

**Development of Khasansky Raion: Potential, Problems and Perspectives<sup>2</sup>**

Dear colleagues, it is a privilege for me to speak to you today and I greatly appreciate it.

My talk concerns development issues in a strategically important Russian area - Khasansky Raion, (a unit below Krai/Oblast' in the administrative hierarchy). The Khasansky Raion is situated on the Russian side of the Tumen River area. And we will focus on subjective assessments of the development process regarding the 'common good', while the process itself is aimed at strengthening Russia's role in North East Asia.

Following Robert Putnam (Putnam 1996) we recognize the premise that the success of any development project is not guaranteed unless it is based on the needs of the elite, on the expectations of the residents and on the authorities' ability to implement the project. Considerable interest has been centered on the problem of compatibility or incompatibility of basic opinions of different social actors (authorities at various levels, businesses and the local community) about the direction and nature of transformation. Studying it might contribute to our insight into the social capital potential as a resource for the realization of ambitious plans in the border area.

Our paper is based on the interim results of the research project of the Institute of History, Archaeology and Ethnography of the Far East Peoples, Russian Academy of Sciences, entitled "Social Transformation and Modernization Processes in the South of

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<sup>2</sup> This paper was presented at Engage Korea 2015 (December 12, 2015, University of Cambridge, United Kingdom).

the Russian Far East 1985 to 2012: Contradictions and Interaction”<sup>3</sup>. In this project the emphasis was placed on qualitative research methods, such as polls, in-depth interviews and direct observation.

I’ll start with a survey of a specific role of Russian government and its activity. And then I’ll pass over to the description of the situation in Khasansky Raion, connected with popular attitude and its manifestation in individual or collective response.

It should be stressed that in Russia the state (as the system of governance and the source of power) retains the role of the principal actor in the eyes of the public. There exists a widespread opinion that all the changes depend on the government’s will. Our data show that two-thirds of the residents believe that it is they who are vitally interested in the region’s development. However, all their hopes the people set on federal authorities and federal programs. Being viewed as the source of an overall vision and the manager of cash flows, the federal authorities are considered to be the initiator and actuator of all changes in the area. And, as the researchers note, the total demise of Soviet economic infrastructure in the outskirts of Russia has left limited chances for the locals to overcome the economic decline independently (Savchenko 2014, 120).

One more feature of this situation is that the idea of the ‘common good’ presupposes neither consent nor encompassing diverse interests in most cases. Since the time of Peter the Great, the idea of the common good has had to be “hammered into the heads of the subjects” to achieve a breakthrough in modernization and social mobilization associated with it (Kharkhordin 2011, 48–49). But today, as Vladimir Gelman writes (developing the ideas of North, Schlumberger and Robinson), attempts at reform are confronted with the disagreement between the goals of modernization and the goals of the neo-patrimonialist institutions operating within the country (Gelman 2015, 2–7). The focus on earning maximum rent for a few agents often runs counter the interests of the local community, which is the case in Khasansky Raion.

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In 2009, President Dmitrii Medvedev officially announced a turn to a state modernization strategy. In its objectives and rhetoric of developing the country through “bringing together the interests of individuals, the public and the state” (*Dmitri Medvedev* 2009) it reminded of the *Perestroika* of late 1980s.

Opinions expressed by the region’s residents lack any clear idea of the notion of “modernization” per se as it is not well rooted in the vocabulary of the local authorities and has not been the subject of public reflection. While modernization is on the agenda of federal authorities, for the people it has become merely a “ritualized” embodiment of the idea of being able to lead a normal life, something for which there is still a high demand in post-soviet Russia (*Professor Aleksandr Auzan* 2010). Here we deal with the technological components of modernization, namely, with the opportunity to improve both the manufacturing facilities of local enterprises and the deteriorating infrastructure of municipalities. Local authorities and businesses have apparently sought to build themselves into the modernization process which allows them to first of all solve the most pressing tactical needs.

The local government, as well as the population as a whole, often have no access to vital information regarding the intentions of the federal government and are unable to foresee the likely outcomes of the proposed changes. Among them are the Territories of Rapid Development, The Free Port of Vladivostok and others. These circumstances are aggravated by lack of locally generated funds for the development. So, generating new ideas and development planning become a practically fruitless endeavor for local government. As a result, most of changes have to be made primarily by using the existing resources and infrastructure, inherited from the Soviet period.

Take for example: the suspended construction by Gazprom of a liquefied natural gas facility at the Lomonosov Cape (Vladivostok–LNG) which is viewed by the authorities as a locomotive for Khasansky Raion and Primorskii Krai as a whole. The municipal government hope that, as it was the case with one of major Soviet companies, the Shipyard in Slavyanka, additional ‘cars’ could be hooked, that is, contiguous industries and access roads to the shoreline. “We would have never been able to build

this on our own” said an employee of Khasansky Raion Administration (Slavianka, Primorsky Krai, pers. comm., July 2014).

However, the project also has its opponents. Their main concerns have been uncertain social returns and delayed outcome. Moreover, no alternative proposals from ecologists and scientists regarding the choice of location have been properly discussed. Besides, the issues of the Vladivostok agglomeration civil and industrial safety have never been taken into consideration. The current project also does not take into account the location fire and seismic risks, nor the uniqueness of Khasansky Raion ecosystem: Khasansky Raion is home to the “Land of Leopard” National Park, the “Kedrovaya Pad” Nature Reserve (a UNESCO world heritage site), and Far Eastern Marine Biosphere Reserve FEB RAS (*Stroiteli zavoda SPG* 2014). Besides, the project is incompatible with the area priority plans for promoting eco-tourism and water-farming which have been leading activities for local private business in recent years.

Thus, the interests of the state and those of residents of outlying areas are incompatible for the parties think in different categories and set goals of different scales. “All the global-scale intentions and corresponding statutes fail in the end because of the discrepancies between what they [the authorities – *A.K.*] want and what those who do their humble work down here can do” (Entrepreneur I., Slavianka, Primorsky Krai, pers. comm., July 2014.)

For instance, in the Soviet time a bright future with the construction of a large shipyard for repairing fishing fleet had been planed in Zarubino township. And there was designed a city for about 70,000 residents (versus three thousand inhabitants as of today). However, *the Perestroika* and the economic collapse held back the implementation of those plans. Now Zarubino is the endpoint of the ‘Primorye-2’ international transportation corridor as a link in the Tumen River Corridor. The federal program “Economic and social development of the Far East and Baikal territory for the period up to 2025” includes the investment project named “Construction of the Zarubino Big Maritime Port”. The aim is to facilitate Russia’s rapid entry into the international transportation and logistics market. The port is also expected to become one of the Territories of Rapid Development. But when describing the results of efforts

to implement the transit project, residents called it “a crawling process without any effect for the locals” (interview with a resident of Zarubino, Primorsky Krai, 17 July 2014).

The attitude of the Far-Eastern population to the federal government has been influenced by a number of consistent mythologems over a long period. Among these is a view of the Far East (a Russian outpost) as a rich area where the good, nevertheless, does not end up in the hands of the locals (Bliakher 2014, 89). During the late Soviet period local authorities were viewed as accomplices of the central government in their colonial use of natural and human resources (State Archive of Primorsky Krai. Funds R.-68, Inventory 117, file 1025, page 88). Today, the ministries and state agencies have been conveniently joined by state-owned corporations and by major companies registered in Moscow and abroad. The regional governments justify their presence in the area by the need for investments.

Vertically oriented, these companies are not built into the local social environment, and their economic activity and modernization programs are often rejected by the community, and can even lead to open protest. Protests are provoked by situations wherein the economic discrimination, due to deterioration in both the industrial and social spheres, which is a very painful issue for the locals, is combined with a conflict on the basic concepts of fairness. Discussion of the expediency of concrete projects often transforms into an argument on the trust to the government whatsoever.

For instance, the story of one project for the construction of a transshipment complex for open coal handling on the Slavyanka Shipyard grounds in the very center of the town. This example reflects all the disagreement on the local community idea of the common good and that of businesses and the government at the regional and local levels. In 2013 at a meeting backed by the local administration it was declared that the constitutional rights of citizens for the life in an ecologically clean environment must be insured. That project was regarded by the residents as a technologically outdated, rather than advanced one. Among the opinions expressed at that meeting were the views that, “without solving the environmental issues... you could just as well put an end to

Slavyanka development”, “We believe that our constitutional rights have been violated”, “Now all the shipyards have been shut out, the fish processing facilities have been closed and everyone who feel bit for it, have started selling coal abroad...” (video recording 2013). One blatant example of such “a prosperity” was the situation of nearby Posyet where over 10 years of aggressive economic activities of the Posyet Commercial Port have led to a massive pollution of both land and water and to the outflow of the population as a result.

All the possible methods had been tried – protests, participation in public hearings, individual and collective petitions to federal and local government, to Public Prosecutor’s Offices and preparing for a local referendum. As a result, the terminal construction project in Slavyanka has been suspended.

The consolidated efforts of the local community, ecologists and self-government have helped to establish grassroots practices and to increase interest in public policy in general. It has also demonstrated the actual need for the residents to determine a desirable picture of the area.

The urgent nature of ecological problems, the response to which captures a full range of disparate approaches to area development, has become the main topic of the eighth “Nature without Borders” International Ecological Forum (Vladivostok, 2014) whose theme was ‘Ecology And Business: From Opposition To Common Grounds’. The forum’s resolution contains concrete proposals to federal and regional legislative and executive bodies. These include:

- “introduce into regulatory compliance practices a requirement ensuring approval from local social organizations concerning all critical decisions on industrial facilities location and on territorial planning which affect the local population interests”;
- “develop a special regime for the management of natural resources in Primorskii Krai’s Khasansky Raion;
- conduct strategic ecological regime assessments and public discussion before any government or commercial projects are launched in the region” (*Rezoliuciia* 2014)

Summing up, it can be seen that the strategic projects proposed under the state modernization agenda have often been viewed by locals as an attempt to disturb the smooth running of the social order with unpredictable or apparently negative consequences for the area. The local response to challenges from the ‘outside’ in the conditions of high institutional distrust has been a collective opposition based on cognitive mobilization. Against the backdrop of incompatible interests and lack of agreement in respective understandings of modernization as a common good for various parties, such as the state, businesses, and the local community, aggravation of latent conflicts and emergence of new ones have often been observed.

Thank you very much for your attention. I will be glad to answer your questions

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Video 2013. Video recording of a meeting. Slavianka, Primorsky Krai. 23 March. Speech of the residents of Slavianka