

Framing socio-ecological conflicts in Russia. From state-socialist societal nature relations and their neoliberal adaptation

Abstract

Since the dissolution of the Soviet Union Russia's dependency on natural resources has significantly increased. Despite the environmental deterioration such a development model inevitably entails, resource-extractivism finds broad support among the Russian population. Nonetheless, social conflicts over the appropriation and exploitation of nature do occur in various forms and on different societal levels. The large protests against the construction of a highway through the Khimki Forest near Moscow or the laying of a pipeline across the vulnerable ecosystems in the vicinity of Lake Baikal confirm that assumption.

The paper raises the question how conflicts concerning nature and environmental issues in Russia can be framed and defined more precisely. It is argued that the implementation of capitalist reforms built upon development promises similar results as the previous state-socialist model. Valorisation and appropriation of nature, usually in the form of resource-extraction, have intensified since the 1990s because they are presented as the only remedy for relative poverty reduction and modernisation.

A profound understanding of the dynamics of resource-extractivism is crucial for framing socio-ecological conflicts in Russia. On the one hand the current development model is the cause of ecological degradation. Therefore, it often provokes various social conflicts on different societal levels. On the other hand resource-extractivism undermines the same socio-ecological conditions, which form the foundation of future economic growth. This conflicting process launches new valorisation processes, meaning the expansion to "unproductive territory", or uncommodified nature.

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1. Conflicts concerning nature in the past years in Russia

Since the dissolution of the Soviet Union Russia's dependency on natural resources has significantly increased. Moreover the state has intensified the resource-extractive mode of development by investing in the exploration of new oil fields in the Arctic Sea or capital-intensive pipeline-projects (North Stream, Siberian Strength). As a self-declared "energy superpower", Russia strives to control international transport infrastructure (pipeline-politics) and to secure the dominant position of conventional energy sources (oil, gas, nuclear energy) over renewable energy sources. Despite the environmental deterioration such a development model inevitable entails, resource-extractivism finds broad support among the Russian population. High commodity prices throughout the last decade led to an increase in social spending. In addition, the commodity sector provides well-paid jobs and social benefits.

Nonetheless, social conflicts over the appropriation and exploitation of nature do occur in various forms and on different societal levels. The large protests against the construction of a highway through the Khimki Forest near Moscow or the laying of a pipeline across the vulnerable ecosystems in the vicinity of Lake Baikal confirm that assumption.¹ Most conflicts concerning nature, however, are not framed as socio-ecological struggles, but emerge in the public as conflicts concerning the distribution of oil and gas rents, regional development or infrastructure projects. Against the backdrop of internationalisation strategies of Russian companies, state-business relations are being reshaped (Henson and Teague, 2005; Yakovlev, 2006). Local municipalities, especially in economically underdeveloped regions, such as eastern Siberia or the Arctic, are structurally dependent on large resource-based companies, since the latter usually provide the necessary communal infrastructure (Anokhin, Kuznetsov and Lachininskii, 2014; Riabova and Didyk, 2014). The ongoing struggle over the appropriation and exploitation of subsoil resources in the Arctic is another example for a rather weak politicisation of socio-ecological conflicts. Although closely connected to environmental issues, it is framed almost exclusively as a conflict about future profits between state-controlled and private energy companies (Filimonova, 2013). Finally, the current debate on import substitution and re-industrialisation in Russia (Worldbank, 2013; Mau, 2014; Gel'man and Starodubtsev 2016) has far-reaching implications for the socio-ecological development of the country. Interestingly, environmental concerns and alternative strategies towards a sustainable economic development are weakly represented in the debate.

Even though the aforementioned conflicts are to a greater or lesser extent connected to the Russian development model (resource-extractivism), they are deprived of their ecological content. The paper raises the question how conflicts concerning nature and environmental issues in Russia can be

¹ This is just to name the most prominent environmental struggles in Russia. Social movements have launched a broad campaign against the import and storage of radioactive waste. In several regions plans to build incineration plants were met with persistent resistance of the local population (Heyden/Weinmann 2009: 197-224).

framed and defined more precisely. An analysis of socio-ecological conflicts is closely connected to the predominant “societal nature relations”. At least in the German-speaking discussion, the term describes a specific understanding how economy, society and nature are interconnected (Görg, 2003; Dietz and Wissen, 2009; Brand and Wissen, 2011). Thereby, the term encompasses not only the “environment” but also the dominant forms of appropriation and control of nature (see 2.1).

It becomes clear that Russia’s dependence on natural resources is the reason for multiple conflicts and social struggles. Although they are not necessarily perceived as socio-ecological conflicts, the conflicts surrounding social and economic development in Russia are predominantly connected to the resource-extractive mode of development. At the same time, however, this dependence limits strategies towards alternative, meaning sustainable, development paths. This paradox shapes political debates and sets social actors restricted corridors of action. Therefore, the main focus lies on the formation and dynamics of the current development model in Russia.

The text is structured as follows: in the second section, I introduce the debate on resource-extractivism, which can be situated in the framework of political ecology, and, in this paper, is combined with insights from regulation theory and critical state theory. Subsequently, in the third section, the historical formation of the Soviet development model and the legacies of “societal nature relations” of state-socialism shall be determined. Based on output growth and fossil fuels as the dominant energy source, the appropriation of natural resources has been closely linked to a promise of societal modernisation. In the fourth section the focus shifts to the transition process. Applying the theoretical framework to the Russian case study the paper seeks to reveal both continuities and drastic disruptions in the country’s societal development. My main argument will be that the implementation of capitalist reforms has been built upon development promises similar to those during state-socialism. Valorisation and appropriation of nature, usually in the form of resource-extraction, have intensified since the 1990s because they are presented as the only remedy for relative poverty reduction and modernisation. Both state-socialist societal nature relations and their capitalist adaptation are a common feature shared by all Eastern European countries. Therefore, it is an important but often disregarded explanation for the specific ecological formation in the region.

2. Framing conflicts concerning nature in Russia – A theoretical approach

2.1 Resource-extractivism as a development model

In order to define socio-ecological conflicts more precisely it is crucial to acknowledge the overlap between socio-economic and ecological aspects in global capitalism. Disregarding the societal context the interests and power relations within a society become opaque. However, they are decisive for the success of environmental policies and their intended purpose. On the other hand the

impact of environmental policies and regulations on socio-economic and socio-cultural developments is often underestimated.

Political ecology “encompasses the shifting dialectic between society and land-based resources” (Blaikie and Brookfield, 1987, pp. 17). It departs from the argument that the appropriation and control of natural resources is not a neutral but a political process. societal-nature relations, therefore, evolve in historically and geographically embedded constellations and interact with political-economic structures and processes (Neumann, 2005, pp. 6). In capitalist “societal nature relations” (Brand and Wissen, 2013, pp. 689), the accumulation of capital is a major driver of the appropriation of land and natural resources (Smith, 1984, pp. 49). In this context, the valorisation of nature is an important strategy or precondition for the incorporation of non-capitalist areas in the capitalist mode of production to subsequently enable the accumulation of capital (Görg, 2004, pp. 1502; Altvater and Mahnkopf, 2007).

According to the social-ecologist Eduardo Gudynas (2010) resource-extractivism is a peripheral development model subject to external logic and based on the exploitation and export of primary goods (see also Bebbington, 2012; Acosta, 2013; Lang and Mokrani, 2013). This economic process has far-reaching consequences because it establishes uneven power relations both on the national and international level. The exploitation of natural resources at the periphery is mediated through the demand of the capitalist core countries. Within a certain country national resources are exploited almost exclusively for external consumption. Besides, the exploitation process is usually but not necessarily controlled by foreign transnational companies.

Another characteristic feature of the resource-extractive mode of development lies in a specific “crowding-out” dynamic of expansion. Other economic sectors, such as manufacturing or forms of subsistence economy, are gradually squeezed out of the market. According to the sociologist Maristella Svampa, resource-extractivism tends to expand to “unproductive” territories and incorporate them into this specific mode of development (Svampa, 2012, pp. 14). The transformation of rainforest into farmland or vast areas of the Russian Taiga and Tundra into raw material extraction areas exemplarily symbolises the crowding-out logic through the valorisation of nature to enable the accumulation of capital. At the same time this process destroys the foundation of subsistence economy of indigenous people living in these areas. Under these circumstances investment in infrastructure or export diversification is structurally exacerbated. Therefore, resource-extractivism is a product and a cause of an international system of uneven trade and power relations. Within a certain country it can foster authoritarian rule and unequal distribution of wealth and income, whereas on the international level resource extractive countries are forced into a (semi-)peripheral dependent status (Acosta, 2013, pp. 68ff.). In contrast to the dominant theoretical approaches on resource-based development, e.g. the rent-seeking theory (Gaddy and Ickes, 2005)

and the “resource-curse” (Götz, 2006; Tauber-Merz, 2014), the debate on resource-extractivism explains development within the framework of both external (world-market) and internal (societal conflicts and structures) factors (Bebbington and Humphreys Bebbington, 2010; Brand and Dietz, 2014).

The appropriation and control of natural resources is usually embedded in dispositifs, e.g. narratives and practices, legitimising the appropriation of nature because it guarantees “progress”, “development” and economic growth (Svampa, 2012a; 2012b). The Russian case is a good example. Despite the inevitable environmental deterioration, resource-extractivism finds support among the population. High commodity prices throughout the last decade have led to an increase in social spending. In addition, the commodity sector provides well-paid jobs and social benefits. In other words: Despite its disastrous effects on nature, the exploitation of natural resources is popular among the population because it is perceived as the only possible solution for poverty reduction. Moreover it serves as a proxy for Russia’s geopolitical ambitions (energy superpower).

2.2 *The regulation of socio-ecological conflicts in the resource-extractive development model*

One important reason why socio-ecological conflicts in Russia are persistently downplayed is grounded in the basic mechanisms of the capitalist mode of production. Following the argument of Brand and Wissen (2013, pp. 692), “capitalist production as a *labour* process is premised upon precisely those socio-ecological conditions, which it continuously undermines as a *valorisation* (*Inwertsetzung*) process.” From this perspective, the “immanent limits of the capitalist mode of production do not lie in the reproductive necessities of human and non-human nature, but in the crises of the valorisation process (ibid.)” In a country like Russia, where entire regions² and the volume of the federal budget depend on the extractive industry³, a critical debate or even conflicts concerning the appropriation of nature inevitably question the current development model. Thus socio-ecological conflicts might threaten existing power relations, which have been established since the 1990s, including political rule and ownership structures.

According to regulation theory an inherent feature of capitalist societies are social contradictions caused by uneven power structures, which produce societal instability. Moreover, capitalist economies are driven by the need of capital accumulation, meaning that in the end every economic activity must lead to the realisation of surplus value. This produces a strong imperative to agree

² The Russian sociologist Nataliya Zubarevich (2010) determines in her analysis on uneven development in Russia four different types of development. Whereas the centre (Moscow and St. Petersburg) exists almost detached from the rest of the country due to its comprehensive integration into the world economy, the second level is composed of industrialised regions producing for the international and/or domestic market. The third type refers to regions that are entirely dependent on extractive industries. The fourth level is shaped by subsistence economy, out migration and limited development perspectives.

³ In February, 2016 Prime-Minister Dmitry Medvedev announced budget cuts of 10 % due to the low oil price (RIA Novosti, 2016).

upon a specific form of political-societal stabilisation, or in other words a specific form of societal regulation (Aglietta, 1979; Boyer, 2005). Initially focusing on the wage relation, recent publications have tried to apply regulation theory to societal-nature relationships (Görg, 2003; Brand et. al, 2008; Wissen, 2011).

In order to determine concrete periods of historical and national development, the regulationist approach has developed two analytical terms: Regimes of accumulation describe the dominant forms of production and realisation of surplus value, which guarantee a (more or less) stable reproduction of the capitalist mode of production over a certain period of time. In resource-extractive modes of development the regime of accumulation is based predominantly on the exploitation and export of resources. However, this does not necessarily lead to a complete decline in the industrial sector. In Russia, industrial sectors such as the military-industrial complex, machine building industry or automotive industry, have consolidated their position after the turbulent transformation in the 1990s (Filatov et al., 2006). Therefore, the term regimes of accumulation or development model should not be understood as rigid, inalterable systems. On the contrary, the struggle between economic sectors and fractions of capital result in constant adaptations and, subsequently, modifications.

The term mode of regulation refers to dominant norms, practices and institutions of a society, in which a mode of accumulation is embedded. Usually they can be described as “institutionalized compromises” (Lipietz, 1985, pp. 112), which contribute to the reproduction of societal power structures. The crisis-prone nature of capitalist societies demands institutions mediating the contradictions between different social forces (capital fractions, class conflicts etc.). From this perspective societal-nature relations take place via institutions, norms, values, processes of subjectivation, and normalised practices. A specific development model, e.g. resource-extractivism, has to be embedded in political and socio-cultural institutions regulating and shaping the appropriation of nature. In this context regulation means the stabilisation and institutionalisation of power relations. Moreover this specific definition of regulation includes a hegemonic understanding of control over nature enabling the state to expand extractive activities to so far “unproductive” territories. Hegemony is understood as broad consent among the population to the appropriation of nature in various forms because it generates benefits for certain social groups. Therefore, negative outcomes (pollution etc.) are tolerated. This is not to say that socio-ecological problems are not addressed at all in Russia. The aforementioned examples prove the contrary. However, conceptions of nature and means of its appropriation are hegemonically produced. Therefore, socio-ecological conflicts are dealt with in a selective manner. “Regulation may prevent destructive forms of appropriating nature from becoming a politically relevant problem. In this case, the destructive character of societal-nature relationships remains latent and is seen as manageable and, therefore,

acceptable and/or it remains limited to socially marginalised groups. Most of all, its costs are both spatially and temporarily externalised (Brand and Wissen, 2013, pp. 693). Even though certain social groups might challenge resource-extractivism, it is supported by the majority.

Both mode of accumulation and mode of regulation can form a mode of development, which guarantees societal stability over a certain period of time and, thereby, a stable form of accumulation (Atzmüller et al., 2013). Following a regulationist approach the paper does not only focus on the economic structure but also on the question, how the latter is embedded in power structures and political order or rather how both aspects are reciprocally intertwined.

2.3 Securing and stabilising the resource-extractive mode of development – The role of the state

According to historic-materialistic state theories the state plays a key role in the stabilisation and reproduction of capitalist societies by actively interfering in socio-economic processes. This means the state promotes specific modes of development, such as resource-extractivism, through certain policies (laws, the distribution of budgets etc.), the use of aggregated knowledge within the state apparatus, or the use of force. Following this approach the state is neither a neutral object, which acts independently and remains beyond social struggles nor simply a captured institution (Hellman, 2000) just acting on behalf of the ruling class. In fact, the image of state-capture reduces the state to a simple object in socio-economic processes. It denies the crucial role of the state in the stabilisation and negotiation of power relations and, thereby, of a certain development model. In contrast to such positions, Nicos Poulantzas defines the state as a “social relation” (Hirsch and Jessop, 2001, pp.18), or more precisely as the “material condensation of ... classes and class fractions” in a specific form (Poulantzas, 2002, pp. 159).

Historic-materialistic state theory perceives the state as a terrain of social struggles, meaning that different social forces act within the state in order to enforce their particular interests. Due to unequally distributed income and social capital, social groups vary in their possibilities to influence the state and its representatives. In the Russian case, for example, oil and gas companies successfully lobbied in the Ministry of Natural Resources and Ecology for a rather weak regulation of subsoil resources, which allows the exploration of natural resources in the Arctic sea without strict ecological conditions (Filimonova, 2013). Eco-activists do not possess the financial means nor contacts to advocate their demands in a similar way, although they influence the legislative process just like the discourse on nature through collective actions (e.g. protests) or campaigns. Even though the “strategic selectivity of the state” enables the bourgeoisie to enforce its demands and interests more often, the state maintains a “relative autonomy” towards individual fractions of capital (Jessop, 1990; Bieling, 2006). In Russia the state regained its relative autonomy in the early 2000s forcing the powerful oligarchs into a new development strategy (Jaitner, 2015). Certain

policies, class-compromises or modes of development are negotiated and decided upon within the state and its institutions. This perspective allows to focus in the analysis on both social struggles due to the resource-based mode of development and the role of the state as a power relation and field of conflict. On top of that it allows to differentiate the influence of various social groups in contrast to a simplified “captured” state.

Historically, the Russian state has always played a key role in the enforcement of development strategies (Krasilshchikov, 2014). In fact, in contrast to the perception of state-socialism as a totalitarian social order, scholars have argued that the eastern European countries and the Soviet Union were able to find support among their respective populations because of their modernisation efforts (Berend, 1996; Segert, 2002; Plaggenborg, 2006; 2013). The implementation of capitalism and the emergence of a domestic capitalist class in Russia (oligarchs) would have been impossible without the active support of the state (Pleines, 2003; Kolganov, 2013; Dzarasov, 2014). Considering the fact that private ownership was almost non-existent until the early 1990’s the state had to work out a coherent, unified strategy which resulted in the formation of a new social order. The election of Vladimir Putin as president in the year 2000 was marked by the legalisation of the highly corrupt privatisation process and the integration of the oligarchs into the resource-extractive mode of development.

3. The Soviet development model

The existence of the Soviet Union was inextricably tied to a promise of societal modernisation. Popular slogans, such as “communism is Soviet power plus electrification of the whole country”, “socialism in one country” or “outpacing the west” refer to the semi-peripheral status of the Soviet Union in the world-system and the state efforts to catch up with the development of the capitalist core countries. Even the Perestroika was initiated as a campaign of economic development and modernisation (Gorbatschow, 1987; 1988). Analysing Russian history, the historian Boris Kagarlitsky shows that Russia always pursued a path of catch-up development (Kagarlitsky, 2009; 2010). Traditionally, the Russian Empire was highly dependent on commodity-export (agricultural products, iron and metal) following its integration into the capitalist world-system in the 18th century (Wallerstein, 2004, pp. 184ff.). Therefore, the economist Ruslan Dzarasov describes the Russian Revolution in 1917 as “a rebellion of the periphery” against “the core of the capitalist world-system (Dzarasov, 2014, pp. 43). Soviet leadership regarded industrialisation as the decisive factor capable of sparking a process of societal modernisation. In contrast to the capitalist core countries the Soviet-type industrialisation process was characterised by two crucial factors: The prominent position of the state in all economic processes (planned economy) due to the absence of private entrepreneurship and the country’s isolation from the world market.

The planned economy proved to be efficient in times where centrally coordinated resource-allocation was necessary, e.g. the development of a heavy industry, the temporary adjustment to a wartime economy in the years 1942-1945, or the reconstruction of the destroyed territories after the German invasion. Moreover the technological gap to the west decreased until the 1970s and the living standard rose significantly over the years, especially after the second world war. However, the planned economy produced uneven sectoral development concentrating the best resources (raw material, workforce and machinery) in the military-industrial complex. As a result, the country frequently produced consumer goods of minor value. In order to secure a high level of economic growth and an increase in consumption a supply of mass-produced raw materials, machinery, equipment and other resources had to be guaranteed. This was ensured through comparatively low labour costs and increasing mineral extraction (Yaremenko, 1997). In contrast to the economies of the capitalist core the Soviet planned economy was less innovative and had difficulties integrating new technologies into the production cycle (computerisation). Observing the technological revolution in the west, the Hungarian economist Ivan T. Berend describes in his analysis of the state-socialist economies the eastern-European industrialisation as an “anachronism”. „The rigid model of modernization, although effective in industrializing backward agricultural countries and in catching up, and with an impressive growth rate on a turn of a century technological basis, was absolutely unprepared for technological reorientation (Berend, 1996, pp. 197). Whereas the „Soviet-type modernization“ (Berend, 1996) was based on output growth and heavy industries it neglected the importance of the service sector and development of high technologies.

3.1 Soviet-type modernisation and the exploitation of nature

In order to ensure a constant resource supply for the emerging industry, the Soviet Union was in desperate need for resources. A characteristic feature of the Soviet industrialisation process lies in the pursuit of autarchy, which was expressed in the slogan “socialism in one country”. The isolation in the early years of its existence forced the country to extend its domestic resource frontier by exploiting the vast deposits in remote and scarcely inhabited regions (Siberia and the Arctic). The “conquest of nature” granted access to huge reservoirs of resources including “classic” industrial resources (coal, iron), non-ferrous metals (copper, zinc, nickel), resources crucial for a modern mechanical engineering industry (aluminium), basic material for a chemical industry and fertilisers, furthermore, gold, platinum, gemstone, and oil and gas. Especially during the Stalinist era the extension of the resource frontier was reached through forced labour of the GULag prisoners. After the German invasion and the factory relocation from the industrialised European part to the Ural industrialisation accelerated. In the course of destalinisation the Soviet government tried to attract workers from the industrialised centre to the peripheral regions in form of higher payment, social

benefits and prolonged vacation.

The utilisation of resources effectively reshaped and transformed space and landscape. In order to exploit the resources of Tundra, Taiga and steppe cities, such as Magadan, Magnitogorsk or Karaganda, were built from close to scratch. Some were founded even above the Arctic circle (Norilsk, Vorkuta). In order to make the vast territory accessible infrastructure projects were initiated, which assumed unimagined proportions. The railroad network expanded quickly. The construction of the White Sea Canal (Belomorkanal) (1931-1933) or Volga-Don Canal (1938-1952) were two of the most prestigious Stalinist projects. All of these projects required the massive use of forced labour with hundred thousands of human losses. After Stalin's death GULag prisoners were usually not deployed for infrastructural projects. Therefore, the economic significance of forced labour decreased significantly. However, the appropriation of nature continued. The transformation of the Aral Sea and a large adjacent region into a „ecological disaster zone” (Micklin and Williams, 1996, pp. 6) is one of the most striking but by far not the only example. In order to increase cotton production large scale expansion of irrigation in the sea's drainage basin was stimulated. From 1960-1990 the population in the Aral Sea region more than doubled. At the same time water supply per capita decreased from 8,8 to 3,5 cubic metre. Moreover the region observed the highest child mortality in the entire Soviet Union (Micklin and Williams 1996, pp. 6-10). On the other hand new prestigious projects were pursued, e.g. the completion of the Baikal-Amur Mainline (BAM). Finally, resource-extraction and industrial production generate high amounts of waste that have to be stored and secured. Especially the nuclear industry is to be held responsible for radioactive contamination of entire areas (Novaya Zemlya) because of nuclear weapon tests and contained nuclear explosions. Accidents in nuclear power plants (Leningrad, Belogorsk) or in plutonium production facilities (near Chelyabinsk) contributed to the contamination of (inhabited) areas just like ocean disposal of nuclear waste in the Barents Sea and Kara Sea or the storage of atomic waste in the Ural, south Siberia and Belarus.

3.2 Extractive-industries as an obstacle for modernisation?

The 1960s mark a watershed in Soviet economic development. The government invested large sums in the exploration of oil wells. At the beginning of the 1980s western Siberia contributed to almost half of the nationwide production of oil. In contrast to the industrial sector the oil and gas industry was predominantly export-oriented and counted for a bulk of foreign trade. In 1970 oil exports amounted to 11% of total exports. Ten years later the share of oil exports had risen to 36 % (BPB, 1981, pp. 46). Parallel to the development of the oil industry the Soviet government facilitated the exploration of gas. Whereas the share of gas in total exports was less than one percent in 1970 it already contributed 7 % in 1980 (ibd.). Even though foreign trade increased from 1960-1980 from

10 to 100 billion Roubles the share of manufactured goods gradually declined (BIB, 1981, pp. 48). In contrast to the majority of Soviet republics, Russia was rather weakly integrated into inter-republican trade relations. In 1988 Russia's share approximately lay at 12, 9 % of national GDP (Langhammer and Lücke, 1995, pp. 4). The wealth of resources and its developed industries allowed Russia to maintain a comparably low level of trade integration. At the same time the Russian Socialist Federal Republic effectively subsidised the industry of the other republics through cheap fossil fuels. In the 1980s, as the economic climate in the USSR gradually worsened, subsidisation of the relatively unproductive industry became increasingly expensive. At the same time a concentration on resource-export promised high profits. In autumn 1991 scholars of the Moscow Institute of world economy and international relations (IMEMO) published an insightful study advising the Russian government to orientate its trade relations with the other Soviet republics according to world-market prices. After the transition to a market economy in all republics the formation of a common market should be prioritised. Sale crises in certain sectors, e.g. chemical industry or iron- and steel industry, could be compensated with the global demand for oil, gas and metals (Korowkin, 1994). Russian economic interests, especially in the extractive industry during the dissolution process of the USSR have so far been a rather neglected aspect (see Hale, 1999; Jaitner, 2014). Against the backdrop of Russia's development since the early 1990s they should be considered a driving force.

4. The Russian development model

4.1 The Transformation process (1992-2000): Transition to resource-extractivism

The end of the cold war allowed the integration of the former state-socialist countries into the capitalist world-system. The far-reaching outcomes of this process have shaped the region up to this day. Although the Soviet Union had increased its trade relations with countries of the capitalist core, the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (COMECON) had remained the key market for Soviet trade providing a stable and protected market for manufactured goods.

In contrast to China or the south-Asian Tigers (South-Korea, Taiwan etc.) the Yeltsin administration did not promote a strategy of industrial development (Krasilshchikov, 2014). Aside from a few exceptions, the government abstained from the idea of keeping the majority of companies under state control in order to implement a regulated social market economy. According to the economists Yegor Gaidar, first Minister of Finance, and Anatoly Chubais, who managed the portfolio of Rosimuchestvo (the Committee for the Management of State Property), the state was primarily repressive, predatory and thereby limiting individual freedom. Therefore, "destatisation" became a central slogan. The term included not only privatisation of state property but rather a comprehensive withdrawal of the state from the economy (Gajdar and Kogalovskij, 1990; Gajdar, 1995). Following

the dissolution of the USSR price controls were lifted immediately, foreign trade extensively liberalised and the development of a private financial sector facilitated (Pomer and Klein, 2001, Jaitner, 2014, pp. 60-86). The implemented agenda was clearly targeted against the institutions of the planned economy. Making the reforms “irreversible” (Yeltsin, 1994, pp. 235) was the official goal of the Yeltsin administration. Therefore, their implementation had to occur as fast and radically as possible (“shock-therapy”). Opposing the latter assumption, the economists Aleksandr Buzgalin and Andrei Kolganov argue the economic policy of the Yeltsin-administration deepened the structural crisis of the Russian economy so severely, that the country changed its mode of industrial development (Buzgalin and Kolganov, 1996, pp. 121ff.).

Following the argument of Buzgalin and Kolganov, it would be more precise to say that Russia changed its mode of development. Since the early 1990s the Russian economy has been based on resource-extraction and processing (oil, gas, aluminium, non-ferrous metals, energy) and the financial sector. The industrial decline has been dramatic. The share of goods production in the GDP dropped from 65, 5 % (1990) to 41 % (2004) and industrial production from 38 % to 28 % (Filatov et al., 2006). Parallel to the decline of the Russian industry the significance of the resource sector for the national economy increased. In the year 2013 the share of non-renewable energy sources (oil, gas and coal) in total exports reached almost 70 %. Metals and gemstones amount for 13 % (Russland-Analysen, 2014, pp. 7). The productive economic sectors are controlled by the state and a group of national entrepreneurs, the so-called oligarchs. The latter gained access to state companies during the non-transparent and corrupt privatisation processes (Pleines, 2003; Kolganov, 2013; Dzarasov, 2014).

According to the sociologist Nataliya Tichonova (2011) about one third of the Russian population became impoverished as a direct consequence of the transformation process. The whole extent of the economic decline has been illustrated by the economist Joseph Stiglitz. Accordingly, the Russian economy measured in terms of GDP suffered greater losses than during the second world war (Stiglitz, 2002).

4.2 Ecology in contemporary Russia – Caught between “Soviet heritage” and resource-based development?

The constant consumption of raw materials and the environmental degradation in the Soviet Union sparked an ecological movement, which became an inherent part of social movements during the Perestroika. Activists raised ecological awareness among the population through campaigns, publications on environmental pollution or the ecological situation in the country and creative forms of protest. The common perspective in the debate criticised ineffective and wasteful resource

consumption and demanded efficient resource-management (Lemeshew, 1988, pp. 328-332; Jakoblow, 1990). As the criticism were usually linked to the structural crisis of the planned economy, the majority of the movement favoured the implementation of capitalist reforms. Accordingly, a market economy would be able to implement resource management more efficiently and sustainably. Presenting the ecological question in the USSR as a part of the dichotomy between (resource-wasting) planned economy and (efficient) market economy the common dynamics of both systems became opaque. The inherent need for economic growth forces both planned and market economy to appropriate and exploit nature. Doing so, both systems continuously undermine the same socio-ecological conditions, which form the foundation of future economic growth. This conflicting process launches new valorisation processes, meaning the expansion to “unproductive territory” (Svampa, 2012, pp. 14), or uncommodified nature. Whereas the capitalist core countries externalised ecological costs by appropriating resources and utilising carbon sinks⁴ from other countries, the Soviet Union, to speak with the French historian Christophe Bonneuil (2015), exploited its own environment. Therefore, the population was immediately effected by the devastating environmental outcomes.

In the course of the implementation of capitalist reforms and the adoption of the resource-extractive mode of development appropriation of nature did not cease nor has it been managed more efficiently. On the contrary, the lack of investments in machinery and equipment is a continuous problem in Russia (Filatov et al., 2006; Alekseev, 2014). Since Putin’s first presidency the state has extended its influence over the profitable oil and gas sector via the companies Gazprom and Rosneft. To a certain extent the increasing resource rents were used to stabilise social development and redistribute profits to the industrial sector. Moreover the latter was able to retain a certain degree of competitiveness due to low domestic energy prices (Robinson, 2007). In recent years there have been serious attempts by the Russian government to diversify exports by supporting selected industrial branches (aircraft-manufacturing, nanotechnology) and developing high-technology clusters, e.g. the industrial-park Skolkovo. Despite these attempts the strong position of Gazprom and Rosneft tied the state even closer to the resource-extractive mode of development. In fact, not the mode of development has changed but its concrete form and shape. Oil and gas revenues are still essential for the state’s reproduction and legitimation, which provides a strong incentive to expand valorisation of nature. Against the background of depleting oil and gas resources in western Siberia, Russia’s increasing interest and economic activity in the Arctic, eastern Siberia and the Black Sea can be explained. However, valorisation of nature in the Arctic, “the world’s next hot spot for hydrocarbon development“ (Henderson and Loe, 2014, pp. 1), might

⁴ Carbon sinks are ecosystems which absorb carbon dioxide (CO₂), e.g. oceans and forests (especially rain forests and Tundra forests).

provoke various forms of conflicts on different levels. Firstly, the Arctic is international territory. Land claims of the neighbouring countries could result in a “race for the Arctic” (see Dadwal, 2014). On a national level socio-ecological conflicts could occur due to diverging interests between resource-extractive industries and the region’s inhabitants. Up to this day the Arctic is shaped by forms of multiple subsistence economies co-existing with resource-extractive activities. Land commodification threatens the life-style of the local people and increases conflicts between them and the globalised, export-oriented resource-extractive industries.

Of course, Russia’s socio-ecological development is also influenced by international agreements, negotiations and institutions on climate change. In fact, the ratification of the Kyoto protocol stabilised the resource-extractive mode of development. Regarding emissions Russia has been one of the biggest net winners under the Kyoto regime. Even though emissions per capita are high, the collapse of the industry during the transformation period resulted in a sharp decline in CO₂-emissions. “The Kyoto Protocol’s designation of the year 1990 as base year therefore benefited Russia significantly. In 1990, Russian emissions were 2.2 billion tons of CO₂, but by 1998 the level had sunk to 1.45 billion tons, then increasing gradually over the years” (Westphal, 2010, pp. 74). In contrast to heavy industries, export-oriented but ecologically harmful sectors, e.g. non-ferrous metals, petrochemical and aluminium production quickly adapted to the new situation by meeting global demand.

Although the national climate doctrine approved by the Russian government in 2009 acknowledges the importance of an internationally coordinated climate policy, it emphasises the right of development, economic growth and modernisation according to each country’s level of socio-economic development and its ecological and climate conditions (Westphal, 2010, pp. 78ff.). Therefore, the Russian climate policy is shaped by its major role as an energy producer and exporter and its high domestic energy consumption. In this context the narrative of the country as an “energy superpower” is particularly significant. On an international level the Russian government strives to secure the dominant position of conventional energy sources (oil, gas, coal and nuclear energy) over renewable energy sources. An important part of this strategy is the construction of pipelines (South Stream, Siberian Strength, southern Europe). At the same time Russia promotes nuclear energy as an ecological alternative to fossil fuels. Interestingly, the state company RosAtom does not only offer to build nuclear power plants but to import radioactive waste as well.

Nonetheless one can observe steps towards an ecological modernisation of the resource-extractive development model. Apart from the utilisation of resources for the extractive industries valorisation of nature has assumed new forms since the ratification of the Kyoto protocol. The Russian government propagates the vast forest stands in the Taiga as a global carbon sink (Tysiachniouk and McDermott, 2016). An ecological modernisation towards a green form of capitalism has mobilised

strong support among international organisations, such as the United Nations. „Russia is an ecological donor to the planet and needs to capitalize her ecosystem services and obtain profit from them (UNDP, 2011, pp. 120).“ A second important strategy is the increase of energy efficiency. By no means an important issue, the debate has to be analysed in a broader context. Targeted energy savings allow the extractive industries to compensate depleting resources. Lower domestic energy consumption would permit them to maintain high export levels and in the end profits.

4.3 Conflicts concerning resource-extractivism

The limits of the resource-extractive mode of development is a matter of controversial discussion. The current Prime-Minister Dmitry Medvedev (2009), the former Minister of Finance, Aleksei Kudrin (2009) or international financial organisations (WEF, 2011; Worldbank, 2013) call for export-diversification and consolidation of the national industry. As a response to intensified global competition, Russia should improve its national competitiveness. Since the beginning of economic sanctions against Russia in the course of the ongoing conflict in the Ukraine, the resource-based mode of development has been even more challenged by parts of the political and economic elite. In an editorial article for the business journal “Vedemosti” Vladimir Putin criticised the peripheral world-market integration and the negative consequences of this process for the national industry (Putin, 2012). In order to reduce technological dependency the government recently founded a commission for import substitution. Centralising know-how and financial structures means the goal of the commission is to advance industrial development.

From a socio-ecological point of view the current conflict is most revealing. On the one hand since the beginning of the transformation process the current development model is being critically discussed in the mainstream for the first time. On the other hand the debate almost completely lacks an ecological perspective. A critical assessment which industrial sectors should be developed or not is not part of the debate nor is the question whether certain ecological standards should be applied. Most likely, the debate on import substitution and re-industrialisation does not seek to overcome the current development model but to modernise and adapt it to a rapidly changing global environment.

5. Conclusion

The goal of this paper was to analyse the societal context in which socio-ecological conflicts in Russia occur. Russia’s development since the early 1990s is closely linked to the country’s peripheral world-market integration and a direct consequence of the transformation process (shock therapy). In the course of the privatisation process and neoliberal reforms, the reconstruction of the country’s industrial base was exacerbated by favouring resource-based export strategies. The historian Boris Kagarlitsky (2009) argues that the peripheral world-market integration fostered

Russia's role as a raw-material supplier for the industrial countries. The rejection of alternative paths of development and the emergence of a semi-peripheral, highly unstable resource-extractive mode of development were the result of this transformation process.

A profound understanding of the dynamics of resource-extractivism is crucial for framing socio-ecological conflicts in Russia. On the one hand the current development model is the cause of ecological degradation. Therefore, it often provokes various social conflicts on different societal levels. On the other hand resource-extractivism undermines the same socio-ecological conditions, which form the foundation of future economic growth. This conflicting process launches new valorisation processes, meaning the expansion to "unproductive territory", or uncommodified nature. Against the background of depleting oil and gas resources in western Siberia Russia's increasing interest and economic activity in the Arctic, eastern Siberia and the Black Sea can be explained. Moreover valorisation of nature assumes new forms. The Russian government propagates the vast forest stands in the Taiga as a global carbon sink or the import and storage of global radioactive waste.

Despite the environmental deterioration such a development model inevitably entails, resource-extractivism finds broad support among the Russian population. High commodity prices throughout the last decade have led to an increase in social spending. In addition, the commodity sector provides well-paid jobs and social benefits. In fact, resource-extractivism includes a promise of economic growth, development and modernisation similar to the Soviet mode of development. Apart from material progress, resource-extractivism is perceived as a means to increase Russia's international influence. As a self-declared "energy superpower", Russia strives to control international transport infrastructure (pipeline politics) and to secure the dominant position of conventional energy sources (oil, gas, nuclear energy) over renewable energy sources (symbolic level).

In an environment where resource-extractive industries dominate the production chains, socio-economic development is structurally limited. If valorisation and appropriation of nature, usually in the form of resource-extraction, are presented as the only remedy for relative poverty reduction and modernisation, ecological demands should address social inequalities and societal power relations. The ongoing conflicts on resource-extractivism (re-industrialisation) are a good example. Environmental concerns and alternative strategies towards a sustainable economic development are weakly represented in the public debate because both the state and the business elite are inextricably tied to the current mode of development. Even an adjusted "industrial resource-extractivism" relies on the constant valorisation of nature. Therefore, socio-ecological struggles are most likely to remain peripheral as long as they do not reveal the structural dynamics of resource-extractivism and connect it to demands of social redistribution.

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