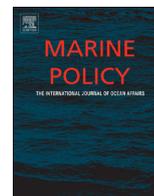




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Constraints on community participation in salmon fisheries management in Northwest Russia



Maria Nakhshina^{a,b}

^a University of Aberdeen, Department of Social Anthropology, Aberdeen, AB24 3QY UK

^b Barents Centre of the Humanities, Russian Academy of Sciences, Apatity, 184200 Russia

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ABSTRACT

Salmon fishing used to be the primary source of income in many rural areas of Arkhangelsk oblast in northwest Russia. People who settled in the area received a name *Pomory*, from Russian *po moriu*, meaning *by sea*, because their subsistence activities became marine fishing and hunting and seafaring. Local fisheries have undergone significant changes as post-Soviet Russia embraced the market economy and the state introduced fishing concessions. The current Russian law only allows fishing for salmon through officially registered recreational or commercial fisheries. Both these options are often either unavailable or unaffordable to rural dwellers, which leaves them with limited or no legal access to their traditional salmon fisheries. There has been a growing concern for protecting communities' fishing rights among wider society in Arkhangelsk oblast. City activists promoted Pomory identity and appealed to the Russian government to grant Pomory an indigenous status to secure their access to fisheries. Although Pomor activism did not reach most of its proclaimed goals, it has contributed to promoting the image of Arkhangelsk oblast as a homeland to Pomor fishing. This image has played an important part in what Arkhangelsk authorities have called socially-oriented fisheries management. Officials have made good attempts to better accommodate rural communities' access to fishing resources. Yet, these attempts have failed to include fishermen as active participants in the process. This paper looks at constraints on community participation in fisheries management in Russia. It considers both historical and contemporary reasons for the low participation of local community in fisheries management.

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1. Introduction

Salmon in Russia is often referred to as *tzar fish* (Rus., *tzarskaia ryba*), as according to literature [1] and popular stories it used to go directly to the *tzar table* from remote fishing communities along the White Sea coast in Arkhangelsk region. Fishermen themselves consumed little salmon as they traded most of it for other goods. During the Soviet times, all salmon went to restaurants in Moscow and to private tables of local party elites. The majority of Soviet citizens did not see salmon in shops; nor could they harvest it individually. Many people in fishing communities in the White Sea area today still do not have a legal access to salmon fishing. The situation in fishery management in contemporary Russia is gradually evolving towards better accommodation of fishermen's interests. It nevertheless remains a complex entanglement of managerial legacies of the Soviet past and contemporary economic and social issues.

This paper looks at small-scale salmon fisheries in Arkhangelsk

oblast to study contemporary constraints on community participation in fisheries management in Russia. Arkhangelsk oblast is an administrative unit in the northwest of Russia. It operates large-scale fisheries in the Barents Sea and small-scale fisheries in the White Sea and mainland rivers and lakes [Fig. 1]. Russian fisheries occur across a vast territory that encompasses significant administrative and geographical differences. Data provided in this paper refers to fisheries only in one administrative unit of Russia and does not represent the entire country. At the same time, the analysis of the fisheries management system and predicaments of fishermen's everyday life as they unfold in Arkhangelsk oblast touches upon issues that are relevant for fishermen across the country.

Data for this paper was gathered in 2014–2016 in the city of Arkhangelsk and in several villages in Mezen region of Arkhangelsk oblast [Fig. 1]. All villages are located near salmon migration routes. Names of villages are not used for the sake of confidentiality, as sensitive subjects such as fishing outside official regulations are discussed in this paper. Study methods included interviews with fisheries managers, political activists, scholars,

E-mail address: maria.nakhshina@gmail.com

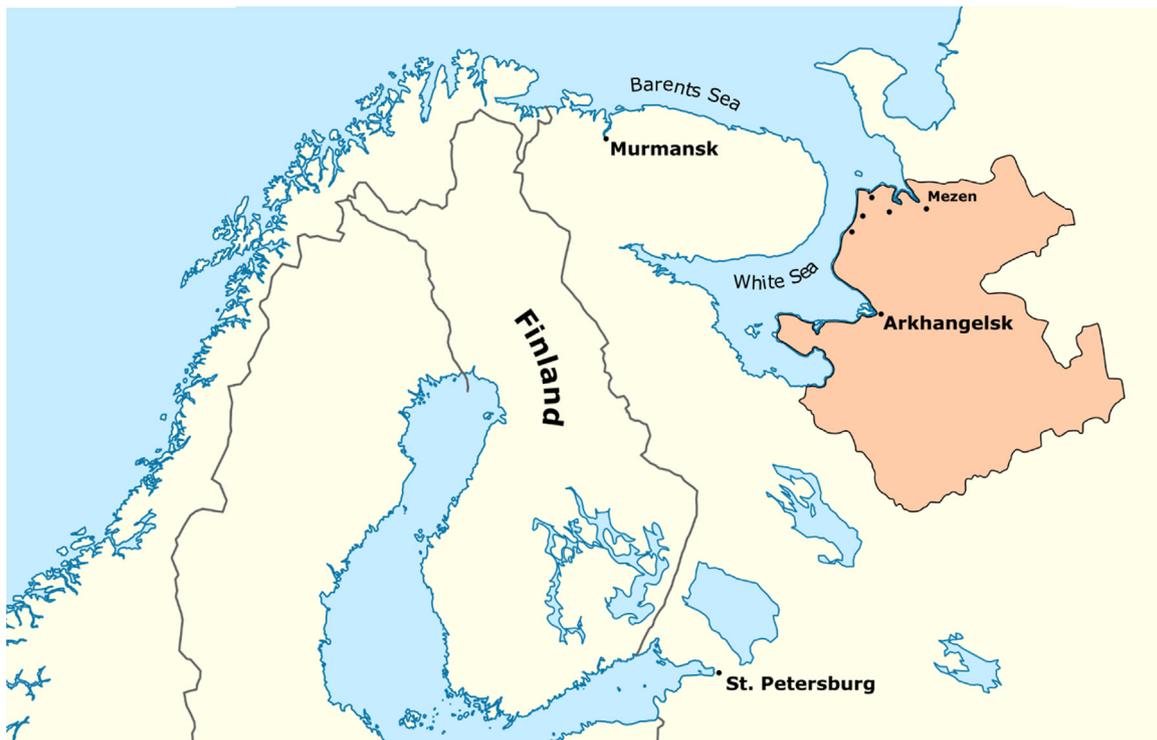


Fig. 1. Map of Arkhangelsk oblast. The city of Arkhangelsk is the capital of the oblast; the town of Mezen is a regional centre. Dots in Mezen region represent villages.

chairmen of several fishing collective farms, and local people in the city and village. Participant observation and engagement in informal activities, including fishing, as well as official celebrations of fishing collective farms was conducted in several villages. Information on fisheries legislation and statistics was gathered mainly from official websites of fisheries management organisations. Information that does not appear online is usually internal and not easily available to outsiders. Arkhangelsk oblast officials have been very supportive otherwise and shared their knowledge and expertise wherever possible.

2. History of salmon fisheries in the northwest Russia

Russian people came to the White Sea coast around the 12th century [2], attracted by rich fish and sea mammals resources. Their initial seasonal settlements gradually turned into permanent villages. People that settled along the White Sea and later the Barents Sea coasts received a name *Pomor*, from Russian *po moriu*, which means *by sea*, because their subsistence activities became sea fishing and hunting and seafaring. Salmon fishing in particular played an important role in Pomor economy. The natural environment of the White Sea area was not conducive to farming, and Pomor depended on external sources to obtain grains. Trading salmon for other goods such as wheat was crucial for Pomor's survival and allowed them to maintain their cultural identity as Slavic people [3].

People fished salmon in self-organised collectives during the pre-Soviet period [4]. The village commune controlled fishing grounds collectively [5]. Lajus [3] stresses the role of monasteries in salmon fisheries in the White Sea area. A lot of fishing grounds belonged to monasteries, which gradually appropriated the richest salmon fisheries. Monasteries served as managers of the resources, organising fisheries and collecting taxes from the peasant communities. During the secularization period of the 18th century, the state took possession of most of fishing grounds belonging to the monasteries and gave them to the villagers.

The Soviet state appropriated and actively exploited fishing resources throughout most of the 20th century. Villagers were organised into *kolkhozes* (collective farms) in the 1920–1930s [5]. “The aim of the *kolkhoz* was first to collectivize the work but also to produce surpluses that could be directed into the stream of national Soviet production” [6]. All salmon fishing during the Soviet period was done by *kolkhozes* and state enterprises, whereas individual fishing for salmon was entirely forbidden [7].

David Koester in his work on Itelmen indigenous fisheries in Kamchatka in the Russian Far East argues that collectivisation together with other Soviet policies led to multiple levels of political, economic, social, and personal alienation of people from renewable raw resources like salmon [6]. The situation with Pomor fisheries was slightly different in that fishers on the White Sea coast were alienated from their right to salmon not as a staple food source, as was the case with Itelmen in Kamchatka, but from their right to trade salmon. All trade was now conducted by the state, and people had no control over the remuneration for their labour as fishers.

At the same time, state organisations and collective farms could fish without major quota restrictions. The state guaranteed sale of fish produce and kept transportation and equipment costs low and fixed. This generated significant employment in fisheries. It also allowed people to procure precious fish such as salmon, through work channels for subsistence [7].

Many people mentioned during interviews that life in the village was difficult until fishing collective farms received loans from the state in the 1950s to purchase large ships, which allowed them to conduct large-scale fishing in both domestic and international waters. Fishing *kolkhozes* soon became sustainable and could support a wide range of social welfare initiatives in the villages. They built roads, hospitals, schools and sustained enterprises such as agricultural and dairy farms.

The situation in fishing *kolkhozes* remained more or less stable until the disintegration of the Soviet Union in 1991. The state introduced fishing concessions in the 1990s, as post-Soviet Russia embraced the market economy. State organisations and collective

farms had their quotas severely cut, as they now had to compete with numerous private fishing enterprises [8]; prices for fuel and fishing equipment rocketed towards market levels. Small-scale marine fisheries in rural communities became largely unprofitable. This reduced the number of people employed in the fishing profession, which in turn decreased people's access to fish through official channels.

As the state support deteriorated in the post-Soviet Russia, people have increasingly turned back to local fishing resources to secure their living. The current Russian law however only allows fishing for salmon and other anadromous fish species through officially registered recreational or commercial fisheries [9]. Both these options are often either unavailable or unaffordable to rural dwellers. The following section describes the organisation of commercial and recreational fisheries in Russia and outlines issues that the current system poses for fishers that live in remote rural locations.

3. Current system of commercial and recreational salmon fishing

Each administrative unit of the Russian Federation where there are anadromous fish species has a Committee of Anadromous Fish Catch Regulation, which governs fishing for salmon and other such species within its territory [10,11]. Commercial and recreational salmon fishing in Russia can only be done on allocated fishing grounds [9,12]. The number of fishing grounds has significantly decreased in the post-Soviet period. The main reasons have been the depletion of fish stocks since the 1950s [5] and decrease of labour force in the fishing profession.

Every year the Northern branch of a state scientific organisation, Knipovich Polar Research Institute of Marine Fisheries and Oceanography (Rus., SevPINRO), recommends the total amount of salmon which can be sustainably extracted in the White Sea and rivers of Arkhangelsk oblast. Registered operators propose the amount of salmon they can catch. The Committee of Anadromous Fish Catch Regulation subsequently gathers to distribute the total amount of salmon among operators proportionately to their applications.

People who want to run commercial or recreational fishing business have to be a registered enterprise who can then rent allocated fishing grounds from the state [9,12]. Twenty-two operators of commercial and seven operators of recreational salmon fishing applied for fishing quotas in Arkhangelsk oblast in 2014. Between them, they received permissions to extract 23,492 tons of salmon. Commercial quotas ranged from between 300 kilos and 3147 kilos of salmon per operator [13]. The figures were similar in 2015 [14]. Officials from fisheries management organisations mentioned during interviews that such quota allocations are not enough to sustain a profitable business and that all operators do something else to supplement their income. One manager suggested in an interview that entrepreneurs keep running this business more for prestige rather than money, as they take pride in bringing friends or high profile officials to their wild salmon fishing grounds. Furthermore, it is prestigious to have salmon in stock to treat one's guests on an important occasion.

Most currently registered operators of commercial salmon fishing are either individual entrepreneurs that live in the city or larger organisations such as fishing collective farms, various joint stock companies and church parishes [13,14]. There are no individuals registered as fishing operators who live in rural areas. One of the main reasons is the lack of allocated fishing grounds in villages. All existing grounds for commercial salmon fishing are located in several places along the White Sea coast and on the Dvina River in the vicinity of Arkhangelsk [13,14]. There are no

grounds available for commercial salmon fishing on other rivers of Arkhangelsk oblast. As a result, some villages located on salmon spawning rivers have no formal access to commercial salmon fishing. In interviews, managers from the Arkhangelsk oblast branch of the Federal Fisheries Agency stated that the government is reluctant to introduce new fishing grounds, to reduce the risk of overfishing.

The lack of fishing grounds is only partially responsible for the low number of rural dwellers in commercial fisheries. Villagers often lack the legislative and administrative knowledge required to register a business. Additionally, running a business involves inevitable travel to the city for a variety of reasons. Many Arkhangelsk oblast villages are in very remote locations, which makes traveling to the urban centre prohibitively expensive for most rural dwellers. There are no roads to some villages. It is possible to reach them by snowmobile in winter and by boat in summer. Water transportation is however very infrequent and the most reliable way to travel during most of the year is by air. In 2015, a one-way plane ticket from the village to the oblast centre cost almost one third of the official monthly minimum wage. Commercial fishing grounds therefore tend to concentrate in urban areas, except for several collective farms that run salmon fisheries in villages. Collective farms' quotas however are very low, and the number of local people they can employ in salmon fishing is very limited. Kolkhozes sell part of their catch in village shops. This is often the only way local people can access salmon legally.

The remote location of rural settlements and low size of salmon quotas contribute to the reluctance of fishing operators to organise recreational salmon fishing in villages, as operational costs make it unviable. The concentration of both commercial and recreational salmon fishing in urban areas leaves many rural dwellers with limited or no legal access to salmon fisheries. Paradoxically, people in the village have been increasingly dependent on fishing in recent decades. Furthermore, many villagers complained that current regulations also restrict fishing for non-valuable fish species in salmon spawning rivers, in order to minimise the risk of salmon bycatch. This results in a nearly complete ban on fishing in some rural locations.

Apart from being a vital source of livelihood, salmon fishing is also an important aspect of local identity. Most families in villages along the White Sea coast would always have salmon on the table when people get together on important social occasions. It is also handy to have salmon in reserve in case of unexpected visitors. When guests leave, hosts often regard it as their obligation to supply them with salmon. Being able to fish salmon in villages on the White Sea coast is part and parcel of being local [7,15].

Ross [16], writing about fisheries dependent areas in Scotland and building on previous work by Nadel-Klein [17], suggests that the importance of fishers' identity may help to explain why people continue to fish, even when it is not economically viable to do so. A similar passion drives many fishers in villages on the White Sea coast to fish salmon outside official rules, despite the risk and hardship involved in the job. As reflected in an interview with a local person who talked about elderly fishers in the village, "it is their life, it makes them live longer".

There has been a growing concern for protecting communities' fishing rights among wider society in Arkhangelsk oblast. There is a general understanding among the public that people who live in coastal villages where there are no major sources of employment should be allowed to fish without major restrictions. The next section looks at various attempts to accommodate people's access to fishing resources in Arkhangelsk oblast.

4. Community access to fishing resources

Arkhangelsk oblast fisheries managers and political activists

have tried to improve the situation whereby communities that have historically depended on fishing currently have almost no legal access to local fishing resources. They approached the issue through administrative means, while at the same time appealing to Pomor identity, culture and traditions. Furthermore, kolkhozes organised people's access to fishing grounds in some villages. There is however no such practice in the villages included in this study.

4.1. Administrative measures to improve community access to marine fisheries

Arkhangelsk oblast authorities found a partial way to tackle the problem of communities' access to salmon fishing. A local branch of a state fisheries organisation arranged several locations for recreational fishing in rural areas where people can fish salmon by purchasing individual permits. Organisers stated in an interview that permits are affordable for villagers and that they try to distribute them fairly so that as many local people as possible can access fishing. They say that if a private entrepreneur ran this business they would likely sell all the permits to their friends and not care about the local population. Running this fishery is unprofitable due to the low size of salmon quotas. The Arkhangelsk oblast government however insists that it continues because they see it as a good solution for providing communities with a legitimate way to harvest local fishing resources. What passes officially as recreational fishing is in fact fishing for subsistence. This does not however solve the problem of people's access to fisheries, as recreational fishing grounds exist only in a small number of villages, usually those that are easier to access, whereas many rural settlements still do not have any legal access to salmon fisheries.

Sakhalin oblast in the Russian Far East introduced a similar initiative in summer and autumn 2015, when the local government issued free permits for recreational fishing for salmon and crab to local population. In some cases, the government even organised the purchase of the catch [18]. Such initiatives are indicative of an increasing awareness among the Russian authorities of an acute problem with access to fishing resources in rural areas where people have limited alternatives to secure their livelihood.

Arkhangelsk oblast authorities have also tried to solve the issue of people's access to salmon by allowing more access to other marine species. The federal government passed an amendment to fishing rules, according to which it is now legal for people who are residents of coastal villages of Arkhangelsk oblast and two adjacent administrative units of the Russian Federation to fish in the sea with stationary nets of a certain size and length [19]. Fishers can only extract nonprecious fish. If they accidentally catch salmon, they have to release it. Villagers stated in interviews that before this change, individuals could only fish in the sea with rods, which most fishermen considered futile because this method would not bring any catch. An official from the Fishing Industry Agency of Arkhangelsk oblast clarified in an interview that oblast authorities lobbied for the new amendment in Moscow because any change to fishing rules in Russia must receive an approval at the federal level. They argued that fishing with nets has to be recognised as a traditional subsistence fishing method in villages along the White Sea coast. It is a significant achievement for oblast authorities to make the federal government formally acknowledge a traditional local way of subsistence fishing.

Riabova and Ivanova [20] suggest in a recent study of fishery governance in Northwest Russia that "in extremely centralized countries like Russia the process whereby the centre loses its power to the subnational (regional) level is an important step towards the rise of non-state governance". At the same time, while Russia has recently made some steps towards multilevel governance in the fisheries sector, people in fishery-based communities

remain largely outside the policy negotiation process [20]. Several fishermen stated that the February 2015 amendment is pointless because fishing with nets of a proposed size and length cannot bring any significant catch. Local officials themselves might recognise the shortcomings of the reform. As according to a fishing inspector, "the idea was good, but the implementation was vulgar".

Fisheries management authorities nevertheless describe fisheries in Arkhangelsk oblast as socially rather than commercially oriented, as they refer to their regular attempts to secure communities' rights to their traditional fisheries. Communities however remain largely unsatisfied with the current state of their access to fishing resources.

4.2. Identity politics in support of community access to fishing resources

Arkhangelsk authorities' aspirations towards pursuing socially oriented fisheries management relate to a wider image of Arkhangelsk oblast as a home to Pomory – courageous seafarers and skilful fishermen. Pomor identity as a pervasive regional brand emerged in the late 1980s–early 1990s, when Russia witnessed an overall liberalization of the political regime, which led to the rise of multiple new ethnic identities.

The term *Pomor* as a collective name for people who live along the White Sea coast and in adjacent territories had been in use since the 16th century [2]. Kulyasova and Kulyasov [21] suggest that since Pomory have never been recognised as a separate ethnic group, attitudes towards them have always been to some extent ambivalent. Watts [22] distinguishes several waves of Pomor identity when it was mobilised by different actors over the past two centuries. It was first articulated in the second half of the 18th century through nationalist reaction against the policies of Peter the Great, which were oriented towards integration with Western Europe. The nationalists argued for the distinctiveness of Russia in its nature as a northern country. The north was thus viewed as the essence of Russia. This implied that the people of Arkhangelsk area were among the most authentic of Russians. An implicit view of Pomory as essentially Russian people had prevailed until the early post-Soviet period, when newly emerged identity politics created a fertile ground for a number of city activists to identify Pomory as an indigenous small-numbered people of the Russian Federation. Indigenous status could allow Pomory to gain privileges in access to fishing resources [8].

The term 'indigenous small-numbered people' (Rus., *korennyye malochislennyye narody*) is a peculiarly Russian phenomenon, rooted in the colonial politics of the Russian Empire. It was commonly used in relation to indigenous people of Siberia. Initially, it "did not refer so much to a quantitative measure of group size but rather to qualitative characteristics, including geographic remoteness, social backwardness, and a need for protection" [23]. Within Russia today, forty peoples are officially recognised as indigenous small-numbered people of the Russian Federation [24] who "qualify for the rights, privileges, and state support earmarked for indigenous peoples" [23].

Supporters of Pomor identity encouraged people in Arkhangelsk oblast to register their nationality as Pomor during the census in 2002. The census results showed that six thousand five hundred seventy one people in Russia registered themselves as Pomory [25], which allowed activists to call Pomory a 'statistic reality' and appeal to the Russian government with a request to grant Pomory a status of an indigenous small-numbered people and subsequently secure Pomory's rights to fishing resources.

Activists' persistent appeals resulted in a response at the state level when the Russian government held a meeting in 2007 that looked into the "social and economic support and ethnic and cultural development of Russian Pomory" [26]. The government

also requested an expert opinion on Pomor identity from several prominent Russian anthropologists. Scholars responded by not advising the government to support activists' claims for Pomory to be recognised as a separate ethnic group [26,27]. They argued that Pomory are a regional subgroup of Russian people, since they do not speak a separate language and their material and spiritual culture has always been very close to that of the majority of the Russian people. Some activists considered the negative response by scholars a 'state directive' and a major obstacle for the movement.

The main resolution of the 2007 meeting was the federal government's recommendation to regional governments of those administrative units where Pomory live to take measures to improve Pomory's social and economic conditions and propose changes to the federal law on fisheries that would allow Pomory to conduct their traditional way of life [26]. Since the resolution was merely a recommendation, regional governments did not act on it. Pomor activists made further appeals to the government but did not manage to achieve any formal recognition of Pomory as a separate indigenous group of the Russian Federation. There are two officially registered Pomor organisations in Arkhangelsk oblast today, but their main activities include organisation of various cultural and social welfare events. They have not made a significant direct impact on improving fishermen's access to fish resources.

Although Pomor activism did not reach most of its proclaimed goals, it has contributed to promoting the image of Arkhangelsk oblast as a homeland to Pomor fishing and seafaring. This image has played an important part in what Arkhangelsk authorities have called socially-oriented fisheries management. Authorities might not speak about Pomor identity explicitly, but their perception of local communities' interests and values strongly relates to the image of Pomory as primarily fishermen. Officials at different levels of various fisheries organisations stated during interviews that coastal communities should have a better access to fishing resources. They understand that a complete ban on fishing would only result in a higher number of unlawful fishing practices and that a more flexible fisheries management approach is required.

The next section looks at reasons for the low participation of the local community in fisheries management.

5. Constraints on community participation in fisheries management

Fisheries managers, policy makers and activists might have made good attempts to better accommodate communities' access to fishing resources. Yet, all of them have failed to include fishermen as active participants in the process.

Reasons for the low participation of local community in fisheries management are complex and partially rooted in the Soviet period of the Russian history, with its top-down communication of management decisions. One of the most prominent issues has been a severe lack of communication between local communities on the one hand, and administration, fisheries scientists and city activists on the other.

There is a strong expectation among villagers today that the village administration needs to do something about communities' access to fishing resources. People suggest that the administration has to come up with an initiative on a village level and pass it on to a higher administrative level, until it reaches the federal government in Moscow. People, as individuals, feel they have little influence on fisheries management and even if they do try to make their voice heard, it will fall on deaf ears. This inaction has roots in the all-encompassing role of the Soviet state, which orchestrated people's lives.

Similar situations can be found in other parts of Russia. Emma Wilson [28], in the study of entitlements to fish resources in Sakhalin in the Russian Far East, describes indigenous people's inability to realise their potential for opposition to multinational offshore oil and gas projects, which present threat to the local fish stock. People revert instead to fatalism and to the passive hope that things will ultimately be for the best. Wilson argues that people's lack of skills to engage with multinationals, together with the lack of networks, information channels and financial resources are secondary to their psychological barriers. People continue to depend on a vertical social hierarchy, and expect regulations and decisions to come from above.

On the one hand, the village administration is an elected body that represents villagers' views. It could therefore contribute to advocating community rights to local fish resources. At the same time, village authorities have limited human resources and work to a very tight budget. Their primary concern is to fulfil their key obligations such as providing social services and maintaining essential infrastructure including roads, water pipelines and electricity.

Fisheries management organisations often use the village administration as an intermediary in their communication with the local population. They rarely speak to people directly. In interviews, villagers noted that when a state fisheries organisation arranged a location for recreational salmon fishing in their village, the officials responsible conducted all communication by phone. They called the village administration and a couple of villagers to ask for an advice where to organise the fishing grounds. There was no public discussion or formal consultation. The administration said they later informed the population about the availability of fishing grounds by nailing a poster to a wooden board beside the main road in the village. Being exposed to the elements, such paper announcements tend not to last very long. When villagers were interviewed about the newly established fishing grounds, most of them said they have never even heard that there is an official fishing location near their village where they can fish salmon with permits. The fisheries managers in turn complained that no one has bought any permits in the village that year and that the lack of demand might lead to the closure of the fishing grounds. During interviews, the officials expressed anger when they were informed that people did not know about the existence of recreational fishing grounds in their village; they said that villagers must have purposefully misinformed this research.

Committee of Anadromous Fish Catch Regulation that governs salmon fisheries develops most of their policies based on recommendations they receive from fisheries scientists. State scientific organisations evaluate existing fishing practices and estimate fishing resources, make forecasts for future levels of fish stock and propose the quantity of fish that can be sustainably extracted. A scholar from a fisheries research institute in Arkhangelsk stated during an interview that in Arkhangelsk oblast they follow a precautionary approach to salmon fishing, which results in the extraction of significantly less fish than the sustainable maximum.

When interviewed in 2015, many local people did not think that salmon stocks had been declining. Rather, they saw yearly variations in the abundance of salmon. People therefore often do not fully comprehend the strict limitations that the state has imposed on salmon fishing. There is a lack of publicly available information about methods and statistical data scientists use to make their forecasts about fishing stocks. Science communicates with fishermen indirectly through official fishing regulations. Ultimate users of fishing resources remain mostly unaware of the process that leads to managerial translations of rigorous scientific research.

Scientific organisations are responsible for holding annual

public hearings in each administrative unit of Russia where they discuss proposed quotas on its territory in a given year. Anyone can attend hearings, express their opinion, and propose changes. In interviews with fishery scientists in Arkhangelsk, they stated their perception that fishers almost never come to these meetings. The culture of community participation in resource management has not developed in Russia. Whereas the mechanism for such participation is technically in place, people are not prepared to make use of it. Furthermore, for a person from a remote rural location to travel to such a meeting could cost more than half of their monthly salary.

Interview data and informal conversations with villagers suggest that many people in small and remote rural locations have insufficient knowledge about fishing rules and consequences of breaking them. Fishing regulations are available online and from local offices of state fisheries management organisations. The latter, however, only exist in bigger settlements, and not all villagers have Internet connection. The controlling authorities often underestimate the degree of local people's unfamiliarity with fishing regulations. Managers rarely visit remote villages due to staffing and budgetary constraints. At the same time, managers themselves admit that official fishing rules are too complex and difficult to understand. They sometimes make extracts from the rules with the most relevant information and publish them online.

There are no social scientists collaborating with fisheries research or management institutions in Arkhangelsk oblast, who could help bridging a gap between policy makers and ultimate users of fish resources. All communication between authorities and fishing communities currently goes *through*: the phone, the village administration, fishing regulations. A more open exchange of information on both sides could lead to a productive dialogue where shared knowledge could benefit both parties.

6. Conclusion

Rural communities in Arkhangelsk oblast have seen some positive changes over the last few years towards securing better access to their traditional fishing resources. Oblast officials might be willing to further reform the current management system; however, any amendment to fishing rules takes a lot of effort and time to gain approval at the federal level in Moscow.

There is a wider issue that negatively impacts fisheries management in contemporary Russia. Managers operate within the field of the federal law that has been constantly tightening in Russia over the last decade, whereas people in the village are still experiencing a major lack of the state's presence ever since the collapse of the Soviet Union. People have become used to the law and the state not being there for them. The imposition of strict fishing regulations looks incongruous and unjust in this context.

Most villagers are not satisfied with their current lack of access to fishing grounds. Yet, they might not welcome management reforms that would strengthen state regulations of the fisheries. While people habitually expect the state institutions to secure their access to fishing resources, they might not want extra presence of the state in their homes. Some fishermen are in fact content with the present state of affairs when they have a higher degree of freedom to fish outside official rules.

Acheson reminds us that "there is no universal solution to the problems of resource management" and that "management will be effective only if resources are matched with governance structures and management techniques" [29]. Natural resources governance in contemporary Russia is a delicate combination of a highly centralised management regime rooted in the Soviet period of its history, and newly emerged management systems that aspire to be more sensitive to local conditions.

Recent studies suggest that fisheries management policies should be more sensitive to issues of wellbeing, cultural heritage and sense of place in fishing communities [30,31]. Trimble and Johnson [30] argue that "most importantly, artisanal fishers need to be made to feel that they are valued partners in the governance of fisheries" and that "by adopting wellbeing as a policy objective, state agencies would be better equipped to understand the material, relational and subjective factors that inform decision making for artisanal fishers". Fisheries managers in Arkhangelsk oblast might not explicitly phrase their policies in terms of wellbeing, yet they made a few important steps towards a socially oriented approach to governance that better resonates with local people's attitudes to fish resources.

Post-Soviet resource management is still a very young phenomenon and there are no existing templates for the successful fisheries governance within this context. One of the biggest challenges is to establish mutual trust and respect between managers of fishing resources and their ultimate users. The first step in this process is to create conditions for a more direct and open communication. This is not going to be straightforward in a country that often lacks basic infrastructure and still copes with the legacy of a top-down mode of communication from its authoritarian past.

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