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Project “Arctic2035” as a Big Step to the New Arctic Russia

*Pavel Tkach**

1. Introduction

The Decree of the Government of the Russian Federation No. 366 of April 21, 2014 on the State program "Socio-economic development of the Arctic Area of the Russian Federation" required the Ministry for the Development of the Russian Far East and the Arctic to prepare drafts of strategic planning documents defining new goals, priorities and mechanisms of socio-economic development for the Arctic regions of the Russian Federation, as well as revisions of the current state program¹. This work was to be completed by December 1, 2019. The strategic planning documents include the Russian Federation Arctic Area Development Strategy. In 2014, when the decree above was adopted, there was only one question: for what period should the new strategic planning documents be applicable? In April 2019, the President of Russia, Vladimir Putin, answered that it should run up to 2035.

Later, the Ministry for the Development of the Russian Far East and The Project Office for the Development of the Arctic launched a unique forum for cooperation between Russian citizens and state public bodies to identify the biggest concerns of each Arctic Region and to develop ideas for the new Development Strategy. That cooperation took place through an online platform “Arctic2035.” This chapter will explain the platform as a project, describe its contribution to the new strategic planning documents, and evaluate its usefulness.

2. Definition and success of the project “Arctic2035”

“Arctic2035” is the result of a cooperation between the Ministry for the Development of the Russian Far East and The Project Office for the Development of the Arctic. It can be defined as an online platform or a bank of ideas where every Russian citizen can propose an idea of the development of the Arctic region of Russia. To participate, one needs to fill out a simple form on the website and briefly describe the essence of your ideas². A proposal of

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¹ The Decree of the Government of the Russian Federation On the State program "Socio-economic development of the Arctic Area of the Russian Federation" [2014]

<<http://www.garant.ru/products/ipo/prime/doc/70544266/>> accessed 14 November 2019 (translation by the author).

² <https://www.arctic2035.ru/>

an idea may be defined as a cooperation process from the private actor's perspective. From a public actor's view, that process may be defined as a realization of the ideas offered by internet users, with a help of private actors. Cooperation will not end after the adoption of the new strategy but will continue through the implementation period. The public actors' engagement in the project takes place through a round-table discussion format of experts in Arctic science and representatives of the regional public bodies. Experts discussed ideas, analyzed issues and prepared proposals for the final document, which will be adopted before the expiry of the current Russian Federation Arctic Area Development Strategy for the period up to 2020. The online platform "Arctic2035" became active from September this year and was open for submissions until mid-November. During this period, 656 ideas were proposed and 10 round-table discussion meetings were held. The author found 1967 media references to the project "Arctic2035" during this time. These numbers indicate the success of the project in reaching the public and gathering views.

Success of the current approach in the development of strategic planning documents consists of the novelty of

such a cooperative approach. Actual Development Strategy is an individual project of the Government of Russian Federation adopted on the grounds of Basics of the State Policy of the Russian Federation in the Arctic for the period up to 2020 and further perspectives, approved by the President of the Russian Federation No. PR-1969 of September 18, 2008. There are 3 reasons why private actors' didn't participate in the development of the present-days Strategy.

The first reason, when Strategy was on the stage of development Ministry for Development of the Russian Far East and the Arctic didn't exist. At nowadays that Ministry is a key link and support of the project "Arctic2035", but in 2008 when the current Strategy was on the stage of adoption, Ministry for the Russian Far East existed only as a project which has been realized in 2012 when Dmitry Medvedev signed Decree of the President of the Russian Federation No. 636 of May 21, 2012 on structure of federal executive bodies

The second, is the accessibility and availability of the internet in the Russian Federation. According to the statistics in the year 2008, it was 47 million internet users, that's 27.1% of the whole population of Russia. In 2019 this amount increased to 93 million³. In

³ Julia Krivoshapko, *The RuNet audience reached 92.8 million people*. (source in Russian language) <<https://rg.ru/2019/04/17/raek-auditorii-runeta-dostigla-928-milliona-chelovek.html>> accessed 14 November 2019 (translation by the author).

comparison to 2008, nowadays accessibility and availability of the internet provide an opportunity for everyone to participate in such online consultations.

And the third, oil and gas exports account for more than two-thirds of Russia's export revenue and more than 15% of GDP. But the financial crisis in 2008 showed how dependent the Russian economy is on oil prices. The plummeting price of Urals heavy crude oil, which lost more than 70% of its value caused big losses in export revenues⁴. The priority of the Government was to extend mining capacity in the Russian Arctic to mitigate revenue losses caused by the collapse of the oil industry in central and eastern parts of Russia.

3. What are the results of the "Arctic2035" platform?

To answer that question we must pay attention to the biggest problems identified by the inhabitants in the Arctic regions of Russia and the ideas proposed through the "Arctic2035" platform. In Murmansk Oblast, Nenets and Republic

of Karelia, most attention is directed to infrastructure and transport. In Arkhangelsk, the focus is on tourism. Citizens from Yamal-Nenets express concerns primarily regarding the economy and agriculture. In Chukotka, education and infrastructure are top issues. In the Sakha Republic and in the Arctic part of Krasnoyarsk Region, ecological issues and infrastructure are highlighted. And in the Republic of Komi, demographic issues are the top issue.

Looking into the results more closely, the largest number of submissions from Yamal-Nenets concerned renovation and upgrade of the water sewer system and the expansion of the centralized power supply zone. An interesting idea was proposed by a local inhabitant to create a system for geotechnical monitoring of permafrost temperatures under infrastructure facilities⁵. This is particularly interesting because it identifies the biggest problem in Yamal-Nenets region - permafrost. Permafrost degradation poses a great danger to the buildings and structures located in the Far North: roads, oil and gas pipelines, and living spaces. Permafrost covers

⁴ The World Bank in Russia, 'Russian Economic Report' (2008) 17
<http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTRUSSIANFEDERATION/Resources/rer17_eng.pdf> accessed 14 November 2019

⁵ Oleg Romanovsky, *Create a system for geotechnical monitoring of permafrost temperatures under infrastructure facilities* (source in Russian language)
<<https://www.arctic2035.ru/c/proposals/technology/sozdanie-sistemy-avtomatizirovannogo-geotekhnicheskogo-monitoringa-temperatur-mnogoletnemerzlykh-gru/>> accessed 14 November 2019 (translation by the author).

almost the entire territory of Yamal-Nenets. Permafrost degradation remains one of the main factors affecting economic activity in Yamal-Nenets. Many structures were built on perennially frozen soil as a foundation and designed for exploitation in certain temperature conditions. As a result, today many buildings and structures are deformed, damaged, demolished or planned for demolition. This has a major impact on the economic component of sustainable development.

Turning to the Murmansk Oblast, according to the collected ideas, the biggest concerns in Murmansk region are fuel oil (masut) dependency because of the lack of gas supply in the region and the lack of transport infrastructure. The solution to eliminating fuel dependency may be in the transportation of liquefied gas from the north or the laying of a natural gas pipeline from the south of the region. Direct gas supply to the region would allow switching the entire energy supply system to a gas type of fuel, which will give an additional impetus to automation and increase the reliability of systems. Considering the infrastructure problems, here it is necessary to underline the lack of transport connections through and around the White Sea. The construction of a new bridge over the throat of the White Sea and the railway along the Kola Peninsula would facilitate high-

speed cargo delivery from the Ural, Siberia and the Far East, and especially from China. It would also connect the largest Arctic cities, Murmansk and Arkhangelsk, with reliable year-round transport links and provide an opportunity for the development of the resources of the Kola Peninsula (bauxite and lithium).

Lack of direct gas supply is a problem not only in Murmansk Oblast, but also in Nenets Autonomous Okrug. Today, most of Nenets villages are using coal for heating. This type of fuel aggravates the environmental situation, and at the same time is laborious to use. Laying of a natural gas pipeline is one solution. A number of citizens also addressed the lack of transport infrastructure and proposed various ideas concerning improvement of the runways in local airports and expansion of the route networks.

The White Sea-Baltic canal holds the most potential for the development of the Republic of Karelia but citizens wanted to see investment to make it more profitable for the region. This canal is an important transport link to ports of the White, Barents and Baltic Seas. Availability of access through the White Sea-Baltic canal to the Northern Sea Route and the Arctic Ocean makes this transport link a potential source of development for the region. However, today, the canal has reached its maximum capacity and can only admit

cargo ships with a deadweight tonnage up to 3-4 thousand tons. According to the ideas proposed through the platform, there are two ways how to increase cargo delivery capacity through the region: the first is expansion of the network of the regional water routes and the second is expansion of the canal's dimensions aimed to increase its throughput for cargo ships with a deadweight tonnage up to 8 thousand tons⁶.

As mentioned above, the biggest concern of the Arkhangelsk Oblast is tourism. Analysis of the submissions uncovered two main themes. The first is the lack of transport infrastructure. The Arctic Museum and Exhibition Center described the importance of transport infrastructure improvement, especially to Franz Josef Land: "Franz Josef Land is one of the most attractive Arctic regions for tourism. Nevertheless, the number of tourists is still very small and does not exceed 1500 people per year. For comparison, in neighboring Svalbard, the number of tourists increased from 15,000 in 1997 to 90,000 in 2018. One of

the main reasons for the growth is the aviation availability. Franz Josef Land can be visited only on rare and extremely expensive cruise ships. If it is possible to build a runway for a strictly regulated and controlled flow of tourists, this flow will increase significantly and will give a significant income to the federal and regional budgets in the form of taxes, as well as the multiplier effects of economic development"⁷. The second theme is environmental damage and the lack of specially protected areas with a specialized regime for tourism. According to the idea proposed by the Government of the Arkhangelsk Oblast: "In order to preserve and develop the ecological potential of the Russian Arctic National Park, the new Strategy needs to reflect the following issues: completion of work to eliminate accumulated environmental damage in the contaminated areas of the islands of the Franz Josef Land archipelago and the continuation of work on the formation of the territory of the Russian Arctic National Park by extending the conservation regime on Victoria Island"⁸. Most of the submissions from

⁶ Vitaliy Spiridonov, *The development of water transport arteries* (source in Russian language) <<https://www.arctic2035.ru/c/proposals/infrastructure/razvitie-vodnykh-transportnykh-arteriy-/>> accessed 14 November 2019 (translation by the author).

⁷ Arctic Museum and Exhibition Center, *Use of the runway...* (source in Russian language) <https://www.arctic2035.ru/c/proposals/tourism/ispolzovanie_vzletno_posadochnoy_polosy_na_zemle_aleksandry_zemlya_frantsa_iosifa_dlya_razvitiya_tur1571780108/> accessed 15 November 2019 (translation by the author).

⁸ Government of Arkhangelsk Oblast, *Development of environmental and tourist activities...* (source in Russian language) <<https://www.arctic2035.ru/c/proposals/culture/razvitie-prirodookhrannoy-i-turistskoy-deyatelnosti-sokhranenie-kulturno-istoricheskogo-naslediya-na/>> accessed 15 November 2019 (translation by the author).

the Arkhangelsk Oblast came from the Government of Arkhangelsk Oblast.

Considering the Arctic part of Krasnoyarsk region (Krai), the biggest threat identified for the development of that Arctic region is heavy pollution. The central city of the Arctic part of the Krasnoyarsk region is Norilsk. It is the second-largest city (after Murmansk) inside the Arctic Circle and Norilsk and Yakutsk are the only large cities in the continuous permafrost zone. However, Norilsk is famous not because of the population but because this city is one of the most polluted places on Earth. Norilsk's air pollution includes radioisotopes (strontium-90 and caesium-137), metals (nickel, copper, cobalt, lead and selenium) and gases (nitrogen and carbon oxides, sulfur dioxide, phenols and hydrogen sulfide)⁹. This explains why most of the proposed ideas were dedicated to upgrading of the cleaning systems in "Norilsk Nickel." The Administration of Norilsk City also proposed the creation of social programs

for resettlement from the most polluted areas near the factory zone¹⁰.

In the Chukotka region, there are two major problems identified: lack of educational institutions and poor air-traffic services. Chukotka is the only region in the Russian Federation where there are no federal universities. There is only the affiliate of North-Eastern Federal University (Yakutsk) in the capital of Chukotka-Anadyr. Direct airlinks outside of the region only run to Magadan and Moscow – the latter operates only once per week.

The paradoxical situation can be observed in the Republic of Komi. The biggest barrier to development of this region is a demographic crisis. According to the 2019 demographic ranking of the regions, the Republic of Komi was ranked 81st out of 85 regions¹¹. From 2016 to 2018, the population in the Republic of Komi decreased by 3.1%. This region has one of the highest migration outflows of Russia, losing 25,680 people in 2018¹². Because of a harsh climate, pollution from coal mines

⁹ Languages of the World, *Pollution Problems in Norilsk* <<https://www.languagesoftheworld.info/russia-ukraine-and-the-caucasus/pollution-problems-norilsk.html>> accessed 15 November 2019 (translation by the author).

¹⁰ Administration of Norilsk city, *Social programs for the resettlement of certain categories of citizens* (source in Russian language) <https://www.arctic2035.ru/c/proposals/obshchestvo/sotsialnye_programmy_po_pereseleniyu_otdelnykh_kategoriy_grazhdan1571991897/> accessed 15 November 2019 (translation by the author).

¹¹ RIA Rating, *Ranking of regions by demography – 2019* (source in Russian language) <<https://riarating.ru/infografika/20190423/630123908.html>> accessed 16 November 2019 (translation by the author).

¹² Ibid 12

and lack of work opportunities, a lot of ideas from local inhabitants were dedicated to the improvement of social programs for resettlement, and provision of additional funding for subsidies for families which want to move out from the Republic of Komi based on the Federal Law No. 125-F3 of October 25, 2002 on Housing Subsidies for Citizens Departing from the Far North and Equated Locations. According to statistics 49,400 families registered for these subsidies in 2019¹³. The submissions from the citizens to the consultation highlight the difficulties of living in the region and desire to move elsewhere but the author contests that facilitating migration outflow will not help to develop the region.

The Sakha Republic is the richest region in Arctic Russia because of Soviet era development of extractive industries, especially diamonds, gold, silver, oil and gas. However, even a relatively rich region has its problems, and the first problem identified is culling of reindeer. Due to reductions in the deer stock, the number of workers in reindeer herding is decreasing. This has serious consequences such as the loss for dynasties of reindeer herders and the increase in the number of unemployed. Reindeer herding is a way of life of the indigenous peoples of the North which

explains why recovery of the practice is a key priority to preserve the traditional way of living of the indigenous people and to preserve employment opportunities in that sphere. The second problem identified is the lack of transport infrastructure through the River Lena. A number of submissions addressed the difficulties of transportation through the biggest river in the Sakha Republic and proposed the building of bridges, which would not only improve the safety of transportation but also accelerate cargo delivery from the capital Yakutsk which is located in the southern part of region to the Arctic territories and the settlements of indigenous people located in the northern part of region around the village Chokurdakh.

4. Conclusion

The above review indicates that the online platform has been useful for the future development of Arctic Russia. First of all, the platform “Arctic2035” helped to identify the biggest concerns in every Arctic Region of the Russian Federation and identified possible goals for the future strategic planning documents. Second, the wide participation of people – which exceeded the government’s expectations - means

¹³ Vladimir Zharuk, *Relocation of Senior Citizens from Vorkuta* (source in Russian language) < https://www.arctic2035.ru/c/proposals/health/nemedlenno_prekratit_genotsid_severyan_stavshikh_z_alozhnikami_iz_za_neispolneniya_gosudarstvom_publi1571513516/> accessed 16 November 2019 (translation by the author).

that the strategy has a greater potential to be socially significant, responding to their priorities. There are two main ways that the legislative branch can regulate the elimination of the identified problems in Arctic Russia. The first would be to adopt a very detailed Russian Federation Arctic Area Development Strategy for the period up to 2035, where semantic separation will be based not on the functional feature, like in the 2020 Strategy with separation on matters of economic development, environmental security, military security, international relationships, and development of science, but rather organized by regions and regional priorities. However, such an approach would likely be too large and unwieldy to be adopted. An alternative approach would maintain the separation by functional features without distinction by region but nevertheless develop a series of executive acts and measures to address the obstacles to development identified through the platform. These could be strengthened through obligations on the regional governments to realize these provisions. The most likely form would be through Orders of the Ministry for the Development of the Russian Far East and the Arctic (as a key ministry) to the concerned regions. Russia will present its new Strategy 2035 in early 2020 but meanwhile, the author concludes that cooperation through the platform "Arctic2035" played a

significant role in the development of Arctic Russia.

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