

Russian approaches to the concept of sustainable development

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Areas for discussion

- What is sustainable development?
- Legislative and policy responses
- Particularities of Russian understanding
- Russia as a global environmental actor
- Implications for Russia's economic/industrial system

The concept of sustainable development

- Contested (geopolitical/economic)
- Vision of future society-nature balance
- Science of sustainability (multiple sciences addressing a common theme) not a coherent Sustainability Science

Russia's engagement...

- UN Conference on Environment and Development, Rio de Janeiro, 1992
 - Agenda 21,
 - Rio Convention
 - non-legally binding Forest principles
 - Convention on Biodiversity
 - Convention on Climate Change

Russia's response...

- **1994** Presidential decree 'Concerning the State Strategy of the Russian Federation for the Protection of the Environment and the Ensuring of Sustainable Development'
- **1996** Presidential decree 'Concerning the Concept for the Transition of the Russian Federation to Sustainable Development'

1996 Presidential decree

‘...the Russian Federation considers it necessary and possible to carry out a sequential transition to sustainable development to ensure a balanced achievement of social and economic goals together with a solution to the problems of preserving a favourable environment and natural-resource potential in order to meet the needs of both current and future generations’

1996 Presidential decree...

- **Stage 1:** addressing societal problems, identifying and improving the environmental situation of regions with serious environmental difficulties
- **Stage 2:** major restructuring of the economy and the incorporation of environmental concerns into both economic and social practices
- **Stage 3:** need to harmonise the interrelationship between the environment and the world community.
Attainment of sustainable development is linked with the 'sphere of reason' (tsarstvo razuma), or noosphere, as advanced by the Russian scientist V.I. Vernadsky (1863-1945)

1996 Presidential decree...

‘The advancement of humanity to sustainable development ultimately would lead to the emergence of the sphere of wisdom (the noosphere) foreseen by V.I. Vernadsky, when the spiritual values and knowledge of humankind, existing in harmony with the environment, will become the criteria of national and individual wealth.’

Russia – affinity with the central tenets of sustainable development?

- ‘The idea of sustainable development is extremely consonant with the customs, spirit and mentality of Russia.’ (1996 decree)
- Restated in the country’s 1997 report submitted to the UN concerning its implementation of Agenda 21
- Social science literature

Recent policy responses...

- Draft State Strategy for Sustainable Development
- Revision of 1991 Environmental Protection law (2002)
- Ecological Doctrine (2002)

Draft State Strategy for Sustainable Development

- 1998 version – sent back for revision
- 2002 version – ‘The strategic aim of the sustainable development of Russia is to improve the quality of life on the basis of scientific-technical progress, and the dynamic development of the economy and social sphere whilst ensuring the preservation of the reproductive potential of the country’s natural complex ...for current and future generations.’

2002 Environmental Protection law

“In accordance with the Constitution of the Russian Federation each person has the right to a favourable environment, each person is obliged to preserve nature and the environment, to be mindful of natural wealth which is the basis for sustainable development, life and the activities of the peoples living on the territory of the Russian Federation. The current federal law determines the legal basis of state policy in the area of environmental protection, ensuring the balanced solution of socio-economic tasks, preservation of a favourable environment, biological diversity and natural resources with the purpose of satisfying the demands of current and future generations, strengthening environmental law and order and ensuring ecological security. ...” (Preamble)

Ecological Doctrine:

Underlying aim of state environmental policy

‘...the preservation of natural systems, supporting their integrity and ‘life-giving’ functions for the sustainable development of society, improving the quality of life, improving the health of the population and the demographic situation and ensuring the ecological security of the country’

Ecological Doctrine:

Main underlying principles...

Incorporating:

- Sustainable development – with equal attention given to its economic, social and environmental elements and recognising the impossibility of social development with the degradation of the wider environment...

Russia as a global environmental actor

- Russia's importance for global biophysical systems and for global pursuit of sustainable development
- Positive 'spin' – Vernadsky etc.
- Kyoto

Russia, sustainable development, & industrial/economic systems

- Ecological modernisation
 - Efficiency gains
 - Pollution reductions
 - Historical connections
- Ministry for Natural Resources
 - Relative power of ‘utilisation’ lobby
 - Economic importance of hydrocarbons over short-medium-term
- Policy – practice gap
 - Lack of coherent policy/inconsistent application
 - Sustainable development – ‘slippery’ concept