

## Analysis

# Social Movements for the Preservation of Forests in North-West Russia: From Consumer Boycotts to Fostering Forest Certifications

By Maria Tysiachniouk, St. Petersburg

## Abstract

This article examines the transformation of Russia social movements and their gradual de-radicalization. It shows how a single social movement evolved in Karelia, starting with efforts to use market campaigns to preserve the forests, then becoming involved in negotiations to create special nature preserves, and ultimately participating in the process of forestry certification as an expert organization. It examines how the social movements relate to businesses and the state. Using concrete examples, it demonstrates how a non-governmental organization succeeded in reconciling two completely different roles: serving in opposition to corporations with the goal of requiring them to behave in a socially and ecologically responsible manner and providing expert support to them. In doing this, the article shows how the environmental movement itself and the NGOs within it are changing.

## Introduction

In the first decade of the twenty-first century, the radical social movements that spontaneously appeared to address pressing environmental issues have practically disappeared from Russia. The only exception is the organizations dealing with fill-in construction in urban areas. In fact, the earlier differences that divided the radical social movements from those more inclined to consensus-building activities that were so characteristic of the post-Perestroika period no longer exist. Now the most striking feature of these more-evolved environmental organizations is their high professionalism and expert knowledge, traits which have brought them closer in character to non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Moreover, the contemporary Russian environmental movement has joined the global network of movements and transnational organizations, making it part of the larger global processes.

These changes were driven, in part, by the transformation in the financing of Russian social organizations and NGOs that took place in the first decade of this century. During the Perestroika years and immediately afterwards a large amount of money directed at developing democracy and civil society came into Russia. The environmental organizations were also financed from these funds. Later this income shrunk significantly and the environmental NGOs had to either take money from the state or focus on expert work to support themselves. The transformation in the source of financing had an impact on the character of the NGOs, making them professional and consensus-oriented and, accordingly, less radical. In this article, I analyze this transformation of the Russian environmental movement on the example of an organization working for the pres-

ervation of the old growth forests in the Karelia region of northwest Russia.

The article focuses on social movements that use market mechanisms to influence transnational corporations. The two main forms of market mechanisms are consumer boycott campaigns (striking at the market power of the corporations) and certification procedures. Both strategies seek to build socially and ecologically responsible markets by converting companies from “irresponsible” into “responsible” firms. These market mechanisms function by pressuring corporations through campaigns to mobilize consumers to boycott their goods or, more recently, simply making the threat of such boycotts. By contrast, certification works by identifying and promoting those corporations that demonstrate social and ecological responsibility. The ecological organizations support the most strict certification system, which is voluntary certification backed by the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC). This system is currently being implemented in Russia and it is what I have in mind in discussing certification.

## Market Campaigns

During Soviet times, strict border security prevented economic activity in Karelia’s border forests. However, with the advent of the Gorbachev era reforms, these forests were opened and were actively developed, particularly by suppliers to foreign companies. This activity attracted the attention of environmental organizations, particularly Greenpeace, because according to Greenpeace Karelia’s trees were old growth forests that were valuable to the local ecology or relatively untouched by human intervention. Greenpeace was the first to apply the understanding “old growth” to the

boreal forests of Russia's northwest region. Following Greenpeace, other ecological organizations, like the European Taiga Rescue Network and the Russian organizations Center for Biodiversity Preservation and the Social-Ecological Union, became interested in Karelia's border forests. In working to save the trees, the groups actively discussed issues related to establishing special nature preserves. By 1992, the idea of creating the Kalevala Park in the area began to take shape. This proposal appealed to NGOs in both Russia and Finland because it sought to preserve ethnic villages, along with their folk stories and songs, as well as the surrounding trees. In 1995, under Greenpeace's aegis, the Forestry Club was established to protect the forests and its membership included the Social-Ecological Union, the Center for Biodiversity Preservation and other groups. Additionally, the Karelian Regional Nature Conservancy (SPOK) was established by students who were working with Greenpeace.

The Forestry Club began to monitor the old growth forests in the European part of Russia and particularly in Karelia, where the question of logging old growth forests was particularly acute. During those early post-Soviet years, many Finnish and Swedish forestry firms were active in the area. Formally their actions were legal, but the companies effectively took advantage of the fact that Russia did not have comprehensive environmental legislation in place. The organizations in the Forestry Club began work to define criteria for old growth forests and began preparing a map showing their locations. They also began to monitor the harvesting of the trees and their transportation across the border to Finland.

At the end of the 1990s, the Taiga Rescue Network and Greenpeace began to expand their information activities identifying the location of the old growth forests and the activities of companies working in them from Swedish and Finnish companies to include British and German firms as well. In cooperation with an international network of NGOs, the Forestry Club began to distribute its maps of the old growth forests to all forestry companies and their consumers: pulp and paper mills, publishers, and construction firms. They also gave the maps to the governments of Karelia, Finland, and Sweden. Beginning in 1996, they initiated direct actions in the Kostamuksha region of Karelia and began protesting against the pulp and paper mills of Finnish companies. These actions and the consumer boycotts organized by the NGOs in Europe forced the forestry companies to accept a voluntary moratorium on harvesting the old growth forests. The first company to do so was Stora Enso, which announced a moratorium on cutting in the disputed areas of Karelia.

In 1997, several additional companies joined the moratorium, including the Finnish transnational corporation UPM-Kymmene. Even more companies joined the moratorium in later years. Greenpeace's old growth maps became informal laws for the forestry companies, guiding their activities, or more precisely, the areas where they refused to work. This informal law worked more effectively than the official Russian laws. However, the environmental movement realized that the moratorium on logging old growth areas was only a temporary solution for preserving the forests and continued to seek other tools for conservation, negotiating designation of specially protected areas with governmental agencies and by promoting companies for certification. These types of activities required that the previously radical organizations turn into ones that were more consensus-oriented. Thus, the market campaigns of the 1990s identified the issue of preserving the old growth forests in Karelia and began a process to save them that unfolded over many years. As we will see below, they produced tangible results.

### Negotiations

From the moratoriums, which provided only a temporary solution, the environmental NGOs began searching for an official way to defend the status of the forests. To achieve this goal, the NGOs had to join negotiations at various levels of government: local, republican, and federal. The environmental organizations led by Greenpeace tried to place the Karelian forests on the UNESCO World Heritage list. They proposed that Russia, Finland, and Norway jointly create a Fennoscandia "greenbelt" which would include 20 forests located on 1,000 km of border territory. However, this initiative did not succeed.

At the same time, the European Union set aside grant money for the creation of four specially protected areas, which included Kalevala Park. This park already had been the object of dispute between the NGOs and the forestry companies, and the NGOs had sought to use boycotts to pressure the companies into accepting their view of the park. Ultimately, to create the park, the NGOs had to engage in numerous negotiations and dispute-resolution procedures, forcing them to stop acting as a member of the opposition and develop a completely different practice: seeking compromise.

The process of agreeing to set up the park, which proceeded in parallel at various levels of government, was slowed by the contradictory interests of the federal and regional authorities and also by the on-going process of reforming the forestry sector. In 2000–2001, an agreement was reached at the local (municipal) lev-

el. However, republican officials objected to what they thought was the unacceptably large size of the territory. The main burden for finding a compromise and fighting for the territory fell on the shoulders of the NGOs. Only in 2002 did the documents go to Moscow for final agreement, where they started to move from one agency to the next, usually with great delay. The problem was that there was a partial change in the responsible agencies and people, who were dealing with this question, and a reassignment of functional responsibilities.

As a result of the delays, the environmental impact assessment eventually expired. Ultimately Greenpeace paid for a new one. In this sense it played a role that was completely unsuited for a radical environmental group. For Greenpeace, the question of preserving the old growth forests was the top priority and the organization could not allow the state delays to block the process of creating the park. Finally, the park was officially created in 2006. The negotiations continued for a long time regarding all the other disputed territories as well. As a result of the efforts of the NGOs, some of the old growth forests were transformed into special nature preserves. Accordingly, in 2009 all the territories with old growth forests entered into the system of state territorial planning as possible preserves. However, to ensure that these territories actually become preserves, the NGO must still do much more work: conduct negotiations with companies that are leasing these plots and achieve the agreement of governments at all levels to create the preserves. Achieving these goals means participating in numerous new negotiations.

Fortunately, the certification process greatly eased the interactions between the NGOs and business. According to the standards of forestry certification, the old growth forests are considered to be of high conservation value and therefore cannot be cut down. The companies began, where they could, to respect prohibitions on cutting down trees in the disputed plots, seeking to avoid conflicts with the NGOs and violations of the certification standards in cases where the certification of the company was in question. Where they could not give up the plots, they continued the old moratoriums or signed new ones with the NGOs. Thus, the NGOs gained a new instrument for dialogue with business, which they began to use actively, working in the framework of the certification process.

### Working as Experts

In 2004–2010 the certification process moved quickly in Russia and in 2006 Russia moved into second place, behind Canada, in terms of the amount of certified for-

estry territory in the world. During the process of certification, corporations began actively to recruit environmental NGOs to serve as experts in facilitating compliance with the standards. The certification process took place at the same time that foreign grant-makers sharply reduced their financing for NGOs. Accordingly, many NGOs began to engage in the certification process in order to develop a new and reasonably stable source of financing. The enterprises that sought expert help from the NGOs were seeking to satisfy principles 6 and 9 of the certification standards of the FSC. The sixth principle focuses on preserving biological diversity and unique and fragile ecosystems; the ninth principle calls for saving high conservation value forests.

The SPOK NGO is among the groups working with businesses as certification experts. However, the organization did not give up its monitoring role for the opposition. Thus, in its work with Karelian companies, SPOK has carried out a double function: both as partner and as a “punitive-observer.” In addition to providing expert services to numerous companies seeking certification, SPOK could, for example, place one at the bottom of a ratings list that it compiled or even send a complaint to an auditor.

Although SPOK works as a certification expert and is a registered consultant for the FSC, its main priority remains the preservation of old growth forests. As a consequence of these different priorities, SPOK, in the course of its certification consultations, devotes primary attention to the question of preserving virgin forests and only secondarily worries about the companies’ interest in addressing other FSC principles and criteria and preparing an obstacle-free path toward certification. As a result, the companies themselves must address the various aspects of certification that do not concern virgin forests, the preservation of valuable ecosystems and the maintenance of biodiversity.

The relations between SPOK and the companies it consults with are best illustrated on the example of its relations with the holding-company Investlesprom, and particularly its subsidiary “Northern Logging Company” (NLC), which works in Karelia.

In 2006, the partnership between SPOK and the company was relatively smooth since at first the lands the company leased held few virgin forests. The question of maintaining biodiversity interested the company to such an extent that it worked with SPOK in 2007 to develop a “Field Guide to Identifying Biodiversity in Central Karelia.” In 2009 SPOK developed a similar guide for all of Karelia. SPOK instructed company experts in this matter and, according to the conditions

of the contract, continued to research the territory for particularly valuable forestry tracts.

The disagreements with NLC began later, when, thanks to the company's insufficient managerial resources, it did not pay enough attention to preserving biodiversity. In the course of raids conducted during 2008 and 2009, SPOK uncovered many violations and examples of only partial fulfillments of company obligations in this area. Additionally, when the NGO further researched the leased tracts, it identified many more valuable forests that it wanted to preserve. In 2007, SPOK found an old growth forest near Lake Maslozero, where the company planned to log and had even built a road. The question of whether to log in this area became the topic of heated conversations. During the course of these discussions, SPOK transformed from an "ideal partner" into an "active opponent." However, long discussions resulted in a compromise that was acceptable for both sides. Nevertheless, as the company's territory expanded, many more disputed tracts were found. For example, the company acquired a forestry processing factory in Muezerski Raion, where there are several virgin forests. SPOK had already fought for many years with the factory to preserve these lands and then began to spar with the holding company once it gained control of these forests. A compromise was found for these lands as well.

These are only two examples of the difficult discussions and negotiations, during the course of which SPOK transformed at times from a consulting company back into a radical NGO prepared to fight to preserve the virgin forests. It is true that in achieving compromise the sides once again became partners. Nevertheless, in 2009–2010 disagreements once again arose regarding the planned nature preserve that had been included in the territorial planning documents governing forests in different parts of Karelia. Even as I write this article, SPOK must resolve many issues connected with virgin

forests and especially valuable ecosystems. A large number of differences await resolution, requiring the NGO to use its entire arsenal of influence levers—from expert consultation and negotiations to the toughest oppositional pressure tactics.

### Conclusion

The case study examined here demonstrated one of the key differences distinguishing Russian social movements from their foreign counterparts. In Western Europe, in countries with a highly developed civil society, NGOs as a rule occupy various niches and different NGOs play different roles: the radicals fight and back the opposition, while those that seek consensus pursue negotiations. Combining these two various functions in one NGO is extremely rare. In Russia, the situation is different. Here only a limited number of NGOs are active, most of them having been set up during the Perestroika period. Given such a limited number of organizations, they must address various questions, occupying two niches at the same time. The limited availability of financing also facilitates this situation since it forces NGOs to become involved in various types of projects simply to ensure their survival. Thus, when it had a chance to win a grant to create a nature preserve, SPOK became involved in this issue. Similarly, SPOK took advantage of the opportunity to work on certification as an expert organization since this effort gave it the chance to combine striving toward its goals with an opportunity to finance its activities. Accordingly, in Russia, the division of labor between radical and consensus-oriented groups that is characteristic for the world's third sector began to disappear at the beginning of the 2000s. This case study showed that this trend affected the once most radical organizations and social movements. They did not give up their radical approaches, but began to combine them with negotiations and expert activity.

#### *About the Author*

Maria Tysiachniouk is a researcher at the Center for Independent Social Research in St. Petersburg.

#### *Further Reading*

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