

STRENGTHENING THE ROLE OF NGOS IN RUSSIA: PARTNERS FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

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Summary

The article is devoted to the development of the environmental movement and its participation in elaboration of sustainable development policy and its implementation in Russia. Special attention is paid to the partnership and collaboration between state and local power bodies and ecological non-governmental organizations.

The article presents information and analysis on the history of the issue, modern trends in ecological policy and its main agents. Primarily, it describes the role of ecological non-governmental organizations in the environmental policy arena, and reasons for emergence of social-ecological conflicts, the motivations of the different social actors involved and methods for their solution.

There are descriptions of several case studies, illustrating the forms of interaction and cooperation between different ecological and social actors.

The article's conclusion contains views on national environmental policy development and possibilities of strengthening public participation in the decision-making process in this sphere.

The article describes the results of the author's research into environmental policy in Russian regions from 1996 to 1999. The author has also used scientific work of other

Russian and foreign researchers, materials published in regional and local mass media, and documents of federal and regional power structures and different environmental non-governmental organizations.

1. Introduction

The beginning of sustainable development as a state policy in Russia was proclaimed with the act of the president, and put into effect as a social and economic program at the all-Russian first Nature Protection Congress in June 1995.

The policy of achieving balance between economic and natural systems started during the radical reform of Russian society, which has been underway since the early 1990s. On one hand, it gives a positive view of the process, because conditions for sustainable development can be introduced into the present structural transformation. On the other hand, there are especially complex processes going on in the social sphere, as new social structures are emerging. These social actors are only beginning their activity in the political arena. Note that the best prepared and most experienced ones are the environmental non-governmental, non-profit organizations (ecoNGOs), whose history has goes back more than thirty years. Many other social structures (groups, civil initiatives, etc.) appeared together with Perestroika (at the end of the 1980s), including the state body, the State Committee for Environment Protection and its regional departments. Later, nature protection bodies were created in regional administrations.

General public opinion has been environmentally oriented only since Perestroika and Glasnost (the start of the democratization process, openness and access to mass media), when the environmental problems were the first to be liberally spotlighted in all Russian mass media (periodicals, TV, radio, etc.). Previously there had never been any 'acute' news about environmental violations. Most published articles had simply praised nature and invoked love and respect towards it.

By the end of the 1990s, there was an established system of nature protection structures, with routes for interaction and mechanisms for their collaboration and partnership. But because of the variety of social and economic development models in different regions of the country, there are also various types of such systems.

Because of the severity of environmental problems, and the variety of social and economic development models in different regions and decentralization processes, it is obvious that the state power will remain the leader in creation of fundamental nature protection federal laws, and will set up the control functions. But the mechanisms of economic management of natural resources and nature protection will be under the thumb of regional social actors. In this situation, the civil initiatives of the population and organizations concerned about the quality of the immediate environment will be the motor for ongoing elaboration and implementation of environmental policy.

2. History of the Issue

In the Soviet period, government efforts to protect the environment were confined to wildlife conservation and compliance with sanitary-hygienic standards. Wildlife

conservation was the responsibility of government agencies organized according to administrative-territorial (hunting and forestry inspector departments) or catchment (water resources and fishing inspector departments) principles.

The greatest achievements of the time were the establishment of an unparalleled system of state preserves as a network of areas in which economic (including recreational) uses were totally banned, and establishment of research institutions to study natural processes in intact ecosystems. The first such preserve was established at Lake of Baikal in 1916.

The Sanitary-Epidemiological Overview Authority of the USSR Ministry of Health exercised control over compliance with sanitary-hygienic standards.

Also, in the 1970s, environmental protection units were established in most ministries and agencies, to enforce compliance, on the part of enterprises, with the established restrictions in their respective industries and sectors.

The fundamental flaw of the Soviet system of environmental protection and nature conservation was that it put the very same department simultaneously in charge of using and protecting (and often also regulating the use of) a particular natural resource. Therefore, breaches of nature conservation standards in virtually all sectors were frequent, and control over compliance was inefficient.

The early days of Perestroika saw the Chernobyl disaster, which led to enhanced attention to environmental problems. In January 1987, there emerged a separate state department for environmental protection which, since that time, has had the status of a Ministry or 'State Committee for Environment Protection' (as it is now). This Committee has departments in all the regions and republics of Russia. Since then, many regional administrations formed their own environmental departments and other local structures.

In summer of 1991, the office of Presidential Advisor on Environment and Health was instituted under the President of Russia. The post, which came with a fairly large staff, was taken by Alexsei V. Yablokov, one of the leaders of the public environmental movement and deputy chairperson of the Committee for the Environment of the USSR Supreme Soviet. Following his proposal, some of the overseeing bodies, such as the State Committee for Nuclear Safety, the State Committee for Sanitation and Epidemiology, and the State Committee for Technology, were taken out of government (which remained the main economic body in Russia) and made accountable directly to the President early in 1992.

The public environmental movement has deep roots in Russia, and boasts a rich history. The first public organization of environmentalists in Russia, the Moscow Society of Nature Scientists, was established in 1805 (nearly 200 years ago).

The All-Russian Society for Nature Conservation (SNC) was established in 1924. As a semi-official structure at that time, it performed various practical nature protection functions which later became federal responsibilities.

Established in the 1960s, a movement known as ‘Students’ Nature Protection Guards’ (SNPG) was formed around the biology departments of universities, and involved both students and professors. The Ministry of Justice of Russia registered the association of these SNPGs as the first harbinger of a national informal movement in 1995. By 1986, the SNPG movement had united more than 120 organizations. These guards were active in protecting nature through inspecting and controlling operations. They fought against all kinds of poaching (illegal fishing, hunting, Christmas tree cutting, people who picked and sold spring flowers and also plants listed in the Red Book). One of their key activities was maintenance of nature reserves and development of the process of creation of nature protection areas all over the country. One of the main means of SNPG’s interaction with the state powers was letters of protest, supported by massive collections of signatures. Such appeals to the state agencies for help in solving different kinds of ecological problems produced positive results.

Relations between the above-mentioned ecoNGOs and official bodies can be described as mutually beneficial cooperation.

Thus, by the beginning of Perestroika, non-governmental nature protection organizations had gained useful experience of self-organization and self-management, and in solving environmental problems both by themselves and through cooperation with state powers. They proved to be ready to produce and develop different documents (including those needed for establishment of an organization), to elaborate environmental programs, and to participate in social and political events, such as meetings, negotiations, hearings, etc. Therefore, in the late 1980s, it was the voluntary conservation movement that led from below to form grass-roots organizations; these became massive all over the country at that time. In every city and in many towns there were newly founded NGOs, whose main focus was to struggle for a better environment. The SNPG movement became just a part of the Russian environmental movement.

In these early years, the ecoNGO activity was mostly of a protest nature. As a result, they prevented the implementation of a number of environmentally harmful projects, e.g. diversion of the flow of northern rivers to Central Asia, raising of the Cheboksar reservoir level, construction of the Katun hydro-power station, construction of a number of nuclear power stations, etc.

In general, the voluntary environmental movement in the late 1980s, though it had representatives in Federal and local bodies of legislative and executive powers, and became quite professional, continued to be unofficial, outside the state structures, and, to a large extent, it was rather an elite movement. It continued to be personality-oriented, and pro-western in its orientation, including increasingly searching for financial support from Western sponsors.

Nevertheless, representatives of government authority tried to organize cooperation with the voluntary environmental movement. There was even a Public Council established under the supervision of the USSR Ministry for Environment Protection.

On the whole, the period between 1985 and 1991 can be described as a period of marked increase in the level of attention paid to problems of the environment and

wildlife, both by the Government and the public.

3. Modern State of Russian Environmental Movement

At present, during the most cruel economic crisis and decay of industrial production, the environmental movement is no longer massive. Its place is now taken by small ecoNGOs, which either follow the tradition of civil initiatives (groups of residents fighting for their civil environmental rights), or professional organizations specializing in a certain field of environmental activities, such as environmental management, public environmental expertise, research into the state of the environment, environmental education and enlightenment, assistance in formation and development of ecoNGOs, etc.

The tension in the environmental situation and the impossibility of coping with it through small dispersed bodies, led the movement to the idea of establishing “umbrella” organizations that can represent the requests of the environmentally oriented community at the federal level. This kind of unit includes, first of all, international organizations such as “International Social-Ecological Union” (SEU), the Russian branch of the Green Cross, and also all-Russian organizations such as Russian Ecological Movement, Russian Social-Ecological Union, etc.

In 1998, SEU had more than 200 branches in 18 countries (in eastern and western Europe, the Middle East and North America) including more than 10 000 activists. SEU is the greatest international NGO in the territory of former Soviet Union, where WWF and Greenpeace have no members but only program officers. There are no other international environmental NGOs in this part of the Earth. On the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the United Nations, the SEU was rewarded as one of the fifty exemplary communities of the world, and it turned out to be the only international association on the list of honor.

Many regional confederations of ecoNGOs have also been established, e.g. the Volga region movement “Let’s Help the River”, Anti-Nuclear Movement (Rostov Region), Youth Environmental Movement of Tatarstan, Vologda Public Movement, etc.

To assist in mobilization of the resources there are all-Russian regional resource centers: Center for Communication and Information of SEU (Moscow), the Institute for Assistance to Social Initiatives (Moscow), the Center for Assistance to Civil Initiatives (Saratov), and others. Their main functions are collecting and disseminating information, organizing training for eco-activists, spreading the experience of different ecoNGOs, providing help in finding resources (including financial), and organization of meetings, conferences, seminars, and congresses.

A number of Russian ecoNGOs are specialized in certain professional spheres of environmental activity, such as development of the process of nature conservation, environmental management, environmental education, expertise, solving of environmental conflicts, etc. Such organizations include the following: the Nature Conservation Center, the Center for Environmental Policy, ecoNGO “Ecoline”, ecoNGO “Institute for Social Ecology”, the women’s association “EcoSociology”, and

“Association of Social-Ecological Education”.

SNC still exists but no longer as the single voluntary organization or even as a leading one, but as a segment of the environmentally oriented community. The functions of regional departments of SNC have become quite varied. SNC is a resource center for other ecoNGOs at the regional level; this usually means providing accommodation, a legal address, and access to telephone—all things achievable after Soviet times. Sometimes, but not very often, SNC can provide eco-activists with office equipment: a computer, fax/modem, printer, copier, etc. The main focus of SNC’s activity is environmental education and awareness, following the Soviet tradition. SNC is usually the organization that receives financial support from regional powers, from regional environmental funds, so it acts as a channel for grant-aid.

The SNPG movement is also active, and it remains one of the main sources for mobilization of new participants in the Russian environmental movement. Former SNPG members from all previous generations provide the nucleus (the most active members) of the movement, and often they are the leaders of the most effective ecoNGOs.

In connection with the democratization of the political system, there was a need for “green” participation in the country’s political life. The early 1990s saw the emergence of the Russian Party of Greens (RPG), and the Constructive Ecological Movement (CEM). RPG has been using the whole wide spectrum of political activity, from taken part in elections to formation of ideology and political platforms, acting at all levels—central, regional and local. CEM as a political unit is only active during pre-election campaigns, and has not been a success to date.

A special place in the modern environmental movement is taken by radical “green” groups. First of all, there are the international organizations “Rainbow Keepers”, Russian Greenpeace, and the regional ecoNGO “Ecodefense!” (Kaliningrad). Their activity, in addition to traditional opposition to environmentally dangerous projects (e.g. import and dumping of foreign radioactive waste material) is of importance as a factor that invokes power structures and industrial circles to collaborate with conventional “green” organizations.

EcoNGO’s main problems in development are mobilization of new members and finance. Both these issues are dependent on the deep economical crisis. The general public is preoccupied with its own physical survival because of the poor payment for work, deferred and inadequate salaries, increasing unemployment, and continuous inflation. People are incapable of considering the quality of their immediate environment, let alone active involvement in this sphere.

Financial support to the activities of ecoNGOs is not practically found inside the country. The main help comes from foreign charity foundations, and it can never be enough.

The main points in ecoNGOs’ activity in Russia are wildlife protection, anti-nuclear struggle, environmental education and enlightenment, sanitation and revitalizing of

urban and rural environments, fighting against chemical pollution (especially in connection with chemical weapons destruction), elaboration of environmental policy and creation of environmental programs, and reconstruction of drainage-basins and sustainable forestry.

The Russian environmental movement does not represent a single whole: this is a totality of groups and organizations, which embrace different ideology, political orientation and forms of social activity. Therefore, according to forms and methods of activity, and also concerning the ideological policy and social structure, the ecoNGOs of Russia can be classified into five typological groups, as follows.

Conservationists: biologists and other professionals involved in wildlife protection; they follow in the footsteps of the Russian university scientific community in the early twentieth century—the patriarchs of Russia’s early protected areas.

Alternativists: the new generation of adherents of ecoanarchism and communitarists. They prefer radical and socially oriented activity, and study the theory of ecologically oriented community formation and its ideological policy.

Deep ecologists (traditionalists): they represent the Russian intelligentsia to whom the main thing is harmony of people and nature, which can be reached through voluntary self-limitation and traditional forms of social life and technologies.

Civil activists: people concerned about the problems of their immediate environment (mostly local residents). They use any methods to achieve the desired results—from protest to cooperation with state powers and other social structures.

Pragmatists: often the offspring of the city clerks, they differ through their engagement in the political process, as they think the situation can be changed only after ecologists are ruling the country.

In spite of these internal differences, the ideology of the environmental movement is built on a rational basis, on faith in science, on the force of intellect. The environmentalists base their activity on a shared sense of environmental value, on similar perceptions of the environmental situation (as being catastrophic), and their common struggle against environmental damage.

In a broad sense, the ideology of the ecological movement is internationalism. In its program documents, the SEU emphasizes the necessity of respecting and observing the rights of all nations and peoples, and the unacceptability of opinions and actions leading to discrimination against nations, peoples, cultures and religions. A slogan "think globally and act locally" is widely endorsed by eco-activists.

Finally, the Russian Greens support the ideas of decentralization, self-government, and development of international cooperation. These are the ideas of democracy and open society.

Today, the Greens are less and less engaged in meetings (these take place under extreme

circumstances only, when a solution has to be found immediately, or when the problem concerns a lot of people ready to work with the Greens). They give preference to research and development, consultations, expertise, methods of infiltration into power structures, and informal contacts. In practice, it is only alternativists who in their radical struggle make use of the methods of pressing upon the power structures, state enterprises and private companies by organizing camps of protest and picketing. In 1993, the environmental movement demonstrated new tactics by conducting legal proceedings on an urgent matter. They started to use the law to find solutions to specific environmental problems.

In general the Greens display rationalism and even pragmatism, based on scientific expertise, and adopt a “small deed policy”. This is a reasonable approach, and growing competence distinguishes the political behavior of the Greens.

The publications of the Greens describe all the ongoing processes, ecoNGO activity (action, campaigns, researches, educational activity, etc.), institutional problems, social-environmental conflicts and their resolution, ideological issues, projects and programs. They have many periodicals, journals and newsletters. The main ones are the newspapers “Green World” (a common publication of the environmental movement and the State Committee for Nature Protection), and “Bereginya” (the newspaper of SEU and the Greens of the Volga region). The most interesting bulletins include “Bulletin of Moscow ISAR” (containing information necessary for ecoNGO development), the magazine of the radical Greens “The Third Way” (devoted to the theory, ideology and activity of the eco-anarchists), Bulletin of the Center for Russian Environmental Policy (concerned with problems of elaboration and implementation of state environmental policy), and the magazine “Participation” (which describes and analyses the social-ecological problems of the regions of Russia). A lot of different electronic bulletins are disseminated through the electronic network of the movement; the most durable are “Anti-Atom Press” (Ecodefense!, Kaliningrad), “Ave-Info”, (“Let’s Help River”, Nizhnii Novgorod), “Problems of Chemical Safety” (by the movement “For Chemical Safety”, Moscow), and “What’s New” (SEU, Moscow).

The environmental movement in Russia is currently facing two main tasks. One of them concerns the deep economic crisis, which has pushed most of the ecoNGOs to the brink of survival. The other task is to increase the effectiveness of their own activity. As regards the democratization process and orientation to sustainable development, their effectiveness is increasing the impact of environmental values on society and the growth of ecoNGO involvement in decision-making.

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Biographical Sketch

Irina A.Khalyi was born in 1950. In 1974 she graduated from Moscow State University, History Department. In 1994 she was awarded her PhD (the title of the dissertation was "Environmental movement in the large industrial center of Russia").

She is currently the employment: chief of the Working Group on Social-Ecological Problems of Russian Regions, Institute Sociology, Russian Academy of Sciences.

Her range of interests include social activity of environmental movement, social-ecological conflicts, environmental policy, and public participation in decision-making.

She has more than 40 publications including the following: *Ecological Problems in Pre-Election Platforms of Candidates for People's Deputies of the USSR* (elections of 1989), 1990; *Emergence and Development of Social Movements of the XX Century* (survey of foreign sociological concepts), 1991; *Environmental Paradigm and Human Values*, 1990; *Ecological Initiatives in Large Industrial Center*, 1992; *Local Ecological Conflicts in the USSR*, 1993; *Ecological and national movements: allies or adversaries?*, 1995; *The Environmental Movement in Russia: Contemporary Trends*, 1995; *Actions of the Environmental Movement*, 1996; *A Place under a Sun. A Handbook for Environmental Non-Governmental Organizations*, 1998.

Editor-in-chief of the magazine "Participation. Social Ecology of the Regions of Russia". She participated in several international projects from 1988 to 1999, the most recent one being the project on providing seminars for regional ecoNGOs, "Strengthening the role of regional ecoNGOs" (Russian-Dutch).

She has participated in more than 15 international conferences and workshops abroad and presented papers, among them to the XIII International Congress of Sociology.

Public activity: member of International Sociological Committee N 24 "Nature and Society" of ISA; member of Russian Committee "Nature and Society" of Russian Sociological Association; leader and organizer of a new environmental social organization, the Women's Association "EcoSociology" (main goal: to assist in development of the environmental movement and to support women's efforts in this field). Consultant of the Dutch ecoNGO "Milieukontakt Oost-Europa" and contact person of Advanced Ecological Courses on Environmental Management at Amsterdam University.

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