

Chapter 23

Russian Arctic Cities' Sustainable Development Strategies

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ABSTRACT

The main research objective of this chapter is to examine sustainable development strategies (SDSs) of urban centers of the Arctic Zone of Russia (AZRF). There are three specific purposes for this analysis: first, to evaluate the scope and focus of such strategies; second, to find out whether these strategies are efficient or not and whether they improve the situation in the particular city or not; third, to understand whether these policies are of short-term/single-issue character or they represent forward-looking/comprehensive strategies. The Arctic municipalities view building SDSs as an important policy priority for themselves. They have tried to create proper legal and institutional settings for the development and implementation of such strategies. They have made great strides in implementing some sustainability-related projects over the last 10 to 15 years. There was a clear shift from survival/reactive to capacity-building/proactive SDSs. Despite some residual problems and shortcomings, AZRF cities' SDSs evolve in a rather dynamic and positive way.

INTRODUCTION

In the post-Soviet era, the Arctic Zone of the Russian Federation (AZRF) experienced numerous challenges ranging from the disruption of traditional economic relations, division of labor between different industries and regions to environmental mess left by the Soviet extractive industries and military. Among the most recent challenges, global climate change should be noted. This phenomenon has rather contradictory implications for the AZRF. On the one hand, it creates greater opportunities to exploit oil, natural gas, and other mineral and biological resources as well as shipping lanes in the Arctic Ocean. In turn, this could be conducive for the revival and modernization of the AZRF industrial base and, hence, further development of the Arctic urban centers where the industrial potential is concentrated.

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On the other hand, extracting natural resources and intensive exploitation of maritime routes will require labor migration into the AZRF. The effect of climate change is amplified in the AZRF urban centers, where the presence of population, natural resource, and transport infrastructure development and other human activities exert additional pressure on Arctic ecosystems. Promoting urban sustainability in the Arctic is critical because the fragility of the environment, economy, and population makes mistakes more costly and likely to have a lasting impact than they would in more resilient environments. Policy makers and corporations focused on maximizing profit margins are not paying sufficient attention to such sustainability concerns meaning that the continuation of current practices could do irreparable damage to the Arctic environment. The growing ethnic, religious and cultural diversity of the AZRF population challenges social cohesion of local communities and calls for new social strategies to harmonize inter-ethnic and inter-confessional relations in the region.

The main research objective of this study is to examine how sustainable development strategy (SDS) is being shaped and implemented by the AZRF industrialized centers. There are three specific purposes to this analysis: first, to evaluate the scope and focus of SDSs (including environmental programs) that are implemented by AZRF cities, such as Apatity, Arkhangelsk, Monchegorsk, Murmansk, Nickel, Norilsk, Salekhard, Severodvinsk, Vorkuta, and so forth; second, to find out whether these strategies are efficient or not and whether they improve the situation with regard to social well-being or not; and third, to understand whether these policies are of short-term/single-issue character or represent forward-looking strategies that are conducive to the sustainable socio-economic and environmental development of the northern urban areas.

BACKGROUND

Conceptual Framework

According to both the Russian political leadership (Government of the Russian Federation, 2009, 2013) and expert community (Dodin, 2005; Kochemasov, Morgunov, & Solomatin, 2009; Perelet, Kukushkina, & Travnikov, 2000; Selin & Vasiliev, 2010), SDS is a key principle of Russia's national policy in the AZRF. In Russian scholarship, sustainable development is an eclectic concept, as a wide array of views fall under its umbrella. Its definition dates back to the 1987 UN Brundtland report, which defines sustainable development as "development which meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (United Nations, 1987). Russian experts differ in their interpretation of the SD concept.

One school, the "economists", following the Brundtland report's approach, believes that sustainable development is a pattern of resource use that aims to meet human needs while preserving the environment so that these needs can be met not only in the present but also for future generations. For this school, SD is an economy in equilibrium with basic ecological support systems. As for the AZRF, the "economists" insist on the need to preserve its fragile ecological balance while exploring and developing the region's natural resources. They oppose an unlimited economic growth and call for a mandatory ecological expertise on all developmental projects (Dobretsov & Pokhilenko, 2010; Kochemasov et al., 2009; Kontorovich et al., 2010).

The "green" (environmentalist) school places emphasis on the ecological aspects of the SD concept. The "greens" believe that the Arctic ecosystem is unique and – at the same time – fragile. For this reason,

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