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NU, PiM and 42 – An evaluation of a Russian-Norwegian environmentalist youth partnership

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**NU, PiM and 42
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Norwegian environmentalist
youth partnership**

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Preface

This evaluation has been carried out for Natur og Ungdom (NU) – Young Friends of the Earth Norway. It is based on interviews in Murmansk, Arkhangelsk, Syktyvkar and NU's heads quarters in Oslo as well as document studies.

The Norwegian Institute for Urban and Regional Research at Oslo Metropolitan University would like to thank all those having shared their time, information and insights with the evaluator. Everybody has been very helpful.

Oslo, March 2020

Kristian Tronstad
Research Director

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Summary

For twenty years Natur og Ungdom and its Russian partners, PiM in Murmansk and Aetas/42 in Arkhangelsk, have run projects together. The project activities are manifold but are tightly coordinated under the umbrella epithet, The Russia Project. Funding has been provided from the Norwegian government (Ministry of Foreign Affairs) through the Ministry of Climate and Environment, the Norwegian Children and Youth Council, the Norwegian Radiation and Nuclear Safety Authority and the Barents Secretariat.

This evaluation covers the period since 2014. The project has provided the two Russian partner organisations with resources to keep youth environmentalism alive in the two cities. The support to the Russian partners has consisted in three main elements. Firstly, it has made it possible to keep premises where activists can meet and employed staff to coordinate activities. Secondly, the project has given the two Russian partner organisations access to additional environmental information and training, including on nuclear issues. Thirdly, they have received training in organisational development and membership democracy.

For NU's members the project has given an opportunity for engaging in international activities and getting to know Russian environmental problems and environmentalism. Two full-time Russia coordinators (one of them on energy issues) manage the Russia Project from the Norwegian side.

Even if the period covered by this evaluation has been a difficult one due to the Russian authorities' measures against foreign-funded civil society organisations, the project can refer to results. Despite the Russian authorities' frequent and somewhat unpredictable changes in their methods to control civil society, the project partners have been able to carry out project activities. Some of the success in this regard must be ascribed to the flexibility on the part of the funders and NU when project activities have had to be amended or changed due to local circumstances. Without allowing the Russian partners to use their local know-how on how to adapt to the political and administrative climate in Russia, much would have been lost.

Moreover, project activities lead to outcomes. The fact that they have staff and premises have made the two Russian partner organisations better at informational work than they would otherwise have been. This has for instance proved to be the case during the ongoing controversies over waste management. The training on democratic organisational practices provided through the project made it possible to solve internal conflicts and for 42 has led to a new organisational model. The two organisations are the places to go for environmentally concerned young people in Murmansk and Arkhangelsk. Representatives of other environmentalist groups in the two cities tell that PiM and 42 with their resources and stability brought through the project have an important function for civil society activism in general. Therefore, the project has a wider impact.

Although PiM and 42 have some other funding and are able to run activities on a zero-budget basis, they are dependent upon the project to retain their position.

The evaluation provides some recommendations:

- **Leeway to the Russian partners.** The Russian partners are capable of developing activities in response to developments within Russian environmentalism locally. The practice of flexibility on the part of the funders and NU should be continued. Under the current circumstances with direct and indirect pressure from the authorities, organisational survival must come first.

- **Find common issues.** The project would gain from more thematic harmonisation in order for cross-national interfaces to become more relevant. The issue of Repparfjorden and Førdefjorden have much in common with the case of the landfill for Moscow's waste in Shies in the Southern part of Arkhangelsk region.
- **Twinning with local NU chapters.** PiM and 42 have more in common with the most active, local branches of NU than with the organisation at national level. Therefore, it might be an idea to "twin" 42 and PiM to one or two of the most active local chapters of NU.
- **Resume applications to the Barents Secretariat.** NU should make effort to comply with the requirement for support from the Barents Secretariat. If no local NU chapters in the Norwegian regions forming part of the Barents Euro-Arctic Region are ready for cooperation, NU is recommended to help finding alternative partners for PiM and 42.
- **Check out the funding opportunities from the Consulate General in Murmansk.** PiM and 42 should examine the possibilities of applying for small funds from the Norwegian Consulate General in Murmansk.
- **Develop "collective memory files".** There is a need to strengthen continuity. The current coordinators have started a work to develop "resource banks", where experiences are written down, including elaborate minutes with descriptions of the situation in which decisions have been made. This work should be given priority.

1 Introduction

For 20 years Nature and Youth – Young Friends of the Earth Norway – has cooperated with two Russian partner organizations in Arkhangelsk and Murmansk respectively. Nature and Youth (hereafter referred to as *NU* after its Norwegian name, Natur og Ungdom) is the largest environmentalist youth organisation in Norway. The Russian partner organizations are *Priroda i Molodëzh* (Nature and Youth) in Murmansk and “42” in Arkhangelsk. The Ecological Movement 42 was established in 2018 by members of *Aetas*, that closed down in 2017). *NU* is the major organisation for environmentally concerned young people in Norway, just like *PiM* and *Aetas/42* have been in their respective cities throughout the two decades of cooperation.

Evaluation objectives

This report is an evaluation of *NU*'s Russia Project. The Russia Project aims to make sure there are «strong, efficient and democratic youth organizations working for environmental protection in Northwest Russia”. The report's overall objective is to be of help in making the project as goal-oriented and efficient as possible.

Results are identified and analysed in line with the tools offered by Theory-of-Change, where results are classified as project deliveries (outputs), outcomes resulting from the outputs and societal impact stemming from the project outcomes. Whether outputs eventually lead to impact is highly contingent upon contextual factors, and the report pays due attention to the circumstances under which the project takes place. Particular attention is given to one of the major objectives of the project, which is to promote organizational democracy and financial sustainability of the Russian partners. The mutual relevance of the project for all partners is discussed. Also the project's cost-efficiency will be addressed.

Methodology

The evaluation is based on three basic sources. Firstly, 20 semi-structured individual as well as group interviews have been conducted with representatives of the three partner organisations and other environmental organisations in Arkhangelsk, Murmansk, Syktyvkar, Moscow and Oslo. Unfortunately, interviews with representatives of the authorities in *PiM*'s and 42's home cities have not been possible.

Secondly, reports, plans and budgets from the three organisations have been reviewed. Thirdly, Russian on-line mass media have been read. The main sources were 7x7, *Novaia gazeta*, *Izvestiia*, and to a lesser extent *Pravda Severa* and *Murmanskiy vestnik*.

The evaluation's research design and analysis is based on Theory of Change and the Context-Mechanism-Outcome scheme (see chapter 3.6).

The 2013 evaluation of *NU*'s Russia Project (Holm-Hansen 2013) will serve as baseline for this evaluation. This evaluation covers the period from 2014.

Transliteration into Latin letters is made according to the Passport 2010 system. The first time a Russian word or expression occurs in the text, the stressed syllable is marked with an *accent aigu*, e.g. '*samostróí*'.

2 Environmentalism in Russia

2.1 The current state of environmentalism in Russia

The policy area of environmental protection in Russia is characterized by four main factors. Firstly, Russia's responsibility for its wilderness. No other state is comparable to Russia regarding unspoiled nature. Secondly, Russia's abundance of valuable natural resources, like gas, oil and minerals. Thirdly, Russia's position as a leading nuclear power with in nuclear energy production. The fourth major factor is the traditionally weak position of instruments and institutions designed for environmental protection.

Unspoiled nature

The traditional way of protecting nature in Russia has been to establish protected areas. Nature reserves (*zapovedniki*) and wildlife refuges (*zakazniki*) were established after the 1917 revolution, and the 2017 Year of Ecology in Russia marked the 100th anniversary of the country's first strict nature reserve. Today *zapovedniki* cover a substantial percentage of Russia's surface. Federally, regionally and locally protected areas cover 3.2, 7.3 and 1.6 of the country respectively (Newell and Henry 2016) and the surface area protected is increasing. The *zapovedniki* are classified under the strictest designated category of the World Conservation Union meaning that all economic activity is forbidden within them. Nonetheless, environmentalists repeatedly point at violations. There are controversies between nature conservationists and logging companies over regulations conserving logging in ecologically valuable forests, e.g. of Siberian pine. Nonetheless, the expansion of the protected area system is considered one of post-Soviet Russia's environmental successes.

Extractive industries

Natural resources form the basis of the Russian economy and major incomes that maintain the Russian state budget come from extractive industries. The state's reliance on revenues from oil, gas and other natural resource industries causes particular problems for environmentalists challenging these industries on the grounds of, e.g. oil and gas spills, reduced biodiversity, negative effects on indigenous peoples' traditional way of life or climate change. The so-called 'climate sceptical' position is relatively strongly represented in Russia and climate change is often just termed 'undesirable weather phenomena'. Highly positioned decision-makers express doubts about anthropogenic climate changes and point at positive effects of climate change on e.g. agriculture.

Nuclear power industry

Nuclear power has a strong position in Russia both for defence purposes and for civilian use. Russia is a major exporter of nuclear power technology. Today the nuclear sector in Russia – civilian as well as military – is amalgamated into one single agency, the state corporation *Rosatom*. Northwest Russia has a large concentration of Russia's nuclear waste problems. This waste has three main sources: the Northern Fleet (unit of the Russian Navy responsible for the defence of Northwestern Russia), the civilian fleet of nuclear icebreakers, and the Kola Nuclear Power Plant.

Instruments and institutions

Russia's environmental policies and the institutions that underpin them prove to be weak when confronted with economic interests, in particular extractive industries and forestry. Lately, local conflicts over urban waste disposal give evidence of this. Moreover, administrative inefficiency plays a role. Only about 35% of the President's assignments related to the environment throughout 2012-2017 had been fulfilled, according to an analysis made for a joint roundtable

meeting conducted by the Civic Chamber of the Russian Federation and the Analytical Centre of the Russian government (WWF Russia 2018).

Russia's environmental legislation is elaborate. A 2014 World Bank report cited in Newell and Henry (2016) identified more than 4000 federal-level regulatory documents on environmental protection. Many of these laws and regulations contravene each other, which makes it difficult to comply with them.

Policymaking is subject to the constraints of a bureaucratic-authoritarian institutional framework. In Russia, a strictly hierarchical and formalistic decision making system with the President on top co-exists with everyday political decision making formed through intra-bureaucratic bargaining. When environmental concern is pitted against immediate economic gain from nature use the environmental side generally loses out. The environmentalists' institutional clout is considerably weaker than that of industries. The Ministry of Environmental Protection was "degraded" to a State Committee in 1996 and made part of the Ministry of Nature Use in 2000.

The policy fields of environmental protection and climate change management is institutionally split up (Holm-Hansen and Berg-Nordlie 2017). In Arkhangelsk environmental protection belongs under the regional Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry, and in Murmansk under the regional Ministry of Nature Resources and the Environment. Much of the control and monitoring functions are carried out by federal agencies, like *Rosprirodnadzor* (the Federal Service for Supervision of Natural Resources), *Rostekhnadzor* (the Federal Service for Supervision of the Environment, Technology and Nuclear Management) and *Rosgidromet* (the Federal Service for Hydrometeorology and Environmental Monitoring).

2.2 Civil society and activism in contemporary Russia

2.2.1 Soviet roots

Russian environmental activism has its roots in the post-Stalinist period and have been linked up to other political concerns of a wide variety. In 1955, the Academy of Science got a commission on nature protection. Four years later nature conservation was defined as problem for geographers to research (Ziegler 1987: 49). A nation-wide voluntary association was allowed to be established and by 1980 the All-Union Society for the Protection of Nature had 33 million members by 1980 (Ziegler 1987: 70).

Environmental civic activism came into existence in the 1960s. Interestingly, the debate was sparked by the culturally conservative literary journal *Oktiabr'* that launched a campaign in 1963 to protect Lake Baikal from the pollution expected to result from the planned construction of two pulp and paper mills at the shores of the lake (Kagarlitsky 1989: 219). This was a watershed because it meant that the nature protection discourse went from protection *for* industry to protection *from* industry. In addition to the arguments put forward by the conservative writers, scholars from the natural sciences as well as sanitary and epidemiological doctors joined the protests contributing with scientific and rational arguments.

Soviet conservative environmentalism manifested itself in cultural heritage protection and campaigns against planned hydro-electrical dams that would leave villages where traditional Russian life took place under water. However, environmental concern was also voiced by technocrats whose key words were 'rational nature use' and '*effektivnost'*' (Holm-Hansen 2005: 102 -112).

Environmental and cultural heritage protection played an important role a catalyst for civic engagement and criticism of the Soviet economic and administrative model during the perestroika period in the latter half of the 1980s. In 1987-1988, the Socio-Ecological Union (*Sotsial'no-ékologicheskiiy soiuz*) was established as an umbrella for contacts between local groups all over

the country. This period was marked by a shift from environmental concern mainly based on national conservatism to also include democratic and Westernising ideas. Both criticised fundamentals of the Soviet system but for different reasons. The conservatives raised their voice because the system destroyed traditional life. The liberals (democrats) referred to irrational use of resources, a problem they as imminent in the Soviet economic system only to be solved by market mechanisms.

The period saw several successes for the environmental movement, e.g. the closure of some heavily polluting enterprises, the shelving of the Northern river reversal plans and a large hydro-electrical dam. Electoral campaigns of democratic candidates often highlighted environmental issues.

2.2.2 Developments since the 1990s

Whereas environmental concern had mobilized ordinary people and enlivened civil society in the second half of the 1980s, it played a minor role in the 1990s. Economic and administrative collapse made people seek individual survival strategies rather than engage in environmentalism. Moreover, the new democratic power holders downplayed the role to environmental protection – “first the economy, then the ecology”, as the argument went, among others in the 1990 “500 days” reform programme. Trifonova and Chuvashenko (2008) argue that this made the environmental movement in Russia enter the “alternativist” stage, in which the movement still finds itself. The authors identify several types of actors and activities that characterise contemporary Russian environmentalism. Among these is the continuation of earlier endeavours to protect areas with a particularly valuable nature through popular awareness and ‘societal control’ (*obshchestvennyi kontrol*). Societal control is an institutionalised mechanism for citizen supervision of the authorities’ compliance with rules and political decisions.

Furthermore, environmentalists are actively engaged in urban matters, supporting environmentally oriented political candidates for elections. Scientists and scholars play a role in monitoring, awareness-raising and introducing environmentally friendly technologies. The educational sector makes pupils and students knowledgeable about the environment. The informational sector plays an increasing role, not least due to the opportunities offered by the internet. Lately, a movement for an “environment-friendly lifestyle” has emerged. NU’s two partner organisations are mainly into raising popular awareness, when allowed in educational institutions. They also make use of informational technologies and appeals to environmental life-styles.

2.2.3 Semi-authoritarian mechanisms

Russia’s political regime is often characterised as semi-authoritarian, hybrid or outright authoritarian. Since 2012 and Vladimir Putin’s third inauguration as president civil society organisations have suffered from tighter control from above. Nonetheless, for practical purposes of legitimisation, information and resource mobilisation, the authorities acknowledge the need for a civil society. Civil society, however, should be “constructive”, and not “harmful”. Drawing the line between the two, of course is difficult and makes for ambiguity as to how the authorities relate to civil society organisations and practice may differ significantly from case to case. In the case of environmental organisations, this leads to low predictability regarding working conditions.

Laws

Environmental and other civil society organisation are constrained mainly by three laws: the foreign agent law (2012), the law on undesirable organisations (2015) and the media agent law (2017). These laws will be briefly described in this subchapter. The implication of these laws will be dealt with in the subchapters analysing Russia’s environmental movement in general and NU’s partners in particular.

The ‘foreign agent law’. The law was introduced in 2012 is the most widely cited measure to strengthen control from above. Any organization that receives foreign funding and engages in

politics have to register as a foreign agent or will be labelled as a foreign agent by the Ministry of Justice. From February 2020 this also applies to individuals who disseminate materials from “foreign agents”.

The definition of ‘political activity’ is vague and applied differently from case to case, and often includes suggestions for concrete adjustments of environmental policies. NU’s partner organization, Aetas was labelled as a foreign agent by the Ministry of Justice in 2017 after its leader had signed an environmental petition on oil spills to the president.

Both Russian partner organizations have undergone formal changes to adapt to the restrictive laws on civil society organizations receiving financial support from abroad.

An organization that registers as a foreign agent voluntarily is allowed to continue its activities. The same applies if it is formally labelled a foreign agent but then it has to pay a fine. Operating as a ‘foreign agent’, however, naturally has several drawbacks. One of them is the requirement that all external material from the organization has to indicate that it comes from a foreign agent. ‘Agent’ has a similar negative connotation in Russian as in e.g. Norwegian, indicating espionage. In addition, ‘foreign’ has a more threatening connotation in Russian.

Moreover, the institution with which environmental organisations may want to cooperate have become more reluctant, because of what is called “administrative pressure” (*administrativnoe davlenie*) in Russian. For instance, headmasters and heads of libraries with whom NU’s partners have cooperated receive “recommendations” from the regional authorities not to invite foreign agents. This leads to marginalisation of the environmental groups. Also groups that are not ‘foreign agents’ may suffer from the same mechanisms as they may be non-recommendable just by having foreign contacts or being sharply critical towards the environmental policies that are being pursued by the authorities. “Not everything is about the foreign agent law”, as one interviewee told, “if we do something considered provocative, we may be blocked also without the foreign agent stigma on us”.

The “no smoke without fire”-effect also plays a role. Merely being under suspicion of being a foreign agent, even in the extended sense of that concept, applied in the foreign agent law, harms the reputation of organisations. Not only fear but also mistrust make many people keep clear of such organisations. One representative of one of NU’s partner organisations mentioned this as a problem for them already.

Failing to register as a foreign agent means draconic fines, like 300 000 RUR. Being a foreign agent also means excessively detailed paperwork to the authorities, or face fines for not doing so.

The effect is that inspiration and learning from international contacts is hampered and that groups apply self-censorship while formulating policy proposals.

So far (February 2020), in all 72 civil society organisations, of which eight environmentalist organisations, and ten mass media outlets are registered as foreign agents.

The foreign agent media law. In 2017, a foreign agent media law was adopted. It made media outlets foreign agents if they received foreign funding and spread information from foreign sources. This law was amended in December 2019, making individual journalists and bloggers foreign agents.

The law on undesirable organisations. The law targets foreign organisations operating in Russia was passed in 2015. Individuals, official and organisations cooperating with undesirable organisations are fined. For a more detailed account of the constrained working conditions for Russia’s environmental organisations, see Servetnik and Album (2018 and 2019). So far, WWF Russia and Greenpeace Russia have survived this law.

Consultative organs

It would be an exaggeration to say that relations between state and society in Russia is solely based upon direct repression. As a result of the regime's unwillingness to let the elected representative organs at local, regional and federal level play an independent role various types of consultative bodies are set up. Representative organs are "substituted" (Petrov, Lipman and Hale 2014). They are composed of non-elected, individual members, often representing science or civil society organisations. Their task is to represent opinion, sector-specific insight and to a certain degree material interests (Davies, Holm-Hansen, Kononenko and Røiseland 2016; Berg-Nordlie, Kropp and Holm-Hansen 2018: 24, 28). Most prominent among these consultative organs are the civic chamber at all levels of governance but the societal councils that advice ministries, agencies and major industries also play a role. Environmentalists – scientists and activists – are represented in these types of bodies. Bellona cooperates with Rosatom's Public Council, which has been established for communicating and working together with civil society (Holm-Hansen 2015). Some Rosatom projects require public hearings as part of Environmental Impact Assessments.

Civil society is also needed for the purpose of 'societal control', mentioned in chapter 2.2.2.

Loyal organisations

The authorities' distinction between constructive and harmful civil society organisations is somehow mirrored in these organisations' attitude to cooperation with government structures, e.g. on the platforms for consultation. Here, pragmatism seems to prevail and lack of participation is a result not only of unwillingness on the part of civil society organisations but also on authorities' unwillingness to engage with them.

Most of the scientific and journalistic attention to Russia's environmental groups is directed at the ones that get into trouble with the authorities. Less attention is given to those at home with the authorities.

Lately NU's partners have experienced competition from local youth groups that emulate their activities but refrain from engaging in controversial issues. These latter organisations benefit from preferential treatment from the authorities. (More on this in chapters 3.5.1 and 3.5.2 below.)

2.2.4 The household waste management issue

«It is necessary to drastically cut the amount of waste ending up in landfills, implement waste sorting and generally move towards the circular economy.»

Putin's state-of-the-nation address to the Federal Assembly at the Manezh Central Exhibition Hall in Moscow on January 15, 2020

Over the last few years management of household waste has emerged as one of the most debated environmental issues in Russia. From mainly being an issue for professionals in the field of municipal infrastructure, it has become a rallying point for environmental groups all over Russia. Moreover, the issue has proved to have a potential for mobilisation among people hitherto not primarily considering themselves to be environmentalists. In the view of many Russians, the issue is closely linked to nepotistic public-private misconduct and central authorities disregard of the geographical peripheries.

Moscow is growing and the Muscovites' consumption is growing. Dumping household garbage in large landfills in the Moscow region has led to heated protests in nearby towns. Local inhabitants complain about small and poisonous gases from the landfills. The authorities, although stating that they go for waste sorting, also plan for garbage incineration plans. Most environmental groups oppose these latter.

The waste management reform

In January 2019, the federal authorities launched garbage reform. At federal level a new agency was established, the Russian Environmental Operator. The authorities' aim is to establish a new branch of the economy, that of waste management (*obrashchenie s otkhodami*). A major step was to concentrate the overall regional responsibility for waste management to so-called *regional operators*, one in each of Russia's 85 constituent regions. These companies control the handling of waste from it is taken out of the bins until it is placed in a landfill, burnt or recycled.

The reform included higher municipal tariffs for waste disposal to finance, among others, new sorting bins. Recycling centres are being built, and people, among them school children, informed about how to sort waste. In the Soviet times waste sorting of paper and glass was a routine procedure in most households. In the 1980s, almost 30% of all paper used and around 45% of all glass bottles were recycled (Fedotkina, Gorbashko and Vadolkina 2019). This system collapsed during the 1990s and the currently lacking infrastructure for separate waste collection is one of the major bottlenecks for a recycling system to work. Today, only around four per cent of municipal household waste is recycled in Russia, the rest is buried, burned or just dumped out in the open (RSU 2019).

To promote sorting, recycling – and making people aware of the need for change – environmental groups carry out actions where they establish pickup stations for waste in cooperation with private recycling firms. Apparently, the environmentalists work in line with the authorities strategies in this. A successful implementation of the reform would reduce the health problems caused by landfills significantly and also the problem of illegal waste tips.

Through the Barents Secretariat commercial actors in Russia and the waste management firm Remix in Tromsø have entered into contact.

Shies

Nonetheless, the reform has caused concern several places in Russia and in the Arkhangelsk region, and the Komi republic in particular. Here, the ongoing construction of a waste disposal site in Shies on the border between the two regions has given rise to massive protest. Today, around 30 environmental groups are involved in the protests and other organisations. Also political parties join in.

The landfill is intended for waste from Moscow. According to the plans, 500,000 tons of waste will be transported to Shies every year for the next 20 years. If accomplished, the landfill will be Europe's biggest.

Shies is a remote place on the train line between Moscow and Vorkuta in the Far North. It used to be a small forestry community with a railway station. Since 2002, the place is uninhabited and the closest village is 20 kilometres away. The place was chosen because of its remote location and vicinity to a major railway line. In 2018, the railway station's platforms were upgraded, forest was logged construction works started up for a landfill.

The waste will be pressed and wrapped in non-recyclable plastic. The presidential Council on civil society development and human rights, referring to the conclusion made by the regional water authorities, declared that the construction breaks with sanitary rules. The waste dump is placed on a bog and poisonous material will leak out and finally into drinking water. The federal minister of the environment has demanded environmental assessments.

In August 2018 the first protest actions against the landfill took place in Urdomá, close to Shies. Two months later an action groups was set up, called "The Pomor land is no garbage can" (*Pomóre'e ne pomóika*). Pomor refers to the old name used for the Northern parts of European Russia, and to its inhabitants, the Pomors. There is a small, yet controversial and repressed,

movement claiming that the Pomors constitute a Russian sub-ethnos, entitled to specific rights. Reportedly, this idea has gained ground after the conflict over Shies broke out.

Pomor'e ne pomoika started out as a group of around 20 people who knew each other on beforehand and who kept in touch on Facebook and its Russian equivalent, *Vkontakte*. The group grew fast and attracted people from all walks of life, "students, businesspeople and housewives", as one leading activist in Arkhangelsk, not related to NU's partner organisation, told us in an interview. Also all political orientations are represented, from the Communist Party to Zhirinovskiy's right wing populist Liberal Democrats, and from supporters of president Putin to activists in Aleksei Navalnyi's regime critical campaign. The organisation takes care not to be political and prefers to call itself 'civic' (*obshchestvennyi*). Most of the communication is on social media, both within Pomor'e ne pomoika and externally.

In December 2018, protest meetings were held in Arkhangelsk city and elsewhere in the region. Around 30 000 people took part in all. In February 2019, Pomor'e ne pomoika arranged a meeting to discuss the waste issue with environmentalists from all over Russia. In all, 25 regions were represented, "and they all have their own Shies", as the interviewee told. Among the participants were Greenpeace and the Environmental Watch on North Caucasus (*Ékologicheskaja vákhta po Sévernomy Kavkázú*). They decided to have no leaders and keep political parties out.

In April 2019, Pomor'e ne pomoika had planned an outdoor meeting but did not get a permission to do it. Nonetheless, they arranged a walk (*shéstvie*) through the central parts of the city, in which 7000 took part. For Arkhangelsk, this was a breakthrough. In all, around 50 demonstrators were fined for a total sum of two 2 million roubles. A fundraising campaign covered most of it. Towards the end of the meeting, a '*bessróchka*' was arranged.

The bessrochka is a neologism based on Russian for "without time limit" (*bes sróka*). After the walking demonstration, ten to 20 people remained at Arkhangelsk's central city square, and every day since a group of people have stood there from ten in the morning until eight in the evening. All major local and regional government buildings are located on that square, and as such, the bessrochka constitute a permanent pressure on the authorities and a reminder to the population at large. This is a new form of political demonstration in Russia. The bessrochka is important for dissemination of information, and coordination of trips to demonstrate in Shies. People hand in food and recyclable waste there. By now, there are around 30 bessrochki in different cities in Russia, including Syktyvkar, the capital of the Komi Republic.

Arkhangelsk city and Syktyvkar are the strongholds of the anti-Shies campaign, and in both cities, various protest actions have been arranged ever since 2018. Whereas the anti-Shies protest in Arkhangelsk takes care to appear a-political in the sense that they avoid statements regarding who should hold political positions, the campaign in Syktyvkar is more outspoken on such issues, and slogans against the governor and even president has occurred at demonstrations.

Activists from the two cities and elsewhere in Russia meet at the so-called '*vákhta*' (rotation shift) in Shies. Demonstrators stay in a cold and remote place in order to prevent the construction of the landfill physically. The parallels to the protests in Norway in the late 1970s and early 1980s to prevent the construction of a hydroelectric power plant in the Alta river in Northern Norway.

In Shies, protest activities began as soon as trucks started to arrive in 2018. Inhabitants in the village of Mádmas, 23 kilometers from Shies, by placing spike mats on the road. In June 2019, the Russian Railways closed down Shies station to make access more difficult for visiting protesters.

There have been several violent clashes at the '*vákhta*'. Special operations forces (*Spetsnaz*) have shown up with guns. A mix of police, private security companies (*ChOP*) and Special Purpose Mobile Unit (*OMON*) have been called upon to make sure construction works continue uninterrupted, and even stay in the same dormitory. According to the protesters, there have

been instances of private security guards beating up demonstrators while the police has been watching only to fine the protesters afterwards.

Just like in the late 1980's, the Shies case, environmentalism is a catalyst for discontent for a wide variety of reasons. As already outlined in chapter 2.2.1., the late Soviet times saw environmentalism and cultural heritage mobilised on two major grounds. Firstly, people who believed market economy would put a halt on the irrational use of natural resources and extreme pollution: Secondly, deeply conservative people both inside the Communist Party and in the opposition who found that Soviet modernism should be blamed for the disregard of Mother Nature and ethnic heritage. Both varieties of critique were quite fundamental and went to the core of the Soviet system.

Today, the waste management issue brings to the fore popular discontentment with major features of the existing political and economic system in Russia. The anti-Shies movement is upheld by at least three sentiment clusters in the population. Firstly, the scattered and weakened environmental movement has come back. An example of this is the Committee Save Pechora (*Komitét Spaséniia Pechóry*). This is one of the longest-living independent environmental movements in Russia. It has concentrated on fighting oil-spills in the Komi Republic. It is now one of the backbones of the movement and benefits from its trustworthiness. In addition, several new environmental groups and initiatives have popped up in the two involved regions. Interestingly, middle-aged citizens form the backbone of these initiatives.

Secondly, waste management forms part of the huge policy field of housing and communal utilities where mistrust looms large (Holm-Hansen, Aasland and Berg-Nordlie 2019). The anti-Shies movement draws on widely held mistrust in the “public-private partnerships” that has resulted from privatisation of hitherto state and municipal responsibilities. The links between the companies involved in the construction and planned operation of the Shies landfill on the one hand and various agencies and companies within Moscow city's huge sector of housing and communal utilities on the other are highly lacking in transparency.

Thirdly, Shies has accentuated a centre-periphery conflict, along lines similar to those studied by the Norwegian political scientist Stein Rokkan. The key slogans of the anti-Shies movement – “No to Moscow's waste in the North” and “the North is no waste dump” and “Moscow takes everything, gives nothing” – illustrate this, as does much of the rhetoric used by the protesters. On several occasions during the field trip for this report, protesters expressed resentment over the glaring difference between what they see on TV from Moscow's streets, parks and playgrounds and what they see in their hometowns.

The specificities of the North and the Northerners is a recurrent theme among the protesters. My interlocutors told: “The forest is a symbol to people here. It is deeply in our souls. We go there for berries, mushrooms hunting and fishing. We don't have parks”. And: “We know what a bog is. In Moscow they don't. That's why they were able to plan a landfill on a bog.” “We Northerners have to cooperate. You die if you stay alone on the taiga”.

As mentioned above, Shies has led to a revival of the Pomor identity but at least so far, this seems to be mainly an exotic addendum to the movement. In the Komi Republic, however, identity issues seems to mean more. The region has a republic status within the Russian Federation with reference to its Finno-Ugric Komi population that constitutes 24 percent of the total population. Although, Komi is spoken mainly in rural areas, the republic is formally bi-lingual. At some of the demonstrations Komi is used by certain speakers. Despite the fact that very few among those present understand it, they applaud it as a sign of the republic's entitlement to more autonomy. Whereas demonstrators brought Russian flags in the early demonstrations, lately only the official Komi flag, the unofficial “separatist” flag and Soviet flags are seen.

Komi activist groups, like *Iz'iatas* and *Dor'iám as'nymös* (Defend ourselves) are vocal in their protest against the Shies landfill. *Komi Voityr* (Komi Nation) is an “inter-regional societal

organisation” for the Komi people. Delegates to its congresses are elected by local Komi communities. It is the only civil society organisation that, according to the constitution of the Komi Republic, has the right to make legal proposals to the republic’s legislature. During the elections to its latest congress in February 2020 a well-organised campaign succeeded in getting anti-Shies representatives elected. The congress passed a unanimous petition to president Putin in which it urged him to clarify his position on the legality of the construction works at Shies. The petition referred to the fact that no environmental assessment has been made, and they asked the president make sure the construction works are terminated.

Two court judgements give rise to optimism on the part of the protesters. Since 2012, there has been a ban on demonstrations on Syktyvkar’s main square in front of the city and republic administrations. The ban was introduced by the Komi Republic’s legislature. In November 2019, Russia’s Constitutional Court ruled that the ban on demonstrations was inconsistent with the provisions of the Constitution.

In 2019, the Urdoma municipal authorities brought the construction works at Shies to the arbitration court in Arkhangelsk region. In January 2020, the court upheld Urdoma’s claim that the construction at Shies is of a permanent character (*kapítál’nyi*) and therefore “unauthorised” (*samostróji*). The court ruled that the investor – *Tekhnopárk* – remove all buildings and infrastructure that have a permanent character. Tekhnopark has lodged an appeal.

Moscow’s city authorities presented its territorial scheme for waste management in December 2019. Shies is not among the landfills listed in the scheme. This may be for formal reasons – the construction permit is yet pending – but could also be seen as a sign of conflict avoidance.

Summing up

The conflict over Shies has been presented in some detail here because it gives a picture of social and political environment PiM and 42 operate within. Although both organisations take care not to involve in political games over whom to elect to political positions at federal, regional and local level, the environmental issue nonetheless is inherently political and at times, like worth Shies, serves as a catalyst for social mobilisation beyond the narrowly environmental.

3 NU's Russia Project

3.1 Brief history

NU has been engaged in Russian environmental problems continuously since 1988 when 70 members of the organisation took part in a peace festival in Murmansk. At the festival NU entered into contact with a wide variety of small environmental groups. This resulted in a seminar in the same city in 1990. This was the first time NU got external funding for cooperation with Russian counterparts. The same year NU was helpful in establishing a local environmental youth group, *Priroda i Molodëzh*. At the time, the idea was to encourage Northern Norwegian local chapters of NU into twinning with Russian counterparts. In 2000, NU and the Arkhangelsk-based Aetas got in touch. Since then, PIM and Aetas have cooperated closely with NU.

In 1993, NU established a position in the head quarter to work on Kola-related issues. Since then, NU has had a staff member working exclusively on the Russian project and since 2005 a staff member working on nuclear issues in Russia.

The cooperation between the three partner organisations has survived the geopolitical shifts and the turn towards a more authoritarian Russian regime throughout the 2000s. As we will show in the description and assessment of recent and ongoing project activities the strained working conditions requires a wide variety of operative adaptations.

3.2 Project organization

Within NU's staff of around 40 people, one Russia coordinator and one energy coordinator for energy issues are employed to work on the Russian project, one of them on nuclear issues. In the current period both coordinators speak Russian and had specialised in Russian affairs before they got the job.

The coordinators are backed by a Russia Committee that meets once a month. This committee makes decisions on project applications and reports, including applications from the Russian partners for specific project activities. It also evaluates activities and establishes working groups for large events and activities. Members are former Russia project coordinators and other NU members interested in Russian environmental issues. As such, the committee contributes with knowledge and experience. It arranges internal training seminars.

Twice a year, the project implementation and results are being discussed in NU's central committee and secretariat. At least one first time participant at specific activities gets the task of writing down her/his impressions. These notes are kept for later use in training of new participants getting the responsibility for carrying out activities. Keeping up project continuity is challenging in a youth organisation with high activist turnover but the Russia Committee and the practice of writing down first time impressions helps NU out of some of the problems. The current Russia coordinators have identified a need for a more structured archive for this purpose.

Whereas the Russia activities earlier enjoyed high prestige and much attention in NU both a local level and in the national leadership this is reportedly not longer the case, at least not to the same extent. The Russia coordinators and the Russia Committee have problems engaging the organisation's leadership and members in their work. The relevance of cooperating with Russian partners and engaging in Russia's environmental problems is not perceived as self-evident as it used to do. This also might drain the patience in the NU leadership with all the formal and practical difficulties that come with the Russia project.

The lack of interest in Russia is reflected in the problems of recruiting NU leaders and members to take part in joint activities with the Russian partners. In addition to the negative effect this has on one of the project's main working methods – enabling a Russian-Norwegian interface for mutual learning among young environmentalists – it creates practical problems. The funders require that a certain number of Norwegians take part in activities. The recruitment process of participants is lengthy. Combined with another lengthy process, that of obtaining visas, this is a problem.

In NU's partner organisations one of the experienced leaders are contact points responsible for project cooperation.

The dynamics of the project is hampered by the fact that the three organisation very seldom prioritise the same aspects of environmentalism at the same time. For instance, oil and petroleum is a core issue for NU but less so for the Russian partners. Likewise, the Russian partners' emphasis on recyclable waste is less of a priority for NU.

3.3 Funding

Currently the project has three sources of external funding. The Ministry of Climate and Environment disposes grants from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) earmarked for environmental cooperation with Russia. In addition, funds come from the Norwegian Children and Youth Council (LNU) with an emphasis on activities that bolster organisational democracy. Finally, NU's Russia Project's training and information campaigns on nuclear issues is funded by the Norwegian Radiation and Nuclear Safety Authority (DSA) with funds from the MFA.

In addition, the Barents Secretariat has funded singular activities between young environmentalists in the Norwegian and Russian parts of the Barents Euro-Arctic Region. Northern Norwegian NU activists and Russia. In 2019, the Barents Secretariat declined NU's project proposal because the proposal failed to fulfil the requirements for funding on two grounds. Firstly, because project activities applied for did not include NU members currently residing in the Northern Norwegian regions forming part of the Barents Euro-Arctic Region. Secondly, because the proposal failed to fulfil the requirements for co-financing. At least 30 per cent of the project must be funded from sources not included in the government's Programme for Activities in the Arctic (*Nordområdesatsingen*). Earlier, NU's applications have been accepted despite not living up to the two mentioned requirements.

3.4 Baseline

The 2013 evaluation of NU's Russia Project (Holm-Hansen 2013) can serve as a baseline against which to assess developments since. Many of the challenges identified in the current evaluation are, as will be outlined below, were already causing concern in 2013.

In 2013, the 2021 foreign agent law already had begun to cause worries among NU's partners. At the time PiM was quite outspoken in its criticism of the authorities and received funds from sources like the German Green Party's *Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung* and the left wing *Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung*. Aetas was more docile and was well-connected with relevant city departments. Both operated from premises subsidised by the city authorities, and Aetas had good working relations with the regional Ministry for Youth Affairs.

Nonetheless, the very different political and administrative environments under which NU and its partners worked created obstacles to finding joint activities equally relevant for the Russian and the Norwegian side.

The different sizes of NU on the one hand and the two Russian partners on the other, combined with NU's closeness to the funders made the cooperation asymmetrical already in 2013 and has been all the time. One NU representative told the two partner organisations remind her of some of the most active local NU chapters. PiM and 42 used to have local chapters in their regions but are now mainly based in the cities of Murmansk and Arkhangelsk.

Despite the differences, in 2013 PiM and Aetas set their own agendas with self-confidence. The Russian partners' economic sustainability, i.e. the prospects of their survival without the funding through NU, was worrying NU already in 2013. They had also been able to diversify their funding sources to a certain degree with Russian funding.

In 2013, a mismatch between the funders and the two Russian organisations as to what to concentrate project activities on. In 2013, this primarily affected LNU's wish to promote the idea of internal organisational democracy.

On the Norwegian side, engaging Northern Norwegian NU members in the Russia Project activities, proved to be difficult.

3.5 The partners

3.5.1 Nature and Youth (NU)

Nature and Youth is the youth organisation of *Naturvernforbundet* (Norwegian Society for the Conservation of Nature). Both are members of Friends of the Earth International. NU has 7 600 members and 80 local groups. At central level NU has five thematic committees. In addition to the committee on Russia, there are committees on nature protection, agriculture, plastic and consumption, and finally an international committee. NU is engaged in a wide variety of environmental issues and do not shun controversial positions. In 2017, NU took the Norwegian state to court on the grounds that the state had approved licences for exploration drilling in the Barents Sea. According to NU, this is contrary to the Constitution's § 112 stating that "every person has a right to an environment that is conducive to health and to a natural environment whose productivity and diversity are maintained".

3.5.2 Priroda i Molodëzh (PiM)

PiM was established in 1990. Currently the organisation has around 25 members, most of them 20-25 years old. It has one local branch outside Murmansk city, in the town of Zapolyarnyi and has had close contacts with the youth club Just Fun in that town for a while. Just Fun organises various environment-friendly activities, mainly on waste. PiM's office is located in the southern outskirts of Murmansk.

Organisational structure

The youth environmentalist organisation is structured "just like Aetas used to be", one of the activists told, referring to 42's predecessor in Arkhangelsk. They are a membership-based organisation with unaffiliated activists taking part in the work occasionally. The leaders are elected and they have an audit committee. Not all those taking part in activities are members.

Priorities

As for many other environmental organisations in Russia right now, waste management, and waste sorting in particular, is one of PiM's main concerns. PiM pushes for waste separation and criticised the local waste disposal plant, Éko-Tekhnopark, that was opened in 2019 for sorting no more than 20 per cent of the waste and recycling less than one per cent. This is much less than the regional authorities gives the impression of, PiM claims.

Also air pollution is high on PiM's agenda due to high levels of coal dust in the harbour. The organisation plans to do more on nuclear issues in the near future. Unlike the waste issue, which is close to people's everyday life, nuclear issues are still considered more abstract and therefore has a lower potential for awareness-raising and mobilisation, PiM fears. Moreover, the nuclear issue is "securitised" in the sense that it is being made an issue of national security and therefore sensitive.

Until recently, PiM was considered the evident place to go for environmentally concerned youth in Murmansk. The organisation, although small, has gained a reputation through its many external activities. An indication of this is the fact that people still bring used batteries to PiM despite the fact that PiM's awareness-raising campaign of batteries took place a long time ago. PiM keeps a large amount of used batteries in their office.

Relations with the authorities

As compared to 42, PiM has a quite moderate profile concentrating on informational campaigns and promotion of responsible consumption. Thus, the profiles of NU's partners in Murmansk and Arkhangelsk are somewhat opposite to what they were in 2013. According to one leading PiM activist, they now avoid the "big" (*global'nye*) issues because they inevitably involve cases of corruption and big money. This makes the authorities neither hear us nor listen to us. For the time being, it is easier to concentrate on eco-friendly lifestyles." A minority in PiM's Board, however, would like a more critical and radical approach.

Some of PiM's activities are strikingly uncontroversial, mainly encourage children and young people to be aware of nature and challenge no one. One example of this is the competition PiM arranges regularly for small children, who are invited to contribute with nature themed arts and crafts. Nonetheless, in 2019, PiM experienced a considerably lower response from schools, a fact that could be explained by school directors' fear of involving themselves with supposedly oppositional groups. This is due to an official recommendation from the authorities to "budget organisations", like schools, libraries and local lore museums not to cooperate with PiM. This is not a ban but a request (*ustanóvka*) that is underpinned by the fact that e.g. salary bonuses may depend on "behaviour". This is an example of the "administrative pressure" often referred to in Russia. PiM is not a "foreign agent" but the mere fact that it cooperates with foreign partners seem to be enough for concern. The recommendation has not been published.

PiM is not invited to any of the consultative bodies that exist in the Russian system. They have the right to take part in public hearing but do not prioritise it since it requires a lot of time and effort. It has contacted the Centre for development of volunteerism, a city level organisation for support to youth initiatives but with a negative result. PiM learnt that the centre had got signals from "above" (*s vérkhu*) not to cooperate with them. To illustrate the "hybrid" situation in which PiM operates, it should be noticed that the organisation was involved in last year's summer camp for school students organised by the regional ministry of environment. "This is good, because it shows we can cooperate", as one PiM member told. Moreover, PiM cooperates with the university in assessing students' works for the study programme in ecology.

Copycat organisation

In addition to restriction and exclusion, PiM is hampered by the newly established practice of new environmental youth organisations mirroring PiM's activities but enjoying access to "administrative resources". Restrictions make PiM concentrate on non-controversial issues and the organisation in the traditions of regime loyal youth organisations pick up their activities and working methods and emulate them. In Murmansk, the new organisation is called Clean Arctic (*Chístaia Árktika*).

PiM does not know for sure who is behind the establishment of the new organisation but Chistaia Arktika enjoys the access to as well as support from the authorities that PiM has been denied. They are invited to events organised by the authorities. The Murmansk city's Department for

public contact for cooperation signed up for PiM's Zero Waste Fest in 2019 but did not show up to the disappointment of PiM who looked forward to contacts. Activities in Chistaia Arktika gives extra points for entry to the university on the line with other socially beneficial activities and sports. PiM has tried to benefit from this arrangement but the request was declined. The local press covers Chistaia Arktika's activities.

A similar organisation has emerged in Arkhangelsk (see below). Whether these initiatives are just another example of mimicked civil society or real organisations for young people engaged in the environment but unwilling to challenge the regime, remains to be seen.

Chistaia Arktika may become an alternative to some environmental young people who fear the so-called *silovye struktury* (security apparatus). However, apart from some police showing up at demonstrations asking for names, there has been no explicit pressure from the security forces.

So far, Chistaia Arktika has not attacked PiM in any of their publications. On the other hand, they have not responded to PiM's invitations for cooperation.

Although PiM has experienced a marked tightening of working conditions over the last years, the organisation's leaders still see some opportunities in the fact that the authorities are not monolithic. PiM still hopes people in the regional ministries responsible for environmental protection and education are somewhat ready to cooperate.

3.5.3 Environmental organization 42 (former Aetas)

Environmental Movement 42 is the heir of NU's partner since 2000, Aetas. For the time being the organisation's office is located on a former factory area in the Solombola city district. For the time being 42 only exists in Arkhangelsk city but Aetas used to have branches in Onega, Ustianskiy raion and Velsk. 42 has cooperated closely with the environmentalist student group ÉkoSAFU at the Northern (Arctic) Federal University.

Organisational structure

42 has undergone organisational restructuring after complaints among members and activists that Aetas did not function optimally, among others when it came to democratic influence from below. The organisation has three categories of members. Those are participants (*uchástniki*), volunteers (*volontéry*), and helpers (*sotrudniki*). Participants, of which there are around 20 have specific tasks and are mainly recruited among those who have been active for a while. There is no membership fee.

Volunteers (20-30 people) assist in activities. In order to become a volunteer one has to fill in an electronic questionnaire. A minimum requirement is to have taken part in two assemblies in the organisation and two actions/events (*meropriiátiia*).

The helpers show up now and then and may take on tasks.

42 has two steering organs. The strategic planning committee (*kordinatstiónnyi komité*) where the movements' coordinator is chair, and the executive committee (*ispolnitel'nyi komité*) that deals with day-to-day and practical issues. The executive committee decides who will go for training (*stazhiróvka*) in Norway. In addition, 42 has an audit committee.

Before the reorganization, the structure was different. Then the organisation only had a strategic planning council and no executive committee. The new model was chosen in order to make the organisation more open for newcomers because they will have immediate support from the strategic planning committee. The most active members are responsible for projects

Priorities

In 2017, Aetas decided to move their focus from forestry to energy and climate issues. Currently, the struggle against the landfill in Shies (see chapter 2.2.4) has priority in the organisation's work.

Also air pollution is on the agenda. Even though forestry is a major economic activity in the Arkhangelsk region, protecting the forests is, for the time being, not an issue that engages broadly among the members.

Shies made it easier to communicate with people about waste sorting. People got more responsive to 42's arguments, one of the organisation's leaders told. People are mobilised against Shies because of 'regional patriotism' and unwillingness to live in a 'rubbish region' (*múSORnaia óblast'*).

Relations with the authorities

42's predecessor, Aetas, had to close down in 2017 due to the foreign agent law. The organization was subject to a surprise inspection by the authorities, unlike PiM that had a routine check the same year. The organization was fined for not having registered as a foreign agent. After the closure, the organization was without an office for a period in 2017. The fact that the organisation was labelled as a foreign agent made the organisation concentrate on handling the new situation, countering smearing campaigns and managing formalities. Activism and recruitment suffered from this.

The registration as a foreign agent has been subject to an appeal lodged to the European Court of Human Rights where it is awaiting consideration by the Court. Aetas got support from a group of lawyers who supports civil society.

Unlike PiM that has become more docile over the last few years, Aetas became more radical and so is 42. Nonetheless, they have some cooperation with the authorities. Recently, they arranged Forum with 200 participants from all over the large Arkhangelsk region including experts and representatives of the authorities. The relations with the authorities worsened noticeably after 42 joined the anti-Shies campaign.

When Aetas was closed down at its annual meeting in 2017 activists set up a new organization called the Environmental Movement 42, named after paragraph 42 in the Russian Constitution: "Everyone shall have the right to favourable environment, reliable information about its state and for a restitution of damage inflicted on his health and property by ecological transgressions". NU's project coordinator and three members of NU's local chapter in Tromsø took part in the founding meeting.

42 is very well linked up with other environmental initiatives. Forms part of coalition with the Social-Economic Union and WWF, and is a member of the Climate Action Network. The Shies case has brought 42 into close and intense cooperation with other groups and organisations, not only in the Arkhangelsk region but in the Komi republic as well. It should be noticed that 42 foreign funding has a downside in this respect. At times the organisation is met with some distrust by other environmental groups because of its links to foreign funders.

Aetas/42 could have chosen to register as a foreign agent. This, however, would have involved several drawbacks. Firstly, they would have had to indicate on all external publications that they are foreign agents. Secondly, they would have to report to the Ministry of Justice four times a year and be fined if the report is submitted after the deadline. Thirdly, most likely mass media and the public administration would be hinting at their status as foreign spies to undermine their trustworthiness in the eyes of the population. As one leader in 42 told, "this latter would be problematic for us since much of what we do is informational campaigns and it is important that people have trust in us".

Bellona Murmansk was labelled as a foreign agent and tried to operate as such for a while but experienced all the problems described above. In 2017 the organisation closed down and came under Bellona St. Petersburg.

Bellona concentrates on positive messages, notably the opportunities offered through updated technology, like electric cars, and cooperates with the regional ministry of energy.

Copycat organisation

Just like in Murmansk, a competing organisation has emerged. In the Arkhangelsk case they are called *Chístyi Séver – Chístaia straná* (Clean North – Clean Country). According to 42, it was set up by the regional administration. They were established at the Forum Clean North in February 2019, a forum that was “categorically boycotted” by, 42 as one of its leaders told. They copy the activities of 42, collecting waste paper and plastic and reading lectures about the environment. They differ from 42 however, by being silent about Shies and the waste management policies in general. Chisty Sever – Chistaia strana seems to have the support of the administration as illustrated in the case of the conflict over the Eko-battle that was a recyclable collection completion to be organised by 42. 42 applied to the authorities for permission to collect waste at certain places in town but without success only to learn the Chisty sever –Chistaia strana strated to collect waste at the same places.

3.6 Theory of Change

All programmes and projects are based on the underlying assumption that there is a connection between the activities stimulated by the project and results. However, this assumption is not always explicit and it is at risk of winding up in the background as the project unfolds. Immediate project practicalities and short-term output have a tendency of coming first.

3.6.1 What is Theory of Change

Theory of Change (*ToC*) offers a methodology for systematic analysis of how project actors understand the links between initial project activities and the wished impacts. It is also useful for assessing how partners follow up the process towards change, and how they document outputs, outcomes and emerging impacts.

The stages in a stylised ToC are:

input (the «intervention», the initial activities) → **output** (the immediate results, «deliveries») → **outcome** (what the deliveries lead to, make project participants and target groups do as a result of the activities) → **impact** (on society)

This somewhat simplistic scheme may be helpful in structuring the thinking throughout a project in order to “bring it forwards” in the direction of impact. Constantly asking how inputs may lead to outcomes, and outcomes to impact has this effect. It also helps identify the mechanisms that lead toward a set of objectives and how these mechanisms are set in motion. As formulated by Som Ray Pawson (2006):

”Interventions offer resources which trigger choice mechanisms (Mechanism), which are taken up selectively according to the characteristics and circumstances of subjects (Context), resulting in a varied pattern of impact (Outcome).”

In short, this means that project results are contingent upon the capacity of project activities to trigger mechanisms under the concrete circumstances in which the activities take place. Ignoring this self-evident insight is often the reason project interventions fail. This is often the case for project interventions within the field of international cooperation. Risks of mismatch between mechanisms and outcome increase when funders and project owners operate - and the basic project design is made - far from where project activities are to be carried out. The circumstances under which Russian civil society organisations work are un-predictable and require a lot of *Fingespitzgefühl* and ability to adapt, act fast and find practicable and improvised solutions.

3.6.2 The Russia project's Theory of Change

The Russia Project's main objective is to make sure there are «strong, efficient and democratic youth organizations working for environmental protection in Northwest Russia» as a factor enabling broader societal involvement. This is an ambitious objective for several reasons, one of them being the restraints in working conditions for critical civil society organizations in contemporary Russia. Another reason is the fact that, in practice, NU's partner organizations are more like ad hoc activist groups than formal membership organizations.

The concrete project activities can be divided into two main categories, environmental actions and organizational work. The idea is that the support offered through the project enables a higher level of activities than would otherwise have been possible, thus attracting more young people to the environmental cause. As for the organizational work the idea is that training offered through NU, among others related to application writing and reporting, the Russian partner organizations will strengthen their organizational capacities. Also exposure to NU's democratic practices is believed to have a spill-over effect.

4 Project results and their impact

This chapter is structured according to Theory-of-Change as outlined in 3.6 above. Outputs will be presented. Whether these lead to outcome and impacts will be discussed. Then the chapter discusses some of the main obstacles and challenges encountered in the project. Finally, cost-efficiency will be discussed.

4.1 Outputs

What are the projects outputs, “deliveries”? The project’s most fundamental output consist in making PiM and 42 able to rent premises and employ personnel to run the organisations. PiM and 42 have other, smaller, funding sources in addition to the ones through NU but these only allow for concrete project activities.

In addition to the basic organisational funding, the Russia Project has enabled a large number of activities covering a wide variety of environment-related issues, like nuclear waste management, forestry protection, clean energy, climate change, and environment-friendly consumption.

The project report to the funders and the Russian partners’ report to NU include a wide variety of outputs. For instance, in its 2017 report to LNU (the Norwegian Children and Youth Council) NU informs that the three partners arranged altogether 23 cross-national arrangements. An interface between Russian and Norwegian young environmentalists has been facilitated. Around 340 young Russians took part in activities in Russia and/or in Norway where they could meet Norwegians. For instance, altogether 15 members of PiM and Aetas participated in NU’s summer camp “In Cod we trust” together with round 360 NU members. Around 125 young Norwegian took part in activities in Russia. About 1775 Norwegians took part in project-related activities, including lectures, in Norway.

The project is composed of a large number of relatively small activities. Broadly, they are divided into Russian-Norwegian joint activities and local activities, initiated and carried out by the two Russian organisations. The outputs can be divided into three broad categories: Learning/studies, information and organisational strengthening.

The large amount of individual activities makes it futile to give a total overview but some illustrating examples can be highlighted.

Learning/studies

Through workshops and seminars on a wide variety of environmental issues, like nuclear energy, alternative energy, waste management, responsible consumption and forestry, activists and leaders of the three partner organizations have acquired additional knowledge. Training activities on forestry and climate issues were combined with an expedition and a summer camp.

In 2019 the Russian partners took part in the Russia-Norway nuclear commission. The nuclear accident in Niónoksa outside Severodvinsk in the Arkhangelsk region in August 2019 made the nuclear issue more topical than before. Five military and civilian specialists were killed in the accident. The nuclear accident partners more engaged in nuclear issues and made them want to make a link between nuclear and other waste management.

In 2019, the Russian partners arranged a conference on recycling of waste. Both organisations have organised waste collection in their home cities where people are invited to hand in waste for recycling and re-use. The Russia project’s flexibility has made it possible for the two organisation to make use of the momentum caused by the wide popular interest in waste issues caused by the ongoing waste reform. This is particularly the case in Arkhangelsk because of Shies.

Also in Norway, the project has produced outputs. NU's Russia coordinators give presentations of Russia's environmental problems and Russian environmentalism in regional and local chapters of the organization.

Information

Films and videos have been made as part of the project to underpin the campaigns. These are, among others, shown at NU meetings and workshops which gives a wider audience.

In 2017, PiM carried out an information campaign on the removal of spent nuclear fuel from the Lépse former floating nuclear service ship.

PiM as well as 42 have arranged so-called Eco-Battles. Eco-Battles are competitions in waste sorting. Individuals and teams compete in collection and sorting recyclable rubbish according to their source material. 42 set up pickup points. Eco-battles have taken place not only in Arkhangelsk city but also in other towns in the region, like Arkhangelsk, Severodvinsk, Novodvinsk, Kótlas, Onéga and other.

Organisational strengthening

Several activities have been carried out to improve the organizational capacities of the Russian partners on the one hand and NU's capacity on Russian issues and how to work with Russian partners. The "NU School" is among these activities. The school consists in training of members of the partner organisations in the basic documents, routines, reporting requirements of the Russia Project. The school has not been arranged on an annual basis but will be from 2019. At joint events the organisers put effort into making Norwegian and Russian participants interact, e.g. through skill-share workshops.

Representatives of PiM and 42 have taken part in LNU's and NU's annual conferences and assisted in the practical arrangement of NU's conference. This way they got to know more people in NU and also gained some experiences in arranging big events (300 people).

The visits by members of the two Russian partner organisations to Norway and by NU members to Russia serve two major purposes, reciprocal training and exchange of experiences on the one hand and as motivation for members.

As part of the project, trainings in recruitment of new members have been provided. Similarly, trainings have been held in how to cope with "transitional phases", i.e. in the challenges of organisational continuity after new leaders have been elected in the organisations.

NU, 42 and PiM agree that closer links to other Russian environmental youth organisations will strengthen the organisations. Funding through NU has made it possible for PiM and 42 to take part in activities of the Russian Social-Ecological Union's youth network since 2018. At the first meeting in 2018, altogether 18 Russian environmental youth groups were present. Representatives from NU take part in these meetings.

Some project activities have aimed at introducing the Russian partners to the international environmental movements beyond NU. Linking up with other environmental youth groups abroad contributes to stronger organisations. Diversifying the partners international contact will improve sustainability. Therefore, funds through NU have been spent on taking part in meetings of Young Friends of the Earth Europe (YFoEE). Aetas' leader joined NU for UNs 23rd Climate Summit. The two Russian partners took part together with NU at the 24th Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change in Katowice 2018. Apart from the effect from learning from like-minded young people abroad such contacts may lead to diversifying cooperation in the long run. A study trip to Finland on the initiative of NU has this purpose.

A nuclear waste campaign carried out with video material, social media and lectures. Internal and external lecturers have been involved. 2019, 2018. As part of the project a documentary has been

made about the Maiák nuclear reprocessing plant and the problems it creates for surrounding villages. The Russian partners have had Chernobyl day activities, including a nuclear accident exercise and lecture in schools.

One of the project's objectives is to strengthen internal democracy. Outputs in this regard have been delivered through NU representatives attending annual meetings in the partner organisation. The NU representatives observe what is going on but do not interfere during the course of the meetings. Afterwards, however, they sum up with the partner organisations' leaders and gives comment and ask question, e.g. about the usefulness of sending out case documents on beforehand, clear voting rules and leaders' receptivity to criticism from members.

4.2 Outcomes

Just like for outputs, outcomes can be divided into three broad categories: Learning/studies, information and organisational strengthening. Whereas output easily can be documented in evaluations, outcomes are more difficult to ascertain. This is because of the attribution problem: The state of affairs is not necessarily the outcome of a project output. They could have come about for other reasons. Nonetheless, it is possible to point at plausible causal chains.

Learning/studies

Leaders, members and activists who have taken part in training, seminars and workshops (outputs) enabled through the Russia Project later make use of the acquired knowledge in protest and information campaigns. This is a typical outcome, and lately, this has been the case with waste management. It has been less so for the training in nuclear problems.

This illustrates the argument put forward above (see chapter 3.6) that outcomes depend on whether circumstances (context) allows mechanisms to be activated. For political reasons the context is prohibitive of nuclear security campaigns, at least for small organisations. The issue is securitised. In Murmansk and Arkhangelsk nuclear energy is used for military purposes, and even in regions where this energy sources is used for civilian purposes the strong position of the State Atomic Energy Corporation (*Rosatom*) within the Russian political and economic power apparatus would have made the issue sensitive.

Joint studies and learning is challenging because the three organisation prioritise quite different aspects of environmentalism much due to differences in working conditions between Russian and Norwegian partners but also differences between Arkhangelsk and Murmansk as to what local and regional issues that engage the population. For instance, whereas the waste issue is mainly municipal in Murmansk it has a national scale in Arkhangelsk (and the Komi Republic) because of the anti-Shies campaign, described above in chapter 2.2.4.

There are also outcomes on the Norwegian side. Through the project, competence on Russia and Russia's environmental problems and movements has been built among young Norwegian environmentalists. First of all, this applies to those directly involved as members of the Russia committee but there is spill-over to NU members not directly involved through presentations at local and regional meetings and workshops (mentioned above)

Information

Through the cooperation with NU, the two Russian partner organisations get access to experts on various environmental fields, which makes them more capable of running information campaigns. Information about waste sorting has led to 200 waste pickup points in the Arkhangelsk city in cooperation with a private firm that sells the waste for recycling.

As one member of 42: “Another success is that people contact us with questions, and not only about waste. We invite expert on various environmental issues to Arkhangelsk and people reckon us as a place to get information.”

Organisational strengthening

The objective of strengthening the partners’ organisations is twofold. Firstly, it consist in making the partners less dependent upon NU. This goes for their financial basis as well as their environmental networks. Secondly, it consist in developing internal democracy in the partner organisation.

Outcomes regarding networks is the most successful so far. PiM and 42 have taken part in meetings and conferences and have got new contacts both nationally and internationally. Their participation in the Social-Ecological Union’s youth network is particularly fruitful. *Druz’iá Báltiki* (Friends of the Baltic) and *Druz’iá Zemlí Rossii* (Friends of the Russian Soil) are other organisations with which 42 cooperates.

A study trip to meet counterparts in Finland and to diversify links has not been followed up.

Both organisation have several funding sources but none of them even close to the Norwegian funds in order of magnitude. The access to Russian state funding of civil society has been restricted due to the hardening of the regime and, for 42, the anti-Shies campaign.

Creating direct links North-North between PiM/42 and Northern Norwegian NU chapters would have created new dynamics and new funding opportunities through the Barents Secretariat. This had had priority and in 2017 ten Russian participants and 39, NU members from eight local chapters took part in a side event to the High North Conference. No outcomes in terms of projects came out of this.

Activities to promote internal democracy seems to be most efficient – generate most in terms of outcomes – when they are specific and linked to concrete activities, like meetings and workshops. Attempts at introducing strict formal procedures to ensure democratic control from below have failed. This may be explained by weak relevance. What is needed for a large nation-wide organisation, like NU, may be less pertinent for a small group of local activists. However, both PiM and 42 pay attention to the need for constantly making the organisation inclusive and activating. The recent reorganisation of 42’s structure was made with these purposes in mind. These measures, however, were most likely due to loss of members, criticism from remaining members than to project efforts.

One of the Russia project’s objectives is to strengthen the partners’ adaptive capacities when confronted with external factors. Handling the many challenges caused by the Russian authorities’ policies vis-à-vis civil society requires hand-on insight, know-how and ability to muddle through. NU could hardly be of any direct help in these matters. However, the Russia Project probably has been of help through its substantial contribution to making the two organisations well established and well rooted and therefore capable to survive under stress.

4.3 Impacts

To what extent do the outcomes described above have an impact on the overall civil society and on environmentalism in Northwest Russia? The political context in which the project operates is, of course, not conducive to easy victories. Nonetheless, there is reason to conclude that the partnership with NU enables the Russian partners to engage in alliances and partnerships with other movements and organizations, and that this has a positive impact on environmentalism locally.

Undoubtedly, NU's two partners have gained strength, among others as a result of the project cooperation. Thanks to the project, they have an office and employees. This makes them able to host other youth initiatives in the region. As one NU representative put it: "If you are engaged in environmental protection and live in Murmansk or Arkhangelsk you know where to go. PiM and 42 have an office and staff." The two organizations would most likely exist even without the project. They have proven to be able to carry out activities on a non-cost basis and have considerable activity beyond the project. This would most likely be stand-alone actions without the basic funding through the partnership with NU. The project facilitates an organization and some continuity. As such, the project achieves its objective of enabling democratic youth organizations working for environmental protection in Northwest Russia.

The fact that 42 has the resources through the Russia Project, it has been able to play a significant role in the anti-Shies movement. Several among the interviewees from other local groups in Arkhangelsk emphasised this.

The emergence of an alternative to PiM in Murmansk (Chistaia Arktika) and to 42 in Arkhangelsk (Chisty Sever – Chistaia strana) has been interpreted as an attempt by the authorities to undermine the position of independent environmental youth groups. Irrespective of whether the new organisations have been established on the authorities' initiative or by environmentally concerned young people wishing to be on better terms with the authorities than PiM/42, the mere fact that these organisations have been established is an indication that the environmentalism is gaining ground. Their emulation of PiM's and 42's working methods may be seen as an indication of these latter organisations' impact.

4.4 Challenges

4.4.1 Partnership and roles

The project is designed as a partnership between the involved organizations on the Russian and Norwegian side. They are supposed to write applications together, co-create results and cooperate when writing reports. However, a feeling among the three organizations of being in the same boat with shared obligations vis-à-vis the funding agencies has proved to be lacking. Some of this may be explained by the fact that NU is closer to the funders. In addition, given the fact that NU is a big, nationwide organisation its administrative capacities and professionalism are superior to that of its partners. After all, PiM and 42 are more groups of activists than anything similar to the fully-fledged organisation NU is.

NU would have liked to see the partners take more lead in the overall project planning. They have a feeling the partners do not need NU beyond its function as a canal to funding. It may be some truth to this and the reason rests with the thematic mismatch of priorities between the Russian and the Norwegian side (see chapter 4.4.2).

Equal partnership?

At the end of the day, NU is responsible for making sure applications and reports are in accordance with the requirements of the funders. At times, this makes them appear as the two Russian partner organizations' counterpart rather than a partner, "a kind of funding agency and partner at the same time", as one experienced NU member told. The elimination of the so-called project pot that gave the two Russian partners access to funds for specific projects to be approved by NU will probably reduce the problem of NU's mixed roles.

The project objective of furthering internal democracy in the partner organisations has been successful. As described above both NU's partner organisation have taken organisational steps, even reorganising themselves, to achieve this. Nonetheless, NU's role as a kind of democracy supervisor is problematic.

Another NU interviewee told: "We need to show them that we are activists like them, not merely technocrats and bureaucrats. Therefore, we need more time together". One NU representative likened the situation to a "one-way partnership" and wondered whether the two Russian organizations find NU to be a relevant partner apart from helping provide funds. The lack of interest in getting in touch with other segments of NU than the Russia Committee should be seen in this perspective and also the lack of follow-up on the Russian side after a study trip to Finland arranged by NU to widen the partners' network in the Nordic countries.

The annual strategy meeting between the three partners is their most important meeting place. Here, the partners discuss plans for the next year and the Russian partners inform about their activities and funding that do not form part of the project with NU.

In addition, NU and partners spend time together when they sort out difficult practical issues and during trainings and summer camps. Then much of the leaders' attention is given to making the event a positive experience for the participants socially and content-wise. Project coordinators on both sides, therefore, have little time to spend together and develop trust. Not only project management suffers from this but also adaptation to Russian partners' needs.

Weakly developed partnership culture is a common situation for projects funded by Norwegian agencies and involving one Norwegian organization and organizations in other countries and certainly not specific for NU's Russia Project. NU stands out by taking this problem seriously.

Communication

A joint email list, skype, VKontakte and whatsapp have made communication thresholds lower today than only a few years ago. Communication takes place several times a week. Nonetheless, the flow of important information between the partners is deficient. Representatives from all three organisations complain about this.

It also happens that the Russian partners do not inform NU about major changes on their side, e.g. when the leader in a partner organization is replaced (leader moved to SPB to work in Greenpeace). One of the NU activists involved in the project called this "a trust bomb". Sometimes delays in information leads to a need for damage control. The frequency with which the organisations communicate varies. NU is in contact on a weekly basis with 42 on whatsapp but less often with PiM.

Many practical problems could have been sorted out easily if the Russian partners made a phone call or sent an email to NU but often they do not. From the Russian partners' side it was mentioned that NU at times are slow in informing them, e.g. about the appointment of new coordinators and amendments to the reporting forms.

In addition to the summer camps the budget allows for two meetings as year between the three partner organizations to work on the project. In 2017, skype meeting were considered to be insufficient and a practice with three one-day meetings with each of the two partner organizations was introduced. It seems the meetings are mainly spent on solving practical project issues and the time set apart for open discussions is not sufficient. One of the experienced NU activists told about one experience from a strategy meeting back in 2015 when open discussions happened. This was summed up as being useful.

Involvement of the NU organisation

There is little demand for broader and deeper involvement of wider segments of the NU organisation in the Russia project. It has proved increasingly difficult to engage larger segments of NU, e.g. the Board, in the project. On the Russian side, NU's partners tend to consider their direct counterparts in NU as the only relevant people to cooperate with. They do not ask to be introduced to NU's Board, working groups or local chapters in NU. Engaging Northern Norwegian NU chapters in the project has proved to be difficult.

4.4.2 Thematic mismatch

Divergent foci between the partners makes joint activities difficult. “NU has oil, we have waste”, as one member of the partner organisation told. The political and administrative situation in Russia requires flexibility and readiness to act fast for civil society groups to succeed. The waste issue is an example of this.

What is topical in Russia at a given time is not necessarily in line with the thematic priorities in the project with NU. Due to political constraints, the Russian partners’ focus has to be narrow and related to very concrete issues. “NU has other environmental problems and also other opportunities. NU’s approach is more global”, one member of one of NU’s partner organisations told. She added: “Besides, they can confront the authorities. We cannot. For us it is important to start with ourselves. NU is fighting oil extraction seldom ask themselves how much oil-related products they consume individually.”

4.4.3 Divergent routines

An unfortunate case of non-performance occurred in 2018. 42 spent some of the funds from the Barents Secretariat for other purposes than stated in the application for funds. This was discovered through NU’s internal audit in April 2018 and NU stopped all transfers to 42 until the it had introduced satisfactory control routines in December 2018.

The case of non-performance was a matter of having used funds planned for one activity on another activity and did not include fraud or personal enrichment. Nonetheless, NU took this case very seriously. At the strategy meeting between 42, PiM and NU that year, one day was set aside for a thorough review of the requirements for generally accepted accounting principles as applied by NU and the funder. The discussions disclosed differences in how the concept of generally accepted accounting principles was to be understood. In one of this evaluation’s interviews a member of one of the partner organisations told that this meeting showed that “NU does not understand Russia to the bottom (*do kon’tsá*). They understand the surface but not the nuances (*tónkosti*) and specificities (*sposóbnosti*), how things work in real life. What they think of a corruption, we perceive as a normal thing.”

The moratorium on transfers made some of the planned activities suffer. Interestingly, during the period of no fund transfer 42 continued several activities on a zero budget basis which gives evidence of sustainability.

4.4.4 Continuity

Some of the difficulties in creating trust-based partnership have their roots in frequent changes in personnel, which is only natural for youth organizations. NU has kept continuity by involving former project coordinators as members of the Russia Committee. This makes the committee a kind of knowledge bank.

“Short memory” is a problem emanating from high personnel turnover. Attempts at making use of google.docx to share documents have not been a success so far.

4.4.5 Sustainability

Despite efforts to diversify funding, PiM and 42 are still dependent upon NU for funding. This may be explained by the current authorities’ fear of independent civil society organisations, the large amount of bureaucratic formalities required from recipients of Russian funds that, after all, are available and the fact that other foreign funders restrict their funding to concrete and delimited activities and do not fund operating activity (premises, staff).

Nevertheless, PiM and 42 have been able to attract smaller funds from some foreign, mainly German, sources. Moreover, as mentioned above, they have proved to be able to run “non-budget” activities. PiM arranged the successful Zero Waste Fest as part of the Russia project and with additional funding generated from money earned from their used paper collecting project.

4.4.6 Vulnerability

The unexpected rejection of NU's application to the Barents Secretariat for 2019 made NU call off three of its planned activities: a study tour to Norway to make Russian partners acquainted with Norwegian practices in the field of waste management; a visit to Murmansk and COP25. Other activities, like the two summer camps in Arkhangelsk and Murmansk, suffered from a cut by 20 per cent on the Russian side and a cut in the number of Norwegian participants. With less funding priority was given to activities on the Russian side because these are major recruiting arenas and important for organizational development. Exchange of experiences between Russian and Norwegian activists suffered. The fact that the "NU school" was cancelled was a set-back for the endeavours to strengthen partners' organisational capacities. This school consisted in training in anti-corruption, application writing and reporting. Among others, due to the fast throughflow of members in the partner organizations NU finds these trainings to be important.

4.5 Cost-efficiency

There is no indication that funds are spent in a wasteful manner. On the contrary, NU and partners are carefully spending the funds on what they are meant for. Cost-efficiency depends on the actual use, outcomes, of the project outputs, and outcomes must be in accordance with the overall objectives of the project. Moreover, the question of cost-efficiency must address the difficult question of alternative ways of carrying out the projects.

The organisational and thematic mismatch described in 4.4.1 and 4.4.2 above means that the comparative advantages of the involved partners do not come fully into fruition. On the other, hand, the partners have shown a great capacity of focusing efforts. This capacity came to the fore in 2019. The 2019 budget cuts due to NU's failure to meet the requirements for funding from the Barents Secretariat showed an ability on the part of the three partners to make the best out of the situation by rearranging activities and concentrating on the most important. Activities on the Russian side were upheld whereas exchange activities were reduced.

5 Conclusion and recommendations

Throughout the 20 years of cooperation the Russia Project has given young Russian environmentalists resources to maintain vital organisations strong enough to keep local environmentalism alive. This assistance consists of three main elements. Firstly, the material support enables premises to meet in and employees to keep up the work. Secondly, the project contributes with training on environmental issues. Thirdly, it supports organisational development with an emphasis on internal democracy in the organisations. In addition, the project has offered young environmentalists is Norway with an interest in Russia an opportunity to gain insight into this country's environmental challenges.

The cooperation has proved to be remarkably durable. This could not be taken for granted since we have to do with youth organisations that per definition experience fast membership turnover. Moreover, the Russian partner organisations are small, local and vulnerable. Vulnerability has increased after the tightening of cross-border civil society cooperation since the initiation of Vladimir Putin's fourth term as president in 2012. The project takes place in a complex setting.

The relevance of the project in today's Russia

As shown and discussed in this report, the tendencies of the current Russian regime to prefer controllable civil society organisations as well as its fear of foreign-funded groups operating as Trojan horses has made working conditions difficult for many segments of civil society. This also applies to PiM and 42 even if their goals are purely environmental and not about regime change. Actually, the two organisations take care not to provoke. When the two organisations challenge the existing administrative and political system it is on the same grounds as the regime does when it does self-criticism. – nepotism, corruption and low responsiveness to popular demands. PiM and 42 see these phenomena as obstacles to the environmental cause. They have never used them for calls for regime change even if the conflict over Shies have sharpened the front lines between the regime and large parts of the environmental movement.

Even through the three partner organisations have managed to keep the project afloat it would be pertinent to question its long-term viability if current conditions prevail. Is a joint Norwegian-Russian project between civil society organisations relevant today? The repressive measures work both directly on the organisations and indirectly on their potential audiences. Therefore, one might ask if the very fact that PiM and 42 are involved with NU and receives funding from Norway creates problems rather than being of help. Much time and energy is lost on coping with the obstacles created by the foreign agent law. Informational activities are central to the two Russian partner organisations but access to schools, libraries, museums, streets and squares has been limited lately. The stigma from cooperating internationally may lead to a certain isolation both from actors who otherwise would have been ready to invite the organisations and from segments of the youth audience.

The question of the project's relevance under current working conditions should first and foremost be answered by the two Russian partner organisations. They are in the position to know. So far, they have not questioned the project's relevance.

Results

The Russia project produce *outputs* (project deliveries, like e.g. trainings and informational campaign material) according to the plans outlined in the applications to the funders. This is made with the flexibility needed to adjust to the difficult circumstances in Russia. Some thematic provisions from the donors do not always correspond with the priorities of the Russian partners. This applies to the issues of nuclear energy and organisational democracy. However, a flexible approach on the part of the donors allows project activities to be designed in ways that make them relevant.

Relevance is a precondition for outputs to lead to *outcomes*, further activities based on the outputs. The training in waste issues is a good example. Being knowledgeable about this issue has made it much easier for PiM and 42 to communicate with people and recruit youth.

Despite the fact that 42 and PiM are small and mainly function as a groups of activists, it is possible to identify some *impact* on society. They are both established as “places to go” for environmentally concerned youth in their home cities. As for 42, other environmental initiatives recently established to fight the controversial Shies landfill, told that the existence of a well-established organisation with staff and office was helpful. In the case a similar issue arises in Murmansk, most likely PiM will be in a position to fulfil a comparable role.

Partnership

The partnership between the three organisations is highly asymmetrical. This is due to structural imbalance between partners. NU is a big, nationwide organisation, PiM and 42 are small and local. NU is closer to the donors and are in a better position to catch the nuances of what is required from them. Moreover, being the project’s owner, it is NU that is held accountable at the end of the day.

In addition, the partnership idea is challenged by the very different working conditions for youth environmental groups in Russia and Norway. Thus has repercussions on thematic priorities. An illustrative example: Whereas in 2017 NU took the Norwegian state to court on the grounds that the state had approved licences for exploration drilling in the Barents Sea, the same year Aetas was labelled as a foreign agent after its leader had signed a petition to the president calling for measures against oil spill. Aetas and 42 have to concentrate on issues and working methods that many NU members find toothless. Correspondingly, PiM and 42 find NU’s more confrontational methods poorly applicable in Russia. This mismatch hampers dynamism in the partnership. NU’s Russia coordinator and Russia Committee struggle to commit NU’s leadership and members in the project.

The value added from facilitating an interface between Russian and Norwegian young environmentalists, therefore, is not fully realised. Therefore, the project’s added value for the Russian partners and reduces the potential for value added from cooperation.

The way the overall objectives of the project is being concretised in project activities, however, correspond to the needs of the Russian partners. The Russian partners energetically make use of the funds offered through the cooperation and are not dependent upon initiatives from NU. They are quite self-reliant as to concrete actions and activities, and carry out actions not funded through the projects, some of them “zero-budget”. They are far from being “commissioned NGO’s” of the kind often emerging as a result of development aid in the Global South and post-conflict areas. They also run “zero-budget” activities and activities funded from other sources than NU.

Nu aims at a stronger partnership but it might well be that a too strong partnership would be an obstacle to reaching the overall aims of the project. For the Russian partners a certain distance from disturbing external pressure is needed. They must strike roots locally, which will be difficult with an agenda developed abroad. They must be flexible and act fast. This latter has been possible thanks to the flexibility within the project. As seen from NU’s side, this flexibility would gain from more directness and openness on the part of the Russian partners.

Although the Russian partners mention that, at times, the NU Russia coordinators do not fully understand them and that donor requirements not always take Russian realities into consideration, deficient partnership seems to be mainly a concern on the NU side. It should be noticed in this regard that that NU’s current Russia coordinators both speaks Russians and knew Russia before taking on the jobs.

Organisational strengthening

The objective of strengthening two Russian partner organisations is pursued by making them economically more sustainable, more robust in the encounters with the authorities, and by improving internal membership democracy.

The current Russian regime encourage civil society initiatives, among them in the field of environmental protection. However, this applies mainly to groups that keep clear of outright criticism of the authorities. PiM and 42 keep clear of outright regime critique but 42's involvement in the anti-Shies campaign makes them cooperate with people who do. The very fact that the two organisation have foreign links make them suspicious in the eyes of the authorities. Whereas they both had subsidised premises from the city government in 2013, this is no longer the case and access to Russian funding is more limited than ever.

Much of the day-to-day administrative work in the two organisations is caused by the need to meet the authorities' increased requirements for detailed reporting. thematically, and in their choice of activity types, the two organisations have adapted themselves in order to avoid clashes with the authorities. This is an art where NU has little with which to contribute. It requires a hands-on presence and sensitivity to signals that only locals can keep up with.

For years, NU has pushed the issues of openness, democratic participation and inclusion, often with little response. Lately, the consciousness-raising and training in democratic organisational practices have proved to be of use in making PiM and 42 more prepared to handle internal conflicts. In the case of 42, the organisational structure has been changed to give more space for activists.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Continue the Russia Project

Even though the working conditions for international civil society cooperation with Russia are increasingly strained, the project should continue. The project has proved to be able to produce outcomes and even impact despite the difficult circumstances. Importance should be attached to the fact that the Russian partners find it worth cooperating despite the problems encountered from being linked up internationally in today's Russia. If Russia opens up for more international cooperation between civil society organisations in the future, Norway would gain from not having given up its support when times were tough.

Leeway to the Russian partners

Thematic mismatch of priorities between the Russian and the Norwegian side makes harmonisation of activities difficult. The Russian partners have proved very capable of developing activities in response to developments within Russian environmentalism locally, with the waste management issue a case in point. Therefore, NU is advised to consider PiM's and 42's practice of bending some of the thematic guidelines from donors more as an asset than a problem. Donors are advised to continue their flexibility. In order to yield results from the project, adapting project activities to actual needs and possibilities is necessary. In this, local insight is needed.

What is at stake is not so much activities as the very existence of the two partner organisations. They are vulnerable due to external pressure from the authorities.

Find common issues

The project would gain from more thematic harmonisation in order for cross-national interfaces to become more relevant.

For instance, thematically, the issue of Repparfjorden and Førdefjorden have much in common with the Shies case, commercial interests and central authorities trying to push waste on the local population in peripheral regions.

Twining with local NU chapters

Anchoring the Russia Project with NU beyond the Russia coordinators and the Russian Committee has proved to be difficult lately. Moreover, there is a need to strengthen the immediate interface between Russian and Norwegians within the project. PiM and 42 have more in common with the most active, local branches of NU than with the organisation at national level. Therefore, it might be an idea to “twin” 42 and PiM to one or two of the most active local chapters of NU. The functional similarities would possibly pave the way for more spontaneity and drive in the exchange of experiences.

Resume applications to the Barents Secretariat

Under the precondition of active local NU chapters in the Norwegian regions forming part of the Barents Euro-Arctic Region, the Barents Secretariat should not be given up as a potential source of funding. If no Northern Norwegian NU groups are ready for project cooperation, NU is recommended to help finding alternative partners for PiM and 42.

Check out the funding from the Consulate General in Murmansk.

PiM and 42 should examine the possibilities of applying for small funds from the Norwegian Consulate General in Murmansk.

Develop "collective memory files"

Being youth organisations the three partners experience high membership turnover. Russia coordinators stay in their positions for a short period. There is a need to strengthen continuity. The Russia Committee with people who have been actively involved in the project, among others as coordinators, is useful in this regard. The current coordinators have started a work to develop “resource banks”, where experiences are written down, including elaborate minutes with descriptions of the situation in which decisions have been made. This work should be given priority.

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Interviewees

- 3 October Startup meeting with Daniella Slabinski and Una Pasovic
- 8 November Group interview with Daniella Slabinski, Una Pasovic, Siri Haugan Holden, Anni Roth Hjermann, Oskar Njaa, Sigrid Berg, Arjo Kvamme, Stine Østnor (former and present coordinators and members of the Russia Committee in Natur og Ungdom, 2010-2019)
- 18 November Group interview, Environmental organisation 42 with Nastia, coordinator, executive committee, Ira, used to be a secretary in Aetas for 5 years; Tanya (coordinator, leader of executive committee), Asia (active in Fridays for Future), Dima (new voluntary, charitable work), Lena (new voluntary), Sasha (new voluntary), Winnie (voluntary), Jura (voluntary, gives lectures at schools), Roman (voluntary).
- 19 November Maria Kreitor (leader local environmental organization Chisty Sever 29 in Severodvinsk)
- 20 November Andrey Shalyov (head of the Barents Secretariat's Arkhangelsk office)
- 20 November Dmitryi Sekushin (representative of Pomor'e ne pomoika)
- 21 November Irina Utkina (vice-chair 42)
- 22 November Nina Aninina (environmental activist, Syktyvkar)
- 22 November Ivan Ivanov, Viktor Vishnevetskiy, Sergej Pliusnin (Board members, Committee Save Vychegda)
- 23 November Ivan Ivanov (head Committee Save Pechora)
- 23 November Iliia Boloban and Vladislav Donichenko (Lesnoy Front and og Respublikanskaya Koalitsiia)
- 23 November Elena Solovëva (environmental freelance journalist)
- 23 November Pavel Andreev (journalist, 7x7)
- 26 November Anastasiia Obedina (environmental activist)
- 27 November Anton Boiarinov (head of PiM), Jelena Burnaza (team member)
- 28 November Nikita Rumiantsev (Youth club «Just Fun» in Zapoliarnyi)
- 28 November Jurii Sergeev (Bellona Murmansk)
- 28 November Pavel Petrin (Laplandiia Educational Centre)
- 28 November Nina Panfileva (vice-chair PiM)
- 29 November Marit E. Jacobsen (vice-head Barents Secretariat)
- 12 December Debriefing with Daniella Slabinski and Una Pasovic