

Indexing Arctic Urban Sustainable Development Planning Strategies: The Case of Russia

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Russian Arctic cities acknowledge the need to build sustainable development strategies (SDSs) to ensure their long-term socioeconomic and ecological viability. They try to create proper conceptual, legal and institutional settings for the development and implementation of such strategies. First and foremost the Arctic cities aim to create and develop an efficient strategy planning system which is seen as a necessary precondition for successful urban SDS. This paper aims to discuss possible indicators to evaluate the SDS planning process in the major industrial cities of the Russian Arctic). The following indicators will be discussed:

- *Ability to acknowledge the need for SDS planning.*
- *Integrated/comprehensive nature of planning.*
- *The existence/non-existence of a planning office in the city.*
- *Clearly defined goals, outcomes/expectations, implementation strategies, including indicators and benchmarks.*
- *Quality and accuracy of assessments (whether it is based on science or wishful thinking).*
- *Coordination with the regional and federal SDS.*
- *Transparency of the planning process.*
- *Public input/community engagement (opinion polls, public discussions in the media, hearings in the public chambers, NGO's role).*
- *Ability to take into account private and public interests.*
- *Centralized or indicative planning.*

Introduction

The Russian Arctic municipalities view the need to build sustainable development strategies (SDS) as an important policy priority for themselves. They try to create proper conceptual, legal and institutional settings for the development and implementation of such strategies. First and foremost the Arctic cities aim to create and develop an efficient strategy planning system which is seen as a necessary precondition for successful urban SDS.

Planning is an integral part of any urban development strategy, including for Russian Arctic cities and towns. City administrators understand that planning gives more power over the future. Planning is deciding in advance what to do, how to do it, when to do it, and who should do it. This bridges the gap from where the city is, to where it wants to be. The planning function involves establishing goals and arranging them in logical order. A well-planned city achieves goals faster than the ones that don't plan before implementation.

Planning is especially important for designing a proper urban sustainable development (SD) strategy because the latter requires an integrated approach to the developmental policies where all aspects of such strategy – economic, social and environmental - should be harmonized and coordinated. Planning for urban sustainability is also important because all potential stakeholders – municipal, regional and federal authorities, companies, universities and civil society institutions/NGOs – should be involved in the SD strategy formulation and implementation.

This paper aims to discuss possible indicators to evaluate the SDS planning process in the major industrial cities of the Arctic Zone of the Russian Federation (AZRF), including Arkhangelsk, Murmansk, Nickel, Norilsk, Salekhard, Severodvinsk and Vorkuta.

Data and Method

The data for this study are drawn from the following sources:

- Regional and municipal development and action plans;
- Regional/local government reports;
- Position/background papers;
- Analytical reports produced by research centers and NGOs; and
- Media reports.

As with any study of sensitive political issues, it's difficult to compile a set of reliable data. Information is often contradictory, misleading or not fully reported. Research is also complicated by differences of opinion between scholars as regards methods of assessment and interpretation of sources. Moreover, research techniques and terminology vary. Therefore, the exercise of judgment and comparing of sources are important elements in compiling the database.

Since the study does not just entail data collection but also data assessment three main principles are implemented with regard to selecting and interpreting sources:

- *Validity*. Data should represent most important and typical trends rather than occasional or irregular developments in the AZRF cities' SD policies.
- *Informativeness*. Sources that provide valuable and timely information are given priority.
- *Innovativeness*. Sources that offer original data, fresh ideas and non-traditional approaches are preferable.

These research techniques help to overcome the limitations of the sources and compile substantial and sufficient data for this study.

The Russian Urban Development Planning: Conceptual and Legal Aspects

Given the highly centralized nature of Russian political and administrative systems, the AZRF municipal SD strategies are dependent on and interlinked to federal policies in this area. Municipal strategies are based on numerous conceptual and normative documents issued by Moscow, although the federal centre encourages subnational units to take into account local peculiarities and suggest solutions to the specific problems of the AZRF. That's why it is important to understand what kind of conceptual/doctrinal and legal basis for SD strategies exists on the federal level.

It should be noted that conceptually the Russian (then Soviet) SD national strategies (in their environmental form) date back to Mikhail Gorbachev's 1987 Murmansk speech, which included a section on the ecological problems of the Arctic. That speech was well received by the Nordic countries and led to various environmental initiatives, such as Finland's 1989 initiative on Arctic environmental protection cooperation, which resulted in a number of technical and scientific reports between 1989 and 1991. This ultimately led to the development of the Arctic Environment Protection Strategy (AEPS) in 1991 and the establishment of the Arctic Council in 1996 (Heininen, 2004: 208-209).

In the social sphere, Moscow's policies aim to foster favorable conditions for the sustainable development of Indigenous peoples. For example, in 2009, the Russian government approved the concept of sustainable development for the Indigenous small-numbered peoples of the North, Siberia, and the Far East (Putin, 2009). Among other things, the concept set forth the general task of raising the quality of life in these regions to the Russian average and the specific task of halving the infant mortality rate (as of 2007) by 2025. However, these policies have still not come close to their targets and are harshly criticized by Russia's Indigenous peoples and national and international human rights organizations (Rohr, 2014).

Moscow actively partook in developing the UN Sustainable Development Goals (2015) and accepted them as a conceptual basis for its national strategy.

As far as legal aspects of Russia's SD strategies are concerned Moscow signed and ratified the most important international agreements on environment protection and SD: the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (1982); Convention on Biodiversity (1992); International Convention for the Regulation of Whaling (1946); Fish Stocks Agreement (1995); the UNESCO Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage (1972); Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (1979); Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (1973); Convention on the Prevention of Marine Pollution by Dumping of Waste and Other Matters (1972); International Convention on Oil Pollution Preparedness, Response, and Cooperation (1990); Agreement on Cooperation on Marine Oil Pollution Preparedness and Response in the Arctic (2013); the International Maritime Organization's Polar Code (November 2014 and May 2015); and the 2015 Paris Agreement under the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change.

To date, Russia has a reputation as a responsible regional player that duly implemented the above international agreements.

Moscow made great strides to internalize these international documents and make them an integral part of its national legislation. The Russian national legislation on environment

protection includes the following legal acts: Federal Law on Environment Protection (2002), Water Code of the Russian Federation (2006), Federal Law on Internal Marine Waters and Territorial Sea (1998), Federal Law on the Continental Shelf (1995), Federal Law on Fauna (1995), Russian Federal Law on the Ratification of the Convention on Biodiversity (1995), and Federal Law on the Northern Sea Route (2012). This legislation constitutes an integral part of the international governance system in the Arctic region.

In addition to the SD/environmental legislation, the Kremlin managed to develop the normative basis for strategic planning. In June 2014, President Putin (2014) signed a federal law on strategic planning that prescribed for all levels of government – national, regional and municipal – having three types of strategic documents: a strategy for socioeconomic development, a forecast of socioeconomic development and specific programs to implement the two former documents. According to this law, the municipalities should define strategic objectives for socioeconomic development and organize monitoring and control over strategic plans implementation. The law also established major principles of strategic planning, such as coherence and integrity; delimitation of powers between various levels of government; sustainability and continuity; balanced nature of the planning system; result-oriented approach and efficiency; clear responsibilities of managers; transparency of the planning process; feasibility and realistic approach; resource-based approach; measurability; relevance of indicators to objectives and program-targeted principles.

The law on strategic planning has become a legal basis for the development of various normative documents regulating the planning process at the regional and municipal levels. For example, in 2012 the Russian Agency for Strategic Initiatives (ASI) has launched an Investment Standard (Standard 1.0) to improve the business climate in the Russian regions and increase their investment attractiveness (see <http://asi.ru/investclimate/standard/>). Having started as a pilot project in eleven Russian regions, the Standard 1.0 became a mandatory instrument for assessment of a region's efficiency in the investment sphere since 2013.

The similar investment standard (Standard 2.0) was developed for municipalities as well. The focus was made on creation of planning and managerial structures in the city/town administrations, including the so-called investment boards; identification of proper objects for investment; building infrastructure for investment projects; training municipal officials, etc.

Initially, it was planned to launch the Standard 2.0 implementation in 2014. However, only a limited number of Russian cities and towns were able to do it. Currently, this standard is being introduced only on a voluntary basis and mainly in the regions that successfully implemented the Standard 1.0 (Emelyanova, 2014).

Although both standards were heavily criticized for their technocratic character and ignorance of local realities (especially in Russia's remote regions), it was a rather useful exercise in strategic planning which can bring some fruit in a foreseeable future.

Measuring Sustainable Development Planning in Russia's Arctic Industrial Centers

When indexing the progress in planning the AZRF SD strategies the following indicators should be taken into account.

First and foremost it is important to find out whether the Russian Arctic cities aim to create and develop an efficient strategy planning system. To make judgments on the administrative/management mechanism's efficiency it is necessary to examine whether the city leadership is able to acknowledge *the need for SD strategy planning* or not. As municipal documents show, the AZRF local governments understand the importance of having a sort of SD strategy. None of the AZRF industrial cities has a special SD strategy but there are sections in the city development plans/strategies that are relevant to this problematique. These sections can be titled differently, such as, for example, "Human/social capital development", "Sustainable socio-economic development", "Sustainable ecological development", etc.

It is also important to know whether city planning is of an *integrated/comprehensive nature* or addresses specific SD-related challenges. It should be noted that only large (by Arctic standards) cities have development strategies of their own. Relatively small urban settlements usually have the so-called 'target programs' related to the SD problematique. For example, Nickel (the Murmansk Region) has a municipal program on provision of urban amenities and urban development but lacks an integrated development plan (see <http://admnickel.ru/celevyeprogrammy.html>). Interestingly, Severodvinsk, which is a rather large city with a population of some 185,000, stopped adopting complex and long-term plans of socio-economic development and replaced them with some three-year forecasts/indicative plans and targeted programs (see <http://severodvinsk.info/?idmenu=48> <http://severodvinsk.info/?idmenu=48>).

It is also important to know whether a *special strategy planning office* exists in an Arctic city or not. Most AZRF municipalities prefer to charge their economic departments with planning functions rather than involve units responsible with environmental or social policies. This brings a certain "economic bias" to their development programs at the expense of social/humanitarian and environmental dimensions of their SD strategies. This also may challenge the integrated/comprehensive nature of planning and give the local development plans a sectoral/single-issue character. For example, the Murmansk (Murmansk City Government, 2013) and Severodvinsk (Severodvinsk City Government, 2010) development plans include almost all aspects of the SD strategy (except food security). However, the Arkhangelsk development strategy (Arkhangelsk City Government, 2008) prioritizes only sectors, such as transport infrastructure, health care, education and cultural heritage preservation and almost completely ignores food, environmental, community, personal and political security.

Planning units are very small and normally consist of several managers even in the largest AZRF cities, such as Arkhangelsk, Murmansk and Norilsk. For this reason, these units are often unable to fully comply with all classical requirements of the planning management algorithm, including strategy formulation and implementation. It is also very difficult for them to properly coordinate their activities with other city administration units which are also involved in the planning and implementation process. For the same reason, it is uneasy to 'mainstream' urban sustainability plans in the sense that all parts of the government have some stake in achieving the goals.

One more indicator of successful SD city planning policy is whether it has *clearly defined goals, outcomes, expectations and implementation strategies*. It appears that most city development programs have clearly defined objectives, outcomes and implementation strategies, including indicators and benchmarks. However, they may differ by specific details. For example, while the Murmansk (2013), Norilsk (2012), Severodvinsk (2010) and Vorkuta (2014) strategies have a detailed

description of the implementation mechanisms and indicator systems, the Arkhangelsk (2008) and Salekhard (2007) ones limit themselves to depicting specific project management procedures and setting some general indicators.

It is also useful to know what *quality and accuracy of assessments* are inherent to the policy planning process? In other words, whether planning is based on science or wishful thinking? It should be noted that strategy planning documents of the AZRF municipalities are based on empirical data and research produced either by analytical units of city administrations or research/educational organizations – local or from other Russian regions. Among the latter the Moscow-based ASI, Institute for Urban Economics, Council for the Study of Productive Forces (Russian Foreign Trade Academy), as well as the St. Petersburg-based Leontief Center, Russian State Research Institute for Urban Studies, etc. should be mentioned.

To shape efficient SD strategies the AZRF municipalities should *effectively coordinate their policies with regional and federal authorities*. The AZRF municipalities aim to develop a proper legal basis for SD strategies, including power-sharing with the federal and regional governments. As mentioned above, by federal law, the Russian municipalities must coordinate their development plans/programs with the regional and federal SD strategies. However, this is done by the AZRF cities in different ways. For example, in the Murmansk development plan each strategic priority is linked to the specific regional and federal programs (Murmansk City Government, 2013: 108-169). On the contrary, the Arkhangelsk, Norilsk, Salekhard and Vorkuta development strategies mention the need to coordinate it with the higher levels of governments *in passim* (Arkhangelsk City Government, 2008: 51-52; Norilsk City Government, 2012: 105-107; 170; Salekhard City Government, 2007: 32-33; Vorkuta City Government, 2014: 84).

The AZRF municipalities are rather cautious about any federal initiatives in the field of strategic planning. For example, Moscow's efforts to introduce the Standard 2.0 got a cold shoulder in the northern cities. In 2014, about 80 municipalities across the country were selected to implement the project. However, in the AZRF, only the Murmansk region, where the Standard 1.0 was fully implemented, participates in the experiment with the Standard 2.0. Four municipalities are considered pilot ones (Pechenga and Kola districts, Monchegorsk and Murmansk); other municipalities (Polyarnye Zori, Apatity, Kirovsk, Olenegorsk, and Kovdorsky, Lovozersky, Tersky and Kandalaksha districts) implement only certain elements of the Standard 2.0. The only municipality that has fully implemented all elements of the Standard 2.0 is Murmansk itself. This can be explained by the fact that it is a capital of the region that has larger financial and human resources than other municipalities (Emelyanova, 2014).

To provide SD strategies with a proper societal setting/support *transparency of the planning process* as well as *public input/community engagement* should be ensured. These indicators are also important for a proper assessment of the planning process' quality. Theoretically, the Russian Arctic municipalities have several instruments to organize the planning and implementation process in an open/democratic way: regular opinion polls, public discussions in the media, regular hearings in the so-called public chambers, dialogue with NGOs, etc. However, only Severodvinsk has a special municipal program to facilitate the local NGOs' development (Severodvinsk City Government, 2016). The Murmansk and Vorkuta development plans hardly mention the need for a dialogue with civil society institutions; other AZRF cities simply ignore this issue resting the SD strategy planning process entirely within governmental structures.

Ability to take into account private and public interests is one more indicator of a strategy planning's efficiency. In principle, all AZRF city development plans acknowledge the need to build a proper public-private partnership. However, in reality few Arctic municipalities (e.g. Salekhard) are able to harmonize public interests with those of business communities which often behave in a rather self-willing and selfish way.

One more important question is about the nature of planning. In the Soviet era, the centralized planning and control system prevailed both in Russia's Arctic and in the country at large. In the post-Soviet period, new modes of decentralized planning and control that are more sensitive to the dynamic AZRF realities have emerged. For example, 'indicative planning' loosens up the planning process: instead of setting taut and unchanging targets, it merely points in certain desired directions and recalibrates future targets in light of what past practice has shown to be realistic aspirations. More generally, the present-day Russian policy makers can rely more heavily on 'loose'/'soft' laws and regulations. Instead of tightly specifying exact performance requirements, the laws and regulations can be written in more general and vaguely aspirational terms (Goodin, 2006: 18). It should be noted that most of the AZRF urban development strategies are written in the spirit of indicative planning rather than in a centralized, Soviet-type way.

As far as the environmental aspect of the SD strategies is concerned, the AZRF municipalities have the following priorities:

- Now the Arctic cities focus on prevention and reduction of pollution rather than on cleaning up the environmental mess as was the case before.
- Rehabilitation of damaged natural environmental systems (damage assessment, targeting the priority areas, clean-up programs, monitoring).
- Solid and liquid waste treatment.
- Targeted programs to protect endangered species.
- Development of public-private partnerships in the environment protection sphere.
- Encouraging environmental research (support for the local universities and research centers).
- Developing environmental education and culture.
- Cooperation with the local environmental NGOs and mass media to promote "green" projects and culture.
- Development of monitoring system in various areas (prevention of natural and man-made disasters; air and water pollution; endangered species, etc.).

It should be noted that the AZRF cities differ by their views on the significance of environmental problems in the SD strategies. While for some municipalities, such as Arkhangelsk, Murmansk, and Salekhard, environmental issues are one of several policy priorities, for Monchegorsk, Nickel, Norilsk, and Severodvinsk, where the ecological situation is rather grave, the need to solve the environmental problems is really critical.



Map 1. Impact zones in the Russian Arctic. Source: redesigned from Dushkova & Evseev 2011: 2.

These cities are traditional centers of metallurgical production, machine- and ship-building industries and for this reason are heavily polluted and pose serious health hazards. Russian scientists identified 27 so-called impact zones where pollution has led to environmental degradation and increased morbidity among the local population (see Map 1). The main impact zones include the Murmansk Region (10% of total pollutants in the 27 impact zones), Norilsk urban agglomeration (more than 30%), West Siberian oil and gas fields (more than 30%) and the Arkhangelsk Region (around 5%) (Dushkova & Evseev 2011; *Ekologicheskoe Sostoyanie Impactnykh Raionov*, 2012). In sum, about 15% of the AZRF territory is polluted or contaminated (Kochemasov et al., 2009).

As mentioned above, the AZRF cities pay little attention to the purely human security problematique preferring to focus on the economic and environmental issues. The “human dimension” of the SD strategies is mostly represented by the municipal programs on civil defense (Murmansk City Government, 2013; Severodvinsk City Government, 2010; Vorkuta City Government, 2014) to protect the local population from natural and man-made catastrophes. Some development plans (Murmansk City Government, 2013; Severodvinsk City Government, 2010) also have sections on personal security, including the need to fight street violence.

Almost all city development plans mention the need for international cooperation, including venues such as the Arctic Council, Barents Euro-Arctic Council, International Polar Year,

Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, UNDEP and UNESCO programs, country-to-country, region-to-region, town-to-town collaboration, etc.

Conclusions

To sum up, the Russian Arctic municipalities have familiarized themselves with the concept of sustainable development. To some extent, this concept was embedded in municipal development plans/strategies, although the AZRF cities lack special SD strategic documents, and, quite often, economic, ecological, and social dimensions are not properly harmonized with one another. The Arctic municipalities view the development of sound urban planning strategies 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 also tried to cooperate with regional and federal authorities in the field of strategic planning and solving concrete socioeconomic and ecological problems

They have made great strides in implementing some SD-related (mostly economic and environmental) projects over the last 10 to 15 years. There was a clear shift from survival/reactive to capacity-building/proactive SD strategies. These efforts resulted in some success stories albeit rather modest ones.

However, there is still a long way to go, in terms of both the development of adequate policies and their effective implementation. The main problem is how to solve the “words and deeds” problem because many of the SD projects still remain on paper and have never been implemented. In other words, the gap between strategy formulation and implementation still exists.

The weak points of the AZRF urban development strategies include a lack of transparency in the policy planning process and a lack of cooperation with and involvement of civil society institutions. To a large extent, the policy planning and implementation process is still of the top-down rather than bottom-up nature. Moreover, not all issue areas of the SD problematique are addressed, and different strategic approaches are not properly harmonized/synchronized with one another. Finally, quite often, municipal SD programs and projects are understaffed, underfunded and not supported by regional and federal authorities. Hence, larger staff and funding as well as better coordination of SD strategies between different levels of government are badly needed.

To conclude, despite the above problems and shortcomings, the total “balance sheet” of the Arctic cities’ SD strategies and general dynamics is rather positive. The AZRF municipalities are serious about solving numerous socioeconomic and environmental problems and making these urban areas better and more comfortable places to live in.

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