin*, 1, March 2001, p. 2.