

1.3 Managing sustainable development of local communities in northern Russia

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DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.7557/5.3199>

Introduction

One of the key problems hindering the transition to sustainable development of local communities nowadays is the deficit in involvement of the internal assets, such as business, local initiatives, leadership, and creativity. In developed countries, people's ability to self-organization and their quality of life became the main local community development concern in the second half of the 20th century. One of the settings for effective regional development is maintaining the connection between the level of local community development and its ability for self-organization. On the one hand, the activities for the development of local communities means bringing people living in the same area together, and having common interests. On the other hand, the establishment of local communities involves activities to improve the infrastructure and economy (through creating jobs, organizing healthcare and education, etc.) so that people feel comfortable in their home territory. Development of a particular area seems to be inseparably linked with the development of local communities and the building of social capital.

The analysis of socio-economic processes taking place in the local community considers social capital as the level of social connectedness of the group living in the same territory. The sustainable development of the Northern territories of Russian under a market economy defines that social capital, and its deriving social networks and partnerships, is of special significance. During the period of industrialization and development of the Northern territories under the planned Soviet economy, the raw materials export model dominated. The efficiency of the economy was determined by the quantitative increase in amount of investments and exports. However, the quality of life in areas of raw materials development was hardly improving despite that at that time the government was responsible for building social infrastructure.



After the transition from a centrally-planned economy to a market economy, Russia is still mostly a resource-based economy. The implementation of major investment projects leads to optimizing the number of workers in the enterprises, or the creation of seasonal jobs. The arrangement and development of social facilities are almost entirely the responsibility of government; business and the population are debarred. Therefore, building social capital in the Northern territories, and thereby structuring the relationships between people, makes the most important foundation for effective self-organization at the local level. At the same time, the capacity for self-organization is understood as the ability for collective approval of the directions for regional development, joint decision-making around those directions, and shared activities for implementing the decisions.

From the governmental point of view, the ability to self-organize can provide the basis for the development of local responses to local problems. Recently, local authorities are beginning to apply so-called 'interactive control', implying greater involvement by citizens in the process of local decision-making in the early stages. In this context, the development of the local community is a development of the ability to start the initiative, and to participate in the elaboration of collective decisions on local issues. Solving these problems requires an understanding of the mechanisms of local community development. That is, the mechanisms of social capital building, finding the sense of belonging and common interests among locals, as well as the ability of people to collectively defend their interests.

Sustainable development

One of the ways to achieve sustainable development was proposed more than 20 years ago by the UN Conference on Environment and Development, which was held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992. At that point, the development and implementation of the "Agenda 21" was proclaimed. When this was applied to a particular area, it was called the "Local Agenda for the Twenty-First Century (LA21). LA21 is simply a framework, the contents of which local authorities can carry out in accordance with the priorities and needs of their territory. This is because Agenda 21 is not a law, it is an international conference accord (United Nations 1992).

As we can see in many countries today, the Agenda 21 - LA21 initiative has become one of the most successful set of measures to bring social development towards sustainability. For example, in 2002 during the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg the



assessment of such work presented data on the 6,500 local initiatives in 113 countries around the world, at both the level of large regions and small towns and rural areas. “Rio + 20” announced the establishment of multi-stakeholder partnerships in 150 countries, 2015 localities (regions, districts, cities) and 20150 communities around the world to strengthen the implementation of Agenda 21 for the achievement of “The Future We Want “ (United Nations 2012). A special session at the conference about the expansion and replication of best practices in partnerships for sustainable development was held. It focused on three thematic clusters: energy, sustainable development of urban and rural settlements, and water problems.

The active participation of local communities in sustainable development is caused by the fact that it is the local level, where people, first of all, notice the problems arising not only in economic activity, but also in environment, or the social sphere. Many of the problems in transition to a sustainable development are effectively addressed at the local level. Therefore, each city, municipality, or district can create a unique long-term plan for achieving sustainable development, which should be reflected in the goals, objectives, and priorities for development of the territory according to its own nature. The plan should also refer to specific activities, their duration, responsible persons, mechanisms and tools to achieve the goals, provide control mechanisms and correction plan, and the monitoring system.

The worldwide experience of local communities suggests that the fundamental characteristics of the Local Agenda approach compared to traditional forms of planning and local development are the following (Sivogorakov 2007):

- The Local Agenda approach is initiated and developed not only by the local authorities, but often non-governmental organizations, citizens' groups, individual active citizens;
- The principle of partnership between the government, business, and civil society actors in the preparation and implementation of the Local Agenda approach is a key condition for the success of local initiatives;
- The Local Agenda approach is primarily a “process” that focuses on constant action and results. It is not designed as a “document” on the sustainable development of the territory;
- In accordance with the principles of sustainable development, the Local Agenda approach is based on an integrated approach, combining economic, social, environmental, and institutional objectives with the mechanisms for achieving them.



The concept of sustainable development has such an appeal: “Think globally - act locally.” This means that when choosing a strategy one must take into account two aspects – on the one hand the global trend of development, and on the other hand the peculiarity and specific features of the territory for which you are developing the LA 21: including its geopolitical position, demographic situation, environmental characteristics, its history, the culture of inhabiting ethnicities, its economic characteristics, and others. Currently, the UN is active in promoting the LA 21 practice, creating for this purpose a special program of the United Nations Human Settlements Programme, UN-HABITAT, which for the past ten years also been actively working in Russia.

Sustainable development in Russia

Russian regions and municipalities are on the way to forming strategies based on the principles of sustainable development. In particular, the Russian Scientific Research Institute of Urbanism (RosNIPI Urbanistki) explores the possibilities of adapting international practices to modern Russian conditions for sustainable development of local communities in specific model areas: Vyborg, Kirishi, Tobolsk, Tyumen, Pskov, and others (Russian North-West and Siberia). For the first time, the Russian Institute researched public involvement in solving urban environmental problems on the sample of model cities. The Tomsk region has the greatest experience with the institutions and instruments of sustainable development in Russia's Northern territories. The Local Agenda 21 was established for the Tomsk region of Tomsk oblast.

In the Russian Federation, according to the Union of Russian Cities, about 10% out of 2.5 thousand local authorities are involved in activities of LA21 or similar. The experience of the Russian regions, cities, and rural areas shows that for such a large area as Russia, there not enough local initiatives that create LA21. The reasons, in our opinion are, first of all, a lack of awareness regarding the idea of sustainable development and LA21, an insufficient number of publications in the field of sustainable community development, and a lack of information on what already exists.

It may also be indicated that in Russia as a whole, and in its North in particular, the development of local communities and the self-organization of the population are still at the elementary level. The reason for such a state can be assumed in the lack of co-operation skills and experience in the organization of collective action, as well as not understanding common



interests and the effectiveness of a collective defense of their interests. This situation can be regarded as the legacy of the Soviet period, when the general interests of the citizens were not formulated by the people, but were imposed from above. Therefore, it is necessary to show positive examples of collective action in the transformation of the economy and social infrastructure, and to enforce the involvement in positive joint activities for the development of local communities. An important result of people's involvement in joint ventures and the formation of the local community is their emerging faith in their own capabilities and their ability to influence their economic and social development.

An important role in the development of local communities is given to scientific organizations that are able to develop a methodology and adapt the experience gained in OECD countries in managing regional sustainable development. The creation of planning models based on the principles of sustainable development can significantly speed up administrative involvement in the implementation of Agenda 21. There is a great role to be played in the establishment of local communities, and the implementation of Agenda 21, by regional universities and colleges, as they are primarily about education but are not limited to education. Universities are both regional and federal entities that interact with the local communities, the local labour market, and the economy. They also implement federal educational and research policy. The former role of universities in the region consisted only of skills training, but currently the community expects to receive advice from university experts. This is especially important for Northern areas that are remote from major scientific and educational centers in Russia.

Sustainable development and social entrepreneurship

The phased implementation of the LA21 approach in the Komi Republic is engaged through the Center for Sustainable Development of the North, based at the Syktyvkar State University (Center). The main area of activity is the study of the Northern territories in terms of their economic, social, and environmental realities, with the goal to building a rationale for the transition to sustainable development. The goals and objectives of the Center coincide with the needs of the region as a Northern territory.

First of all, the Center's activity consists of educational programs and projects, for example, the School of Social and Environmental Entrepreneurship (School). Its experts have developed an authentic program on social entrepreneurship; they have conducted workshops and training



seminars on the development of projects on sustainable development in four rural areas. School audiences discussed projects aimed at solving social and environmental problems of their village or municipal district. As a result, some projects have received grant support from the Government of the Republic of Komi. Currently, experts from the Centre consult with the students of the School, and then monitor the social and environmental projects supported by the governmental financial aid. Social entrepreneurship is a priority educational project of the Center as social entrepreneurship creates and maintains social capital, and unites people and organizations to promote the social and environmental innovations.

The prerequisites of social entrepreneurship in Russia result primarily from the Russian State's decision to support a competitive environment for delivering social services. This decision is related to the following problem: budget allocates more funds to support the distribution of social services, but the service is not improving. This creates a high demand for additional services in childhood education, sports and leisure activities, senior services, and others. Non-profit organizations and social entrepreneurs can now compete with state and municipal agencies to provide social services.

The increased participation of non-governmental organizations in social services could be provided in the following areas (www.asi.ru):

- Growth in the public demand for social services provided by non-governmental organizations.
- Growths in the supply of social services provided by non-governmental organizations.
- Elaboration of mechanisms for public-private partnerships in the social sphere.

The workshops experience allows us to make some initial conclusions about the prospects and possibilities of social entrepreneurship in the Komi Republic. Participants of the seminar represented the government, small business, socially-oriented non-profit organizations, and proactive citizens.

It should be noted that most of the ideas of those who were attending the School of Social Entrepreneurship focused on solving social problems and serving the interests of local communities. However, the proposed valuable social ideas are hardly fulfilled within the business models: social projects do not generate the income needed to support the work of the project's social entrepreneurs over the long term. In this case, the only source of funding is a



gratuitous grant support. In order to proceed from initial idea towards a business model, it is necessary to adapt the idea to a market project. The initiators of the social projects lack some dynamic leadership and vision of an adequate sustainable financial model. One of the ways to solve this problem could be a partnership of private and public organizations. This may help from the perspective of solving social problems, but it is often difficult because of different interests. Therefore, it is necessary to develop and implement a training system for the management of such a partnership.

Some experts define a significant role of local public self-government (LPSG) in the process of establishing of local communities. In the Komi Republic, in May 2014 there were 56 LPSGs and an additional 22 were in the formation stage. The most active involvement of citizens to the LPSG is in the rural areas. Thus, in the different districts of the Komi Republic the registered number of LPSG's is: Priluzsky – 17; Koigorodskiy and Sysolsky areas – 7, Ust-Kulom – 8; in other rural areas – 4. In 2013, the authorities of LPSG in the Republic of Komi implemented 22 local initiatives, more than 43% of which occur in the construction of playgrounds and sports grounds, 26% for the repair of roads and pavements, 17% for the provision of water, 9% for the improvement of the local area, and 4% for environmental protection.

These data indicate that the LPSG activities promote the formation of local communities, and the inclusion of people solving local social and environmental problems. Development of the system of LPSG in the Komi Republic is delegated to the Association of Local Public Self-Government, who provides free services to local communities in the establishment and operation of LPSG throughout the region.

Closing

There is no clear opinion on the status of public self-government at the present time. There are various views. To some it is about volunteering and fundraising. Lawyers note its dual legal nature: LPSG with the seal and bank account is an NGO, and a community meeting could be given the status of a representative body in a small village. This diversity of opinion comes from a variety of practices of local public self-governance, its forms of implementation, areas of activity, and systems of interaction with business, local government, and regional authorities. LPSG is considered as an actor of social and administrative influence, which is able to initiate and organize habitat change, build relationships within the local community, as well as



interaction with the environment. Therefore, it is very important to study the process of local initiatives that create a LPSG, as well as the future prospects for the local communities of rural settlements.

Nowadays, the Komi Republic has enough prerequisites for the development and implementation of local plans to make a transition to sustainable development that meets international requirements specified in the Agenda 21 initiative. The Center for Sustainable Development in the North of Syktyvkar State University could contribute to necessary organizations and consultations, their design and implementation. This process may include informing and initial training of local communities; establishing a group of stakeholders and partners; data gathering and analyzing existing problems; examining prospects for the local community with a SWOT-analysis; creating the “image of the desired future”; action planning (including financial planning); preparing an integration plan with local regulations; broadcasting the plan to the population to get acquainted and to attract new stakeholders; starting working groups; implementing the plan; monitoring and evaluating the results; making adjustments to the plan, and changing some of the activities.

The main difference between the proposed plan for area management from the traditional plans of socio-economic development is in the active participation of the public in the preparation (from bottom to top) and the implementation (moving authorities and the population towards each other). Testing and adaptation of LA21 to the conditions of rural Komi Republic will contribute to a set of management tools for local development for the benefit of sustainability.

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