

Final Report: Junior Research Visit at State University of St. Petersburg

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“Empirical Assessment of the Governance for Sustainable Urban Development Initiatives for Coastal and Trans-Boundary Regions – a perspective from St. Petersburg”

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**How did you benefit from the stay at the partner university? (1) What were the main results of your research stay? (2) Who were your primary contact persons? (3)**

**How did you benefit from the stay at the partner university? (1)**

Russia is one of the representative case studies of my PhD research. Consequently, my research stay at the St. Petersburg State University (SPbGU) has been of fundamental importance for my scholarly investigation and analysis. The selection of Russia and more specifically St. Petersburg’s urban conglomerate, as a case study of sustainable environmental governance at the urban-environment interface, is merited by its importance within both European and global context.

The urban population of Russia’s Northwestern Federal District, of which St. Petersburg is the Administrative Center, is now estimated at 83.5% of the total population of the district, amounting to more than 5.6 mln people. St. Petersburg, the largest city on the Baltic sea coast, is also amongst the most rapidly growing cities of the world and its influence extends well beyond the national level. This great urban conglomerate of the Russian North faces the unique and particularly challenging task of reconciling the environmental transformations and heavier Carbon footprint, resultant from growing urban population and city expansion, with the conservation and adaptation needs of the fragile northern environments. The urgent imperative to address these pressing issues reflects the global challenge of finding a sustainable governance solution to the rapid growth of the existing urban conglomerates and their resultant much more significant environmental impact. My scholarly efforts to try to address these now-global issues in the particular circumstances of St. Petersburg’s urban

conglomerate were greatly benefitted from my stay at SPbGU, whereby progress was achieved in both the theoretical and empirical research aspects. In terms of theoretical research, progress has been made in honing the initial broader-in-scope framework towards more in-depth scholarly review of the existing research issues, tailored and targeted towards answering the empirical investigation questions, which have emerged during my previous research stay.

Russian science draws on rich analytical and philosophical traditions and it is also dynamically developing in response to the current global and national sustainable environmental governance challenges. During my current research stay I was able to meet a wider range of important environmental governance stakeholders, such as representatives of the Russian environmental NGOs, civil society, as well as the business community. The meetings and discussions with these non-governmental governance actors have been indispensable for my empirical research.

Russia is the largest country in the world in terms of size, so the smart and adaptive application of high technology and technological innovation are essential for the success of the sustainable governance strategies of such large territory, which houses a very diverse range of bio-geo-climatic zones and socio-environmental ecosystems. A research visit to some of the leading Russian Universities in Moscow, such as the Institute for Emerging Market Studies, Moscow School of Management Skolkovo as well as the Moscow State Forestry University, expanded my research perspective, allowing me to understand better the wide range of ideas and approaches with which the Russian academy, government and civil society seek to address the contemporary challenges of sustainable urban governance.

Particularly beneficial for my research has been my attendance of several international conferences, which were organized by leading Russian Universities – SpbGU and the Institute for Emerging Market Studies, Moscow School of Management Skolkovo. The venues' format allowed me to interact with researchers from different Russian federal districts – an opportunity, which would have otherwise been practically hard to achieve, considering the very large distances in Russia.

The transformation of the urban-environment interface, under the pressure of growing urbanization, has far reaching implications for health and sustainability at local, regional and

global scales. Substantiating the theoretical research framework with a local-level study, the research stay allowed me to conduct an extensive empirical work at one of my case-study areas – Sestroretsk. Sestroretsk is a town which is part of St. Petersburg’s urban conglomerate; it is also an area of environmental protection, of particular importance for human health, as it is a site of a major rehabilitation center. Therein I conducted 21 interviews with medical doctors, patients, administrators and civil society representatives, exploring in greater detail the issues of sustainable urbanization, public health, and environmental protection at the urban-forest interface. I particularly express my gratitude to Prof. Bobylev, who kindly supported my gaining access for conducting research at Sestroretsk.

### **What were the main results of your research stay? (2)**

The main results of the research stay can be summarized as follows:

1. Continued engagement with the most current and relevant scientific publications and analyses of leading Russian scientists working in the area of sustainable environmental governance. This theoretical review has now been honed towards more targeted issue-specific publications. Access to the rich libraries and scientific resources of the State University of St. Petersburg and the Russian Academy of Sciences at St. Petersburg, as well as the Moscow State Forestry University. Environmental NGOs, such as Bellona and WWF Russia, have also graciously provided me with copies of their most relevant publications
2. Meetings with leading Russian and international scientists in both St. Petersburg and Moscow.
3. Meetings and engagement with non-government governance actors, such as environmental NGOs, civil society representatives and representatives of the business community.
4. Student education – Prof. Bobylev kindly invited me to present four guest lectures at the State University of St. Petersburg to both graduate (Masters) and undergraduate students, studying environmental management, political geography, natural resources

management. Prof. Bobylev kindly informed the academic community at SPbGU about my research stay and the scope of my research and interests:

[http://earth.spbu.ru/news-events/news\\_785.html](http://earth.spbu.ru/news-events/news_785.html)

5. Participation in 2 international conference fora:
  - a. First German-Russian Workshop on Institutional Change „Institutional Reform in Post-Communist States: Obstacles, Resistance, Failures“, SPbGU
  - b. ‘What Does Bioeconomy Offer For Long-Term Strategic Cooperation Between Europe And Russia’, jointly organized by the Institute for Emerging Market Studies, Moscow School of Management Skolkovo and the European Forestry Institute, Moscow, Russia
6. Attendance of 2 guest lectures:
  - Angelina Davydova, Director of German-Russian Office of Environmental Information, European University of St. Petersburg.
  - **Esko Aho**, former prime minister of Finland, currently the Executive Chairman, East Office of Finnish Industries Board, Institute for Emerging Market Studies, Moscow School of Management Skolkovo
7. Meetings and discussion with a representative of the European Commission in Moscow about the possibility for more extensive future collaboration, especially in the sphere of academic collaboration and educational exchange.
8. Participation in discussions with graduate students, currently engaged in research in the area of sustainable development
9. Preparation of materials for future publications, in collaboration with Prof. Nikolai Bobylev.
10. The research project was taken from the theoretical into the empirical stage. Empirical work was conducted in the city of Sestroretsk, a suburb of St. Petersburg.

**Who were your primary contact persons? (3)**

I express my gratitude to my primary contact persons and organizations in this research visit:

1. Prof. Nikolai Bobylev, Saint Petersburg State University
2. Prof. Tatyana Romanova, European University of St. Petersburg
3. Maxim Titov, European University of St. Petersburg
4. Bellona
5. Friends of the Baltic
6. Russian-German bureau for Ecological information
7. Udmurtskiy State University.
8. School of Fashion Journalism.
9. Huhtamaki.
10. European Forest Institute.

Further contacts have been established, but are not mentioned here for confidentiality reasons.

**What aspects of your research stay did you find most challenging or interesting?**

My efforts to empirically explore and subsequently theorize, within the context of the existing scholarship, the ways to integrate considerations of environmental and human health into sustainable urban governance have been both the most challenging and interesting aspect of my research stay.

The Russian boreal forests are an important factor for Carbon storage and climate change mitigation, as well as for biodiversity and human health. Yet the forests and environmental ecosystems at the urban-forest interface are subjected to a particularly harsh anthropogenic pressure. Lack of proper understanding about the true magnitude of the forest ecosystem services has resulted in the progressively growing over-utilization of the environmental resources. Currently the natural resource management regime and the normative regulation reflects a pattern of use, characteristic of a much smaller population size. The rapid urban growth has outpaced the social attitudes and the normative base. This mismatch, in which the population growths has surged ahead of the pace of urban socio-environmental system's adaptation and adjustment, can have very harsh and detrimental consequences. One of my

interviewees, senior scientist, cautioned: ‘So many people have now moved to live in Moscow that the forests at the urban-forest interface, which are intensively used for recreation, are in danger of being trampled down. People still think that they can walk everywhere in these forests, but the amount of people now using this resource is so large that the soil is being compacted underneath their footsteps, thus limiting the availability of water and nutrients and also damaging the roots of the trees. We may even need to restrict people’s access to the forests at the urban-environment interface, otherwise our forests may simply die, being trampled down by the sheer number of people, who walk around.’ Consequently, an appropriate action must be taken, since inaction has a particularly detrimental impact on human health and environmental health and integrity.

The most challenging aspect of my research was deriving conclusions on the type of actions that need to be taken in order to adequately address the issues of sustainable urbanization within the context of St. Petersburg as well as scaling up such conclusions within the global context.

Another challenging and interesting aspect of my research was making a comparison between the European approaches to sustainable urban governance and the Russian ones. I can confidently affirm that the sustainable urban environmental governance in Russia can greatly benefit from the European experiences and vice versa. Thus, cooperation is greatly needed in order to address the urban-environment issues of our contemporaneity. The challenging and interesting question is contemplating about the format, which could best guide and structure such cooperation.

Participation in lectures, conferences, interviews and discussions, which I have participated in or conducted – these diverse forms of interaction opened up numerous challenging and interesting possibilities to collaborate, develop new ties, hopefully leading to new ways of addressing the challenges of the modern sustainable city.

**What activities have you been involved in while at the partner university and how have these aided your understanding of your research topic/sustainability?**

In my previous answers I provided numerous details about the activities, that I have been involved with, during my research stay, and which included more in-depth and tailored-to-the-task library research of the existing scientific publications, discussions with the scientific community, conference participation as well as student education, via invited guest lecture presentations. I was able to attend academic events and arrange discussions and meetings with representatives of the civil society, business and NGOs, as well as the academia in both St. Petersburg and Moscow.

In my preceding answers I have also given details and examples of the activities, which I have been involved with – e.g. library research, field research, participation and at times organization of lectures, conferences, interviews and discussions, etc.

A discussion of the ways in which these activities have aided my understanding of my research topic and sustainability has also been discussed in the preceding sections. Thus here I will emphasize only the most important conclusion: sustainability is not a narrow task to be achieved by a singularly-focused activities of one city or even one state. Even within the boundaries of one country – in this case Russia – tailored approaches are needed for each region, ones which reflect the specific needs and challenges faced by this region. International collaboration at multiple governance levels and transnational learning via formal and informal channels are essential for building a common future which is greener and more sustainable.

My research visit at SPbGU allowed me to appreciate the need for and the value of what the University Alliance of Sustainability is doing – creating such common vision, good will and shared understanding.

**How did you interact with the university/staff/students/sustainability initiatives?**

In previous answers I have mentioned that I am fluent in Russian, so I was able to interact with ease with the university academics, staff and students. Everybody has been very easily approachable and helpful. The sustainability initiatives at the State University of St. Petersburg are international in nature and I was warmly welcomed to participate in and contribute to them.

The four lectures, which I gave to the students, were very positively received. I am very grateful to the student community of SPbGU for their keen interest in my scholarship and research inquiries and I express my thanks for their many interesting questions.

The reception from the research community at SPbGU has been just as welcoming and supportive.

I was also warmly received by the academic communities at the European University of St. Petersburg, the Moscow State Forestry University and the Institute for Emerging Market Studies at the Moscow School of Management Skolkovo. The European University of St. Petersburg is an institution dedicating considerable efforts towards seeking collaboration with European Universities and Institutions, so I was easily able to find lots of common concerns and interests with the research community there. My interactions with the Moscow State University have been very warm and positive, even including an informal presentation of my work to some of the staff. My visit there was very useful and it has definitely opened possibilities for future collaboration. I greatly valued the original and innovative market-led approaches towards sustainability, promoted by the Institute for Emerging Market Studies at Skolkovo, Moscow. The visit there was indispensable for interacting closer with those representatives of the business community, who lead in providing sustainable and environmentally friendly commercial services and products.

**How did your understanding of sustainability/sustainable development develop during the research stay?**

The empirical focus of my stay allowed me to meet with different environmental governance actors and I interviewed several business people. Some of the businesses are very supportive of the notion of a transition to a greener economy and greener society; some even actively seek ways to become greener and more environmentally friendly, thus becoming creators of original technological innovations. The good efforts of such green businesses should receive more support and encouragement from the public institutions, as they are important partners in the sustainability governance efforts. Government measures, market-led approaches, consumer/citizen actions and NGO activism are not inimical, but mutually complementary in the efforts toward achieving sustainable development.



Another aspect of my understanding of sustainability, which developed during the research stay was my awareness of the growing strength of the public opinion in favour of the availability of greener products on the market. Thus, it is becoming apparent that businesses, consumers and the government need to work together to achieve the sustainability goals. The format(s) of such collaboration are dynamically and often spontaneously emerging.

Of particular value for my research was my engagement with the community of Sestroretsk. My interaction with the community members there improved my understanding of the ways in which the suburban communities adapt to change and incorporate the protected natural environment, which they inhabit, into their livelihoods. The research conducted at the study area was indispensable in developing nature-based solutions and governance models for sustainable and resilient cities, based on the principles of balanced territorial organization, governance devolution, and public participation.

Russia's challenges are often of a different - namely much larger scale - than the ones, faced by the EU member-states. However, although they may be different in some ways, the sustainable environmental governance issues that the European Union and Russia need to resolve are in essence, very similar. Europe and Russia need to work together and learn from each other's experiences, in order to solve the common environmental problems.

### **How has the research stay influenced your future goals?**

The research stay at SPbGU has been indispensable for my progress towards completing my dissertation. The case study, conducted in Russia, enriched my understanding of the development options, faced by one of the great urban conglomerates of the European North. St. Petersburg faces formidable challenges in its aspiration towards transforming itself into a greener and more sustainable city. My future research goal is to help overcome these challenges.

The research stay allowed me to conduct a detailed analysis of one of my study areas, thus exploring a bottom-up, community-based perspective. Since I have currently conducted only one empirical investigation in Russia at Sestroretsk, St. Petersburg, I hope that there will be an opportunity to conduct a second one, which will allow for a comparative evaluation, thus

greatly increasing the analytical strength of the research and the power and applicability of the scholarly conclusion.

My research goal is to help address the complex challenges of sustainable urban governance, drawing on the best practices and ideas. I hope to continue the productive and fruitful collaboration with the research community at SPbGU as well as with other academic, civil society, NGO, business and medical community representatives, which I met during my research stay.

I would like to conclude my remarks by expressing my gratitude for being able to participate in this academic exchange to the following institutions: the University Alliance for Sustainability, the Freie Universität Berlin and the State University of St. Petersburg. I am particularly grateful to Prof. Nikolai Bobylev, my host at the State University of St. Petersburg and to my graduate supervisor at the Freie Universität Berlin - Prof. Dr. Miranda Schreurs.