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Structures of mobilization and resistance: Confronting the oil and gas industries in Russia

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ABSTRACT

Drawing on recent developments in the problematic relationship between the oil industry and local communities in the Republic of Komi, we develop a case study of environmental grassroots mobilization in northwest Russia. Using a qualitative methodology comprising semi-structured interviews and participant observation, we analyse the movement's actions in terms of the concept of governance-generating networks (GGN), with reference to the global network of non-governmental environmental organizations and other institutions. The article focuses on the network of non-state actors, examining the spatial levels from local to global in an environmental movement seeking to challenge Lukoil, the major oil company in the region. We investigate the strategies adopted by the social movement and the responses of the oil industry and various governmental institutions, with this analysis including an examination of power between the different bodies and networks involved. In particular, we analyse different forms of corporate social responsibility seen in the steps taken by Lukoil to avoid more severe reactions.

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1. Introduction

Indigenous peoples and the oil industry have co-existed for many years in the Komi Republic, a region located in the northwest part of the Russian Federation. Since the 1990s, however, citizens have been affected by oil spills as a result of growing industrial activity. Case studies have found that the industry burdens local communities with an environmental risk adversely impacting their wellbeing (Yakovleva, 2014). The Komi-Izhemtsi, not recognized as an indigenous people by the Russian state but recognized as such by the UN, are making an effort to influence the oil giant Lukoil by engaging with global associations and networks. It is this local resistance to Lukoil, viewed as action embedded in a global network, that is the focus of interest in this paper.

Due to the increasing importance of energy resources for the global economy, the Russian state is determined to rely on the energy sector for its institutional and geo-political existence

(Wilson and Stammler, 2016), even in a period of declining oil prices (years 2015–2016). The Russian oil and gas industry accounts for over 70 per cent of the nation's total exports (EIA, 2014). The country holds more than 20 per cent of the world's known gas reserves and 5 per cent of its proven oil reserves and the supply of oil and gas makes up a large part of Russia's exports to Europe (European Commission, 2016). The West is dependent on the Russian oil and gas industry and this constitutes a viable way forward for Russia to develop a geo-political strategy to influence the Western economy. Oil is the main export resource in the Komi Republic, output being 257 thousand b/d¹ (EIA, 2014). The oil and gas industry figures prominently throughout the region, with facilities stretching from Ukhta to Pechora and Usinsk being the centre of production (TED, 1997). Lukoil is the main player in the industry in the region today, operating through its subsidiary Lukoil-Komi. Each year, the area produces 2.3 million tons of oil, which constitutes about two-thirds of Russia's total heavy oil production (Annenkova, 2012). Lukoil was founded in 1991 and is the second-largest oil company in Russia, and the second-largest

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¹ Barrels per day.

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Table 1
List of interviews in 2015–2016.

Date	Place	Category	Interviews	Number
20 February–4 March 2015	Izhma	Activists	Activists in Save Pechora and Izviatas	11
20 February 2015	Syktyvkar	Rosprirodnadzor Komi Republic (Russia's environmental protection agency)	Representative	1
21 February 2015	Krasnoborsk	Activist	Activist in Save Pechora and school teacher	1
21 February 2015	Vertep	Activist	Activists in Save Pechora and school teachers	1
21 February 2015	Scheljejur	Activist	Activist in Save Pechora	1
24 February 2015	Izhma	Local administration Izhma	Deputy Social Issues	1
24 February 2015	Izhma	Local administration Izhma	Heads of administration of the municipal district Izhma	2
25 February 2015	Usinsk	Lukoil-Komi	Director of Legal Affairs	1
25 February 2015	Usinsk	Lukoil-Komi	Representatives Public Relations/Public Affairs	2
26 February 2015	Usinsk	Lukoil-Komi	Museum guide of the Lukoil-Komi museum	1
27 February 2015	Syktyvkar	Activist	Leader of Save Pechora	1
27 February 2015	Usinsk	Regional Administration	Head of Territorial Development of Ecology and Nature	1
27 February 2015	Usinsk	Regional Administration	Representative of Department of Regional Development and Nature Management	1
28 February 2015	Syktyvkar	Activist	Leader of Izviatas	1
March 2015	Pechora	Trinity-Pechora region	Deputies SPC	2
March 2015	Kolva	Reindeer herding companies	Representatives	3
4 March 2015	Syktyvkar	Ministry of Natural Resources of the Republic of Komi	Minister and representative	2
5 March 2015	Siziabsk	Reindeer herding brigade	Director of the Reindeer herding brigade <i>Izhemtsi Olenevod</i>	2
22 April 2015	Moscow	State Duma	Vise-director of <i>Izhemtsi Olenevod</i>	2
22 April 2015	Moscow	State Duma	Members of State Duma Committee on Natural Resources, Environment and Ecology	1
22 April 2015	Moscow	State Duma	Deputy chief of staff of the State Duma Committee on Budget and Taxes	1
24 April 2015	Moscow	Lukoil	Representatives of the Department of Social Programs	2
24 April 2015	Moscow	Lukoil	Head of Department of Corporate Activity	1
24 April 2015	Moscow	WWF Russia	Representative	1
20–21 January 2016	Syktyvkar, village Ib	SPC, Izviatas	Activists	3
4 February 2016	Skype	IWGIA, INFOE	Employee and activist	1
4 February 2016	St. Petersburg	University of Lapland, European University St. Petersburg	Researcher	1

producer of oil (Lukoil, 2015), producing 89,856 million tons of oil in 2012 (Lukoil, 2015). A major oil spill occurred in Komi in 1994; at that time, oil extraction was carried out by Komineft, which was later bought up by and is now an official subsidiary of Lukoil (Lukoil, 2015). Lukoil has been trying to 'clean up the effects of the 1994 spill and replace the ageing network of pipelines' (Wilson, 2016), but oil spills nevertheless still occur.

In this study, we investigate the NGO network constructed around indigenous and environmental organizations – involving grassroots as well as global players – that has mounted and sustained continuous resistance directed towards Lukoil at its headquarters in Moscow and its subsidiary, Lukoil-Komi, which operates in the Komi Republic and Nenets Autonomous Okrug. The major research questions we address are: In what relationship does the bottom-up NGO resistance network stand vis-a-vis the transnational Lukoil; and what factors have enabled the resistance to sustain itself over the years when confronted with powerful players? We look briefly at the emergence and transnationalization of the environmental movement in the Komi Republic. Of interest are the movement's structure and survival strategies over the years under a political regime that is constantly trying to eliminate such efforts, mostly through the Foreign Agent Law enacted by the Putin administration in 2012.² In particular, we examine the responses of different stakeholders, such as the oil industry and different levels of government, to the movement on multiple scales (from the local to the global). We also consider the way in which companies make

use of corporate social responsibility strategies, basing our analysis on the renewed EU Strategy for Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) (EUR-Lex, 2011).

After describing the research methodology, we present the theoretical framework, with this including a brief look at Castell's theories of networks and power in relation to the local-global realm. We then go on to introduce the concept of the governance-generating network (GGN), which forms the foundation of our analysis in conjunction with social movement theory and concepts relating to CSR. This is followed by a description of the case study and a brief history of environmental movements in Russia, building on which we proceed to the globalized movement today. We argue that local resistance is seeking to change a global industry using local as well as global resources and has, through different kinds of framing, succeeded in *surviving* over the past two decades (Table 1).

2. Methodology

The research takes a case study approach in order to provide depth and accuracy (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007), focusing on the *how* and the *why* of the focal phenomenon (Yin, 1994) – citizens' resistance to oil companies – and its context. The conclusions of this study are based on semi-structured interviews carried out between February and April 2015 and between 20 January and 4 February 2016. These comprised 16 interviews with local activists in the district of Izhma, five interviews with activists in the urban district of Usinsk – all 21 interviewees being members of the NGO Save Pechora Committee (SPC) and the indigenous peoples' organization Izviatas – and one interview with members of IWGIA (International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs). In addition, three interviews were carried out with local (Izhma) governmental bodies, six with regional (Usinsk and Syktyvkar) and three with national (Moscow). Three interviews were carried out with representatives of the Lukoil office in Moscow, and four with

² The Foreign Agent Law has been in effect since November 2012, initiated by the ruling party United Russia, and actively promoted by President Vladimir Putin. It states that non-profit organizations throughout Russia are required to list themselves as foreign agents when receiving grants from foreign sources, in order to avoid 'any direct or indirect interference in [Russia's] internal affairs (...)' (Kremlin, 2013; Купина, 2012).

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