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Renewable Natural Resources in North-west Russia

Nysten-Haarala, S. 2008 *The Changing Governance of Renewable Natural Resources in North-west Russia*. London: Ashgate Publishing, pp. 265.

The Changing Governance of Renewable Natural Resources in North-west Russia is an interesting step forward when describing socio-economic change in Russia during the past two decades. The authors of this volume are an international, inter-disciplinary research group of scholars from Finland, Russia and Sweden. This group includes experts in human geography, environmental sociology, law, economics and international policy. Their Russian-Finnish project in 2004–2006 combines both theory and survey research methodology.

International cooperation in the area of applied sciences is very important. However, this cooperation is both complicated and difficult. My experience shows that these difficulties include the development of collegial relationships, tolerance, technological solutions to data transfer and communication, strategies for obtaining alternative sources of funding, and others.

Two of the thirteen chapters have international Russian-Finnish and Russian-Swedish co-authors: Chapter 7 with co-authors Juha Kotlainen, Antonina A. Kulyasova, Ivan P. Kulyasov and Svetlana S. Pchelkina; and Chapter 11 with co-authors E. Carina H. Keskitalo and Antonina A. Kulyasova.

The book focuses on the adjustment of local communities and enterprises to institutional changes and government attempts to manage that development. Analysis of the socio-economic and political transition in Russia provides the authors with a unique opportunity to test various social science theories about the effects of formal institutional change on the behaviour, social and psychological condition of individuals and local communities as well as whole societies.

The authors' interest focuses on the governance of forest and fishery resources in North-west Russia. Selected territories are Arkhangelsk, Leningrad,

Murmansk, Vologda regions and Republic of Karelia. The local view is approached empirically, with data gathered through interviews with local authorities, managers and people involved in governance and the use of natural resources (p. 1).

The topic is both important and timely. Using renewable natural resources is an essential element of sustainable development. It is therefore unfortunate that the authors do not analyse the governance of the main renewable natural resource, agricultural land. The agricultural plot is part of the household. The processing of the earth – work on the land and agriculture in general is the primary activity compared with other types of activities in the South or North.

According to our survey data, wages and social payments (transfers) in the republics of Karelia and Komi provided more than 85 per cent of monetary incomes of rural households in 2008–2009. Our results are similar to Russian government statistics¹.

At the same time, the share from other sources of monetary income is extremely low. For example, the sale of private agricultural production makes up 2.8 per cent of household monetary income, sale of wood production 1.3 per cent, and entrepreneurial activity 2.6 per cent. These data illustrate the rudimentary development of house production, entrepreneurial activity and self-employment in those regions. In short, rural households in Karelia and Komi have almost no participation in market relations.

Our data indicate that in many other regions rural households derive more than one third of their monetary income from economic activities². It is possible that this extra income is insufficient for North-west households. This gap is especially important during times of economic crisis when reductions of monetary income from salary and wages may also occur.

The book consists of three main parts: “National policies and the transition to a market economy”, “Case studies of different aspects of governance”, and “The international and global impact on national environmental policy, global forestry and fishery.” There are some differences between the book’s contents (p. v–vi) and its description in the Introduction (p. 5).

¹ Sotsial’noe polozhenie i uroven’ zhizni naselenia Rossii 2009. – Moscow: FSGS, 2009, p. 122.

² Patsiorkovskiy V.V. Sel’skaia Rossia: priorityety razvitiia. – Moscow: Pokolenie, 2009, p. 133.

Part one starts with an analysis of national policies and their impact on Russia's transition to a market economy, with a particular focus on how the institutional framework has developed. Three main theoretical concepts were introduced in that part.

One of them presents Finnish research as the concept of *governance and path dependency*. Governance and path dependency is *the main concept applied by the authors of this volume in their empirical studies of transformation at local level* (p. 10).

The second main concept of *trust* was presented by a Swedish scholar: *Trust can be understood as a mechanism that serves to reduce social complexity. ... Trust is located in the relations between people; it is not a psychological state of isolated individuals* (p. 34).

The third main concept of *sustainable development* was presented by another Finnish researcher: *According to the most often quoted definition, sustainable development means development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs* (p. 57).

These three main concepts appear in several other places in the book (pp. 78, 98, 132, 151, 171, 198, 245). Additional interesting concepts are discussed in the volume, for example, 'hybrid economic practices' (p. 139), 'contemporary sociological understanding of space and time' (p. 170), 'survival strategies' (p. 198) and others.

This last point of view is very close to the reviewer's work in our applied studies and papers. We evaluate transition time in rural Russia as the change from survival to sustainable development (See: O'Brien and Patsiorkovski 2006: 240; O'Brien, Patsiorkovski and Wegren 2005: 95–117; O'Brien, Patsiorkovski and Dershem 2000: 286).

The most interesting part of the book for sociologists is Part two, which includes four chapters: "Re-Territorializing the Russian North Through Hybrid Forest Management", "Construction of Trust in Russian Mill Towns", "Conflict as a Form of Governance: The Market Campaign to Save the Karelian Forests", and "Transformation of Nature Management in Pomorie: Fishing Villages on the Onega Peninsula of the White Sea".

This second part of the book examines the empirical implication of theoretical models, including *governance and path dependency*, *trust and sustainable development*. This part introduces case studies which illustrate different aspects in the changing governance of renewable forest and fishing resources in North-west Russia.

The researchers used high-quality sociological methods. The empirical data are largely based on primary sources, including biographical and semi-structured qualitative interviews with local managers of logging and fishing companies, directors of municipalities, and workers, and residents of logging, and fishing settlements in different regions of the Russian North-west.

A more comprehensive sociological picture of change in both governance of renewable natural resources and local residents' life is presented in Chapter 10, by a Russian tandem Antonia A. Kulyasova and Ivan P. Kulyasov.

This chapter analyses the transformation that has taken place in the nature of management institutions of Pomor fishing villages on the Onega Peninsula of the White Sea. The authors show changes in traditional nature management practice, primarily with regard to fishing. They look at fishing from two really important and interesting sides: as the main source of employment in this area and as a local phenomenon of culture.

To analyse institutional forms of organisation with regard to fishing in Pomor villages, the authors apply the theory of path dependence (p. 197). They try to use both approaches of this theory. One approach looks at the changes of social institution characteristics and the emergence of new institutions, while the second approach is the impact of new institutions on social agents. In this way, according to the authors, the current path needs to be rejected (path-shaping) and a new path taken up (p. 198).

The analysis of the transformation of nature management in the Pomor community shows that the Pomor village as a community presents itself altogether as a stable set of daily and seasonal practices. The social institutions of the Pomor villages maintain stability and adherence to the traditional track (path dependence). The fishing *kolkhozes* function as fundamental social institutions, preserving specific socio-cultural features connected with traditional culture and traditional management (p. 220).

As one respondent said: *Chubays*³ says, *no matter how much money we spend on this village, it all disappears. Therefore, I could only tell him: don't give anything, just don't oppress us with taxes* (p. 210).

The new strategy of the Pomors is the attempt to create new social institutions. One of these institutions is the Pomor neighbourhood community of indigenous minorities, which has NGO status. This strategy gives the

³ Chubys was formerly a government official. Today he is a symbol of privatisation and shock therapy in Russia in 1992–1998.

community a new chance for the preservation of the traditional natural resources, community and unique culture (p. 222).

I think this is a correct view and conclusion. Social capital (networking and self-governance) historically plays a very important role during times of transition and survival in Russia. Ordinary people try to do everything themselves when official institutions are strained or have failed.

Therefore Russian people do not like transition times. They identify those as periods of social stagnation. For many local residents the stable power of authority is much better than an unstable, emerging democracy. The Russian language has a special word for such a period – “a bezvremè” (безвремяе). This word has very strong and deep roots in Russian history and culture. In summary this book can be useful for everyone who is interested in emerging economics, the issue of management of renewable natural resources and Russia.

References

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