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'Fragmented Belonging' on Russia's Forested Western Frontier

Tomila Lankina

Local Governance Research Unit, Department of Public Policy, De Montfort University,
The Gateway, Leicester LE1 9BH, UK

E-mail: tlankina@dmu.ac.uk

Abstract

Karelia is a forestry-rich region on Russia's northwestern frontier. This article shows how institutional arrangements for local government were a product of contending efforts of western donors and other transnational actors, the federal and regional governments, and the municipalities. Russia's re-centralising reforms and broader authoritarian context notwithstanding, Karelia illustrates how the choice of local institutions, and ideas about representation and citizenship are increasingly shaped by actors beyond the central state. Borrowing insights from J.S. Migdal and J.C. Ribot, this article argues that the result is shifting cognitive boundaries and 'fragmented belonging' in a dynamic process of contestation and re-contestation of citizenship.

Keywords: democratisation, foreign aid, globalisation, natural resources, Russia, regions, European Union, Karelia

INTRODUCTION

OVER THE PAST TWO DECADES, many countries have embraced decentralisation as an institutional form that would promote efficiency, equity and democracy. The logic behind these efforts is that *if* the right mix of institutions is in place, 'genuine' decentralisation could solve many of the problems that local communities face in newly democratising and developing contexts. As Ribot (2004) poignantly observes, getting to *if* has proven to be a challenge, with many an ostensibly decentralised community still 'waiting for democracy'. Indeed, few countries boast the mix of institutions that arguably makes for 'genuine' decentralisation: democratically elected local authorities with their own tax and revenue base and legal guarantees for decision-making on locally specific issues.

Approximating the 'if' scenario, however, has likewise proved no panacea against the deeply embedded patterns of social exclusion, corruption or inequity plaguing many a local community (Crook & Manor 1998; Lankina 2004). Regular democratic elections do not always make the mayors or councillors more accountable to local populations; and increasing the localities' revenue base sometimes serves to transpose the corruption 'pathologies' of the centre to the local level (Carothers 1999).

These facts have been a source of frustration for decentralisation advocates. Compounding these frustrations is a failure to locate decentralisation in the broader contemporary contexts. Democratic decentralisation is meant to strengthen citizenship and 'belonging' in the nation state and ensure that local governments have adequate resources to promote social equity. And yet, scholars now question and redefine the very meanings of citizenship faced with globalisation and other external influences on the nation state. Irrespective of whether the effects of these developments are positive or negative, they have to be factored into the analyses of decentralisation.

Modern conceptions of citizenship, intricately tied to those of the nation state, include a bundle of rights that populations in western democracies incrementally attained over the last two centuries. Sparke (2004) distinguishes three key forms of citizenship: civil citizenship, such as the right to protection of private property and freedom of market access; political citizenship, such as the right to vote and run for office and; social citizenship, the guarantee of basic social necessities for a decent standard of living. In many decentralising settings, local governments have been faulted for being unprepared for, or incapable of, adequately serving these goals of advancing citizenship. Local governments indeed often lack formal powers for advancing civil citizenship as the respective authority is often vested with the national government. Local council electoral rules often do not ensure broad-based citizen representation and the local authorities' fi-

nancial powers are usually weak; hence, the inadequacy of social services provision.

And yet all of these issues are at the core of the debates about the weaknesses of the modern democratic polity as a whole. Neo-liberalism and the imposition of market-based forms of governance have arguably strengthened the power of big business at the expense of citizen rights. These tendencies have also arguably resulted in the curtailing of social programmes in western democracies. Finally, in many democracies citizens feel they cannot influence the government through the ballot box (Sparke 2004).

In addition to these substantive aspects of citizenship, which bind ruler and ruled in a web of mutual rights and obligations, citizenship is also about national and local identity, or what Ribot (2007) refers to as belonging. Ribot suggests that here too local governments are to play a pivotal role, fostering an integrated public domain and residency-based forms of citizenship in, and identification with, the wider polity (Ribot 2004, 2007). As at the advent of modernity, local governments are there to help turn 'peasants into Frenchmen' (Weber 1976). Particularly in developing settings, a democratically elected village council, it goes, should help overcome the ethnic, sectarian or gender tensions and social structures of exclusion by fostering a broader civic-based identity.

The world we are dealing with now, however, is far removed from the one that Weber (1976) describes, a fact that scholars of decentralisation underestimate. In his essay on the deconstruction of the notion of identity in our current world, Migdal (2004: 5) rightly discerns: 'Many studies . . . , continue to remain fixed and thematized at the level of the spatial and the geopolitical associated with the nation state'. The mass media that succeeded in turning villagers into good national citizens at the advent of the modern age, as described by Weber, are now eroding the notions of belonging to one bounded space. The 'mental maps' that people construct for self-identifications, are as much products of socialisation in their home country, as of absorbing information, imagery and experience derived from other sources, be they local or global (Migdal 2004).

Not only are the 'mental boundaries' redefined through contact with the world beyond the bounded state, but this world is also affecting the social, legal and other frameworks deemed previously the nearly exclusive domain of the national government. Nowhere is this more evident than at the local level. Just as the local was once central to the success of the national project, it may now prove to be a crucial aspect in its undoing. This is because porous borders, flexible legal frameworks and markets facilitate external actors' access to regions and localities bypassing the national government.

Such global-local links are bound to be particularly pronounced in resource-rich settings, where the local is tied to the global through production and export proc-

esses. In such areas, the local arena might be an object of 'neocolonial' (Lehtinen n.d.) or otherwise exploitative practices from without (Steele 2004; Swyngedouw 2004), resulting in the 'politics of democratic disempowerment' by forces in the global economy (Grugel 2003: 262, discussing Scholte 2000). An example would be tax and regulatory concessions leading to the curtailing of social programmes that large corporations win from local governments using threats of relocation of production (Sparke 2004). The locals might also suffer from donor efforts with 'questionable political or ideological agendas' (Standing 2004: 1070) that through a selective focus on some local actors serve to 'fragment the public domain' (Ribot 2004). An example would be the support for externally formed or funded committees or non-governmental organisations (NGOs) (Manor 2005), which are there to rubber stamp external donor or business preferences irrespective of those of elected local bodies.

Alternatively, the local setting might benefit from external actor efforts to foster citizenship and strengthen democratic local governments. The precise models of governance will depend on the actors involved in this process, and perceptions of these actors and their choices by the local people. In a globalised world, in which democracy is no longer something mapped straightforwardly 'onto territorial nation states' (Grugel 2003: 261), there is a whole range of such actors: from transnational social movements, to more institutionalised regional and global governance regimes (Ingebritsen 2002). They provide local citizens with alternative norms, resources and authority, contending with those of their own states (Keck & Sikkink 1998; Mukhopadhyay 2005).

Geographic proximity of localities to economic and political heavyweights is even more likely to encourage such governance characterised by 'trans-territorial' and 'multi-territorial' problem solving (Higgott 2005: 585). These efforts need not be solely motivated by the devious 'neocolonial' (Lehtinen n.d.) logic of resource extraction. Such mega-players as the European Union (EU) tend to pursue external good governance efforts for environmental, poverty alleviation, security or democracy reasons (Lankina 2005).

Territorial proximity also works to make the locals themselves receptive to such influences. Although borders separate them from external players, such localities are more appropriately conceptualised as a 'frontier'; rather than being sites of separation, they create opportunities for exchange and interaction, ultimately helping redefine the cognitive and practice boundaries separating 'us' from 'them' (Hibou 2004; Migdal 2004). In local governance, cognitive shifts would reflect local people's perceptions of legitimacy or effectiveness of external versus domestic templates, and in practice, efforts to emulate those they find most appealing.

The national level will continue to have tremendous salience and local governments will be still influenced by

national laws and regulations. And yet particularly on a geographic frontier, the boundaries separating the domestic from the external will tend to become fuzzier when external actor efforts lead to greater institutional 'isomorphism' (Krasner 1995) or convergence between the local and the external, and when the 'mental maps' (Migdal 2004) favour the external over the domestic. Rather than being passive recipients of imposed institutional choices by national governments and foreign donors, the locals are here seen as active agents in the dynamic processes of contestation and re-contestation of institutions, identities and belonging (Chhatre, this volume). These processes are illustrated in the forestry-rich Republic of Karelia.

The article is structured as follows: section two discusses the history of Karelia and the contexts shaping its current institution building, section three focuses on Karelia's local government development in the 1990s and section four analyses the impacts of domestic and external actor institutional choices on local understandings of democracy. The conclusion discusses the implications of the conflicting institutional dynamics for democratic citizenship.

KARELIA IN THE BROADER CONTEXTS

Karelia's historical legacies, frontier status and forestry resources affected the constellation of actors shaping its local government, which contrasts with that of many other Russian regions.

Over 80 per cent of Karelia's territory is covered with forest. During the Cold War, Karelia's location on the USSR's (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) border with non-communist Europe blocked access to forests in the heavily guarded border zone. Accordingly, along the Finno-Russian border Karelia boasts some of the best preserved boreal forests in Europe. Outside of the 700 km border zone, however, the Soviet government set up timber industries. Currently, approximately 60 per cent of Karelia's industrial output comes from timber logging, wood processing and paper pulp industries, with most of production outputs going to Europe (Zimin 2004).

Karelia is one of Russia's eighty-nine administrative regions (several regions are now being merged). The region has a historical legacy of ties to Finland, the latter being itself formerly part of the Russian empire. Geographically, Karelia straddles territories in Russia and Finland, hence the distinction between Russian and Finnish Karelias (Paasi 1996).

Similar to the other ethnically defined republics in the Russian Soviet Federated Socialist Republic (RSFSR), Karelia occupied a higher status compared to the non-ethnically defined *oblasti*. The republics were created in the context of Stalin's nationalities policies according to which the recognised ethnic groups, such as the indigenous Karely, were entitled to a 'homeland' region.

The USSR's collapse in 1991 raised concerns that Russia would also follow suit and splinter. In the early 1990s, the republics used potential secession from Russia as a bargaining chip, ultimately securing important power sharing prerogatives from Moscow, such as authority to manage natural resources and relative freedom in their internal institutional choices.

These developments should be situated in the broader regional and international contexts. As in the other post-communist states, western donors became active in Russia. The EU was particularly influential in this process. The regional dimension was a crucial component of EU aid involvement for security and other reasons. A focus on geographically close areas was meant to mitigate such negative spillover effects of the 'problem' neighbour as environmental pollution, crime or human trafficking. Regional involvement also reflected a philosophy of sub-national development that arguably made the EU project itself tick. Within Europe, regionalisation was seen not only as a means to mitigate minority nationalisms, but also to foster social cohesion. As a form of confidence building among nations formerly at war, the concept of a Euro region straddling national boundaries, likewise became a major policy success. With the Cold War over, these conceptions were to be applied to the post-communist east so as to turn 'curtains of iron' into those of 'gold' (Paasi 1999).

For Karelia, the significance of these efforts was magnified due to its location on the Finnish border. Rather than contesting and reifying the political boundaries separating Russia and Finland, much of the discourse among the Finnish policy and academic elite conceptualised the area as a frontier. While borders or boundaries have a more formal meaning as lines of separation between two states, frontiers lack clear demarcations and are instead conceived of as a meeting place of networks, cultures and societies (Paasi 1999). The most local units—individuals, communities, townships—become important to this conception; the more points of contact among them, the more they underline fuzziness of the frontier, the overlapping and transcending nature of space and boundaries.

The loose constellation of centre-regional relations in Russia, the EU's developmental philosophy and the peculiarities of Finnish conceptions of Karelia, these were the broader contexts in which Karelia's post-communist institutional development unfolded. The following section turns to the discussion of Karelia's local government trajectory as shaped by these factors.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT DEVELOPMENT: THE POLITICS OF CHOICE

Local Authority, National Frameworks and International Aid

Until 1995, the national frameworks for local government in Russia continued to be amended versions of Soviet laws and decrees. In 1995, the federal government

adopted a new law, which survived until 2003. The 1995 legislation was rather general in nature. It mandated the separation of local government from state authority and allowed the regions to have local institutional arrangements of their choosing. The vagueness of the law was only matched by the degree of federal enforcement with many regions violating even the most basic provision of separation of local government from state power. The result was a patchwork of institutional arrangements, which varied from region to region and ranged from Soviet style administrative hierarchies with powers of appointment and dismissal leading up to the regional governor, to elected authorities with meaningful powers and autonomy from regional bodies. It is important to note here that the republics were not usually among the latter group of regions. While invoking 'freedom' and 'sovereignty' in their own struggles with the federal centre, they were themselves eager to tramp on local government powers and institutionalise its dependence on regional authority.

Karelia, however, did not fit into this pattern, a contrast with other regions that our study will hopefully help explain. In the 1990s it emerged as one of the leaders in local government development, although it did face many of the same problems plaguing local governance elsewhere. Still, in comparative terms, Karelia's local government is more developed than in most of Russia's other regions (Gel'man et al. 2002). Until the most recent federal re-centralising reforms, Karelia maintained democratically elected local authorities at all levels. This contrasted with many other regions where local executives were governor appointees or were otherwise subordinate to the regional authorities. In a comprehensive study, which ranked regional democratic performance, Karelia likewise emerged at the top of the list (Petrov 2005).

As in the other regions, Karelia's local government arrangements were a product of contending influences: federal, regional and local. What makes Karelia stand out is the role of external actors, EU in particular, in providing a menu of local institutional options and resources for local development. The EU and other European bodies, such as the Council of Europe, accord special importance to democratically constituted and socially responsive municipalities. This is reflected in a special Council of Europe Charter and EU Technical Assistance to the Commonwealth of Independent States (TACIS) programmes in Russia aimed at municipal development (Lankina 2005). The Nordic states, which have been active in Karelia, also boast some of the highest levels of municipal autonomy among democratic nations. They have been keen to export their models to post-communist neighbours—with both EU moneys and their national funds.

Studies of foreign aid suggest that a proclaimed goal of decentralisation does not always match the realities of the actors being empowered on the ground. Under the banner of democracy promotion, it has been argued, western actors support private bodies, civil society organisations or deconcentrated state authorities operating at a local level (Ribot 2004). Resource-rich areas or those designated as nature reserves have been arguably particularly prone to such politics of local government *non*-choice—in which local governments are avoided by outside actors (Ribot 2004; Spierenburg et al. this volume).

To what extent did external choices in Karelia mirror these patterns? In order to address this question, the author constructed a dataset of EU projects conducted in the regions from 1991 to 2005. In its aid projects, the EU distinguishes between federal and regional components. Federal projects cover policies of national significance. In the regional component, the EU specifically targets local agencies. Federal actors may be involved, but only if a project includes several regions and requires federal co-ordination, or if it is of federal significance (Interview with Aleksandr Berdino, Director, TACIS Regional Support Office, Petrozavodsk, 5 July 2004).

The dataset distinguishes between federal bodies, regional and local governments, NGOs, universities and private agencies. It shows that the EU targets both the regional bodies and municipalities for donor assistance. The record varies from region to region, but Karelia in particular stands out for a large share of projects aimed at municipal development. It was the main beneficiary in seventy EU funded projects. The local government shared the first place with the regional government as the beneficiary of the largest number of projects, twenty-four. NGOs were listed as main beneficiaries in only seven projects, and federal actors, in two. In terms of volumes of funding, regional bodies emerge at the top of the list, which is explained by the larger scale of projects they are involved with. The data for Karelia contrasts with nation-wide data on the regional component of EU aid, with local government occupying only the sixth place in terms of the number of projects in which it served as a key partner.[1]

Examination of project activity and interviews with TACIS offices staff, as well as with local grantees, also suggests that donors stress cooperation between local governments and non-state local actors in project assistance.[2] These project records are a reflection of continental Europe's own governance patterns. Unlike the United States of America (USA) with its stress on neo-liberal models of governance with a privileged position for markets and non-state actors, the EU is not averse to work with formal democratic institutions like local authorities. The social or 'cohesion' dimension of citizenship is also prominent in EU project activity; many projects target municipalities-NGO cooperation in improving local welfare provision or that between local governments and trade unions.[3] These patterns contrast with American donor assistance; the USA shows preference for work with non-state actors like political parties or NGOs (Carothers 1999).

Finally, the very structure of EU funding privileges local governments and forces NGOs to cooperate with them (Lankina 2005). Many TACIS projects require the support of local authorities even when an NGO files an application (Interview with Svetlana Shlykova, Regional Coordinator, Open World Center, Petrozavodsk, 9 July 2004). This could range from a signature to commitment to participate as one of the project partners. Applications also have co-financing requirements of up to 25 per cent of the total funding. This likewise encourages partnership arrangements; while NGOs are unlikely to meet this requirement due to funding constraints, municipalities have the capacity to contribute this share in kind by allocating a full-time local government official to run a project or providing office premises. As one local official stated, co-financing could mean 'premises for seminars, halls, rental payments, communal utility expenses, partly staff salaries and so on' (Interview with Vera Meshko, Chief Specialist, Department of External Affairs, Petrozavodsk City Administration, 7 July 2004).

The official in charge of TACIS projects in Karelia thus explained the EU's preference for work with local authorities, as opposed to NGOs:

> What kind of salaries do NGO [workers] have? All are volunteers, there are no salaries. Here is the trick. And the administrations of cities, regions, they can allocate staff, they have decent salaries, so the co-financing turns out to be decent especially if many persons are involved (Interview with Aleksandr Berdino, Director, TACIS Regional Support Office, Petrozavodsk, 5 July 2004).

In many localities, NGOs are dependent on local governments to begin with, relying on them for premises, utilities and other infrastructure support (Interview with Galina Yushkova, Karelian Center for Gender Research, 9 July 2004). In small towns and villages NGO capacity is even weaker than in medium and large towns, and the local authorities tend to serve as broader project umbrella agencies.

The substantial aid volumes were instrumental in shaping Karelia's local government institutions in the 1990s. One study, which sought to explain variations in local democracy among Russia's regions in the first postcommunist decade, identified the 'transboundary factor' as key to explaining Karelia's local government development (Gel'man et al. 2002). This factor was important in Karelia's adoption in 1994, the first among Russian regions, of a democratic law on local government. The law specifically took north European institutions as models. Another comparative study found that Karelia differed from other regions where American donors have been more active than EU. It found that Karelia maintains cooperative and consensual modes of interaction between NGOs and local governments, characteristic of continental Europe (Belokurova & Yargomskaya 2005).

The resulting institutional arrangements also played into the region specific political dynamics because they affected the resource base of the mayors of larger cities, who conflicted over power and resources with the regional governor. For example, Gel'man et al. (2002: 230–231, 245) show how in an effort to extend his power base, the mayor of the regional capital tapped into the many possibilities of attracting EU grants. The mayor could be successful in obtaining grants in competition against other municipalities and regional bodies, however, only if he could demonstrate the democratic nature of his administration and its social and economic performance.

Importantly, until the end of the 1990s, when the Kremlin maintained more of a hands-off approach towards the regions, the federal government played only a marginal role in the process. For example, when the mayor of a regional city tried to attract federal funding to strengthen his institutional power base, 'the hope for help from the federal centre was in vain, whereas western sources turned out to be more effective'. 'Generally', write Gel'man et al. (2002: 230–231, 245), 'international factors continue[d] to play a certain role in the maintenance of the political autonomy of the city'.

Local Government and Forestry Decentralisation

These aid patterns may have also had an indirect impact on governance in the area of forestry management. Our research does not support the claim that 'neocolonial' raw material extraction interests guided the western neighbours' involvement in the region (Lehtinen n.d.). If anything, donor government policies conflicted with the timber related trade and investment interests of their private businesses. By supporting local government development, donors indirectly endorsed Karelia's practices of 'administrative paternalism' (Bessudnov 2004): a way of encouraging forest enterprises to adopt 'socially responsible' business practices. The practice was institutionalised in the operation of the forestry commission in charge of allocating forestry plots, which included both regional authorities and federal bodies. Enterprises that the commission allowed to engage in forestry exploitation were selected based upon their pledge to accept social obligations *vis-à-vis* the local workforce and broader citizenry (Bessudnov 2004). Generally, because enterprises often depend on the regional government for preferential tax treatment and other privileges, they are vulnerable to regional pressures and have strong incentives to comply.

In contrast to regional authorities, local governments were not formally endowed with extensive forestry management authority. The 1997 forest code and the 1995 local government law vaguely referred to local governments as 'participants in forestry relations' without specifying the respective functions. As with other general provisions of this legislation, their interpretation and practical application varied from region to region. In Karelia,

de facto the regional authorities' backing ensured that local administrations enjoyed some leverage in forestry exploitation decisions. They could pressurise timber companies operating in their jurisdictions to perform services to the local citizenry. These could range from supplying households with firewood to survive the harsh northern winter, to repairing a roof in the local kindergarten, to building heating facilities, roads and other infrastructure.

The practices of 'administrative paternalism', however, in the longer term were instrumental in crowding out both the larger federal timber industry competitors, and scaring off foreign investors, mostly from those same Nordic states that sponsored developmental projects in the region (Zimin 2004).[4] Until 2000, the large economic interests were actually scarcely interested in penetrating Karelia's timber sector. In recent years, however, they have sought to capture this market, controlled by the regional authorities or smaller regional firms (Bessudnov 2004). In this they were helped by the federal government reforms aimed at re-centralising power and control over natural resources.

Re-centralisation and Forestry

The latest federal reforms were a departure from the Yeltsin era federalism when the regions enjoyed substantial prerogatives in local government institution building and natural resource governance. The 2003 local government law has sought to introduce greater uniformity of institutional arrangements across all regions. The law had the effect of changing the structures of accountability, re-establishing or reinforcing upward linkages. It provided for three main tiers of local authority with popularly elected councils: settlements*,* municipal counties and city districts. With regard to the chief local executive, the law provided for several options: the (1) 'mayor-council' model, based on popular election of council deputies and city mayors as chief executives; (2) the 'city manager' model, whereby elected local deputies hire a chief executive who is nominated by a special commission that includes regional governor appointees; or (3) a mixed model, whereby the elected mayor is reduced to chairing the local council, while a hired city manager is vested with the powers of chief local executive (Gel'man & Lankina 2008). The regions acquired significant influence over the appointment of the key local executive in municipalities with the city manager type model. The governor and regional legislature also acquired extensive powers in removing even the popularly elected mayors, disbanding local councils or setting up temporary regional administrations in the localities.[5]

The politics of *dis*-empowerment also extended to local prerogatives in natural resources. In an effort to re-acquire control over natural resources and submitting to lobbying pressures from large timber industries, the Putin administration overhauled previous modes of forestry management. In 2004 the government passed an amendment to the forestry code endowing the centre with management powers over local forests. It also proposed a controversial new forestry code. The federal government produced successive drafts of the code without any substantive involvement of the broader public.[6]

The final version of the code, which entered into force on 1 January 2007, gave back the powers of forestry management to the regional authorities that the 2004 amendment had deprived them of. The code, together with the new local government law, however, provides for only marginal involvement of local governments in forestry exploitation decision-making, largely limiting it to forests already in municipal ownership. According to the 2003 local government law, only forests that are within the *residential* (emphasis added) territory of the lowest level of local government authority, or settlements, and of urban city districts, are in local government ownership.[7] There are no provisions for forest ownership by larger territorial units, the municipal counties. Municipal authority that the code refers to therefore covers a limited range of forest land that has low economic significance and is mostly recreational in nature.

Timber industry lobbying of the code is reflected in its business first nature. The code provides for auctions, whereby the sole criterion is the amount of money offered by the highest bidder to state, regional or municipal authorities who decide to auction plots. Alternative ways of allocating the land would have been through competition or *konkursy*. In a *konkursy*, decisions would have been based on a bidder's willingness to take on a set of obligations related to the social, economic and environmental concerns of the local populations. While the code refers to municipalities as 'participants in forestry relations' endowed with management powers, its article 50.2 forbids local and other authorities from making decisions that 'in any way could lead to prohibitions against, limitations on, or elimination of, private competition'.[8] Any local government decision, in an auction or otherwise, related to socially equitable and sustainable forestry management could be construed as violating this provision.

These federal reforms, with their imposition of an administrative template on all regions and the disempowerment of elected bodies in natural resource management were a departure from the 'formative years' of Karelia's local government development.

FRAGMENTED BELONGING ON THE FRONTIER

Karelia illustrates how government politics of disempowerment may clash with the more enabling institutional choices of external actors. As frontier region, it straddles the discrepancy between western neighbour fostered expectations of what local government should be about, and the increasingly authoritarian central state. Although compared to Russia's other regions, Karelia ranks

highly in terms of local democracy, its residents have strongly negative and pessimistic opinions about local governance. The local is consistently compared and juxtaposed to western models, to which Karelia had been exposed more than any other region. The 'West', and specifically, EU, Finland and other Nordic states serve as reference points shaping local perceptions of Russian state and regional policies in Karelia, as indeed the regional government's choice of institutions and practices concerning representation and citizenship.

The discussion in this section is framed using Migdal's concept of 'mental maps'. Migdal refers to mental maps as incorporating 'elements of the meaning people attach to spatial configurations, the loyalties they hold, the emotions and passions that groupings evoke, and their cognitive ideas about how the world is constructed' (Migdal 2004: 7). Here, 'mapping' Karelia's 'mental maps' is important not in a static sense, but as a means to understanding the dynamic and unfolding identity shifts, and how they shape past and current practices and institutions. This discussion is based on interviews that the author conducted in August 2004 and January 2006 with local government officials, councillors, NGO activists, forestry scientists and the timber business community. The timing of the interviews, against the background of federal reforms, allows one to discern how institutional change is perceived and acted out through locally specific and western influenced lenses.

Interview data provide insights into the local attitudes toward representation, citizenship and belonging. Local government officials invoke the West when criticising the regional authorities' top-down manner of decision-making that neglects the preferences of local elected authorities and when talking about citizen rights, as opposed to just obligations *vis-à-vis* the state. Perceptions of local government itself change as donors encourage the locals to perceive the local authorities as institutions that could have a productive relationship with the local community, in collaboration with NGOs, rather than being simple targets for blame attribution. Expectations of local government role in forestry resources management, its social cohesion function and relationships with the private sector are also shaped by the West. And the national government is no longer seen as the sole source of normative and legal authority. Instead, we see Karelians invoking their northern identity, in juxtaposition to the centre, and looking outside of their national boundaries in search of normative templates and legal solutions to vital local issues.

Local councillors and mayors expressed frustrations with discrepancies between normative ideals of formal arrangements for citizen representation shaped through countless training seminars in, and city twinning activities with Nordic neighbours, and the federal and regional politics of disempowerment. A mayor of a municipal district, the self-described 'most progressive mayor in Kare-

lia' begins the interview with a reference to his training in Sweden, 'probably the most advanced country from the point of view of local self-government'. He then contrasts Swedish local government with the lack of formal powers of his administration and subordination to regional and central state agencies:

> *Here we have centralisation of power and it is dangerous to talk openly. As head of the rayon* [municipal district]*, my open statements will lead to problems for ordinary people. Say, tomorrow you will write that I said something against the governor, and then someone from the government will call and say: 'Are you crazy, do you have mental problems? Go and print a disclaimer in the paper, because if you don't, there are many ways we can beat the hell out of you!' Say, if you need fuel, they will* [not give funding for it to you] *and will say: 'Go ahead and freeze'. In reality, though, it is their obligation to give me this money, not their right. The possibilities for influencing the mayor are colossal. . . Of course, I would like to work in a <u>modern</u>* [emphasis added] *way, whereby I could call the top <u>manager</u>* [governor, emphasis added] *from here, or he could call me, in the framework of normal business relations, but in reality we haven't met once, I can't even technically reach him if I were to call* (Interview with Alexandr Potsikovskiy, Head of Administration of Prionezhskiy rayon, Petrozavodsk, 19 January 2006).

The mayor's reference point for such statements using the western word *menedzher* for governor (manager) is Sweden or other western states symbolising all that is *modern*. Other Russian regions, where local government practices might be worse than in Karelia, are not used as a reference point. The distinction between rights and obligations is also interesting. It points at the Soviet and pre-Soviet Russian tradition of subordinating society and individual to the state. The strong belief that he has a right to expect certain obligations from the state for his constituents as a popularly elected representative of the local people is a reflection of a western liberal conception of citizenship, and not the reality that he observes in his daily practice.

Western actors likewise influence ideas about local government decision-making involving NGOs and broader publics. This shift in perceptions is illustrated in the narratives of an environmental NGO activist, who had received grants from Sweden, Finland, the Netherlands and other European countries specifically aimed at fostering local government links with NGOs and the local communities. 'At some point, the Norwegians said we should work with municipalities', recalls the activist citing the following example from one of the projects:

The task was to gather people for 2 days in the rayon centre and discuss sustainable development of the rayon. It is rare here that people work with local government together and not regard it as a conflict zone but a discussion zone instead. People tend to come to the local government to start a fight, say, when there is no street lighting. And this time around too, the planned dialogue started with conflict with claims that the village has no safe water. People made their complaints, and then the local government [official] *said: 'Why do you throw garbage on the streets?'* [a practice that contributes to bad sanitation in the city] *. . . But then people started asking questions . . . In the end the discussion was very good . . . for the first time perhaps as normally there is no dialogue with local self-government . . . And the local government saw that the people are not lacking in initiative* (Interview with Ludmila Morozova, Head, Karelian Branch of the All-Russian Society for the Protection of Nature, Petrozavodsk, 19 January 2006).

In this case the western donor initiated discussion helped change citizens' perception that local government has no relationship with the local community, towards a recognition that it is at least an agency to have a 'dialogue' with. Such a perception would be vastly at odds with the normative understandings of local self-government in democratic western settings, some of which even go as far as regarding it as the *sum total* of the local people's will. Local people's perception is far removed from expectations of democratic accountability of popularly elected councillors. The dialogue in Karelia is an example of getting one step closer to changing this perception.

Western exposure also influences perceptions of local and national government role in advancing social citizenship. The European concept of social cohesion is frequently inferred in discussions with municipal practitioners and other local actors. Awareness of EU cohesion policies shapes expectations of local government role in addressing local inequities in Karelia. It also shapes perceptions of the federal centre's local government reforms, which are blamed for subverting the social component of citizenship.

A representative of Karelia's Association of Municipalities, for example, maintained: 'Decentralisation in European Union member states is all about cohesion'. The logic of social cohesion, he surmises, is behind the recent trend in EU member states of regionalisation. He suggests that such spatial consolidation of local authorities into larger units better addresses developmental planning and redistributive needs of smaller localities. This he contrasts with the Russian government's reform, whereby popularly elected local governments had been created at village levels, but with no capacity for performing social services or managing local resources (Interview with a representative of the Association of Municipalities of Ka-

relia, Petrozavodsk, 17 January 2006. The interviewee preferred to remain anonymous). The above statement may be a misrepresentation of the complexity and diversity of local government arrangements in EU member states. It is, nonetheless, illustrative of how policies of the western neighbour are held up as a standard against which to measure domestic developments.

Local actors also invoke the West in references to 'socially responsive' business practices in the timber industry. 'In the West, social partnerships are very developed. In Europe, for example', maintained, Galina Kozyreva, a scholar who had been involved in a TACIS-funded study of the 'village *sotsium*' in forestry towns in Karelia. 'It would be just for the local level to receive compensation [from forestry proceeds]', she noted (Interview with Galina Kozyreva, Senior Researcher, Institute of Economics, Karelian Regional Chapter, Russian Academy of Sciences, Petrozavodsk, 19 January 2006).

The 'most progressive' mayor, in whose locality a business takeover of a timber plant had occurred resulting in lay-offs, fumes that nobody informed him of the planned takeover, let alone consulted him. His expectations of participatory and socially responsive forestry management are likewise inspired by his ideas about business practices in the West:

Nowadays, a system of relationships is built such that the federal structures and law . . . , is all about business first. As far as I know in Sweden and even in the US . . . the stock exchange ratings [of a company] *fall when its social parameters fall, when an enterprise sheds its social burdens. That means something is wrong with that enterprise . . . And we don't have it here. While in the West, such social dimensions are very prominent* (Interview with Alexandr Potsikovskiy, Head of Administration of Prionezhskiy rayon, Petrozavodsk, 19 January 2006).

Another example of the negativising of the 'Russian realities', which refer to both lack of formal local government powers to influence resource use, and the lack of citizen awareness of their rights, is the local Greens activist's critique of the forest code:

The Russian realities will be playing a huge role, and they will lead to simple degradation when this code is adopted, of forests, will create social issues . . . We think the owner of the forest will not care about ecology and social issues. See, on the question of social responsibility, we are only beginning to talk about it in Russia . . . Our population may not even understand what is happening on their land (Interview with Dmitry Rybakov, Association of Greens of Karelia, Petrozavodsk, 19 January 2006).

And yet not only do interviews reveal juxtapositions between the negativised Russia, 'us' versus the idealised West, 'them', but also self-identifications signifying greater cognitive proximity to the West. Karelia is frequently identified with the broader geographical 'north', which is juxtaposed to the central state, in that the former espouses more 'socially responsible' and environmentally sustainable approaches to nature and resources than the latter:

> *We have certain traditions here. The North has been traditionally famous for clever, sustainable use of resources, and this has to be preserved . . .* (Interview with a representative of the Association of Municipalities, 17 January 2006).

He then goes on to criticise the draft federal forestry code, and particularly its provisions on auctions, which trample on the principles of socially responsive and sustainable forest use:

> *Here in the local arena I think there are expectations that these processes* [timber management] *could be regulated for the benefit of the local people, including when someone wins a bid* [in an auction]*, one can set conditions that he* [the bidder] *builds roads, does something for the social needs. . . . There are tonnes of issues that could be decided with people participation. . . I think we have to discuss this code. . . Our federal bodies need to try to ensure. . . that the local level could be more effectively engaged so that the mechanisms of its involvement would be more clearly outlined in the forest code. I saw the latest version, and there the social component is very weak. It is very general with no real impulse for local governments to use their right to influence forest use* (Interview with a representative of the Association of Municipalities, 17 January 2006).

The West is not only invoked in normative understandings about local democracy, which are unattainable in practice given 'Russian realities'; instead, it is looked upon as a source of legal authority that might shape formal structures of decision-making within Russia itself. The EU forestry certification initiative is a case in point. The EU had been pushing for forestry certification partly as a way of decreasing illegal logging and ensuring sustainable development.[9] Local actors invoke this initiative as key to changing the environmental and social dimension of timber management in Karelia. 'Maybe forestry certification will help reorient the forestry business. . . It might be the key factor that will influence this here', maintained a local scholar involved in a study of the social implications of timber industry restructuring in the localities.

'What you can't go against is forest certification coming under pressure from Europe. The Finns have long adopted thirty-two parameters for certification', echoed an Association of Municipalities practitioner (Interview with a representative of the Association of Municipalities of Karelia, Petrozavodsk, 17 January 2006). The local Greens activist is likewise enthusiastic about the potentially 'very strong' influence of certification, including on shaping Russia's timber related legislation. Already, 'Europe has voiced its concerns over the draft forest code. They [in Europe] understand the importance of heritage', he maintained (Interview with Dmitry Rybakov, Association of Greens of Karelia, Petrozavodsk, 19 January 2006).

These discourses are revealing of the ideals, understandings and hopes derived from western sources in Karelia. Furthermore, western influences also translate into institutional choices and practices. Notwithstanding the broader authoritarian context, most recently Karelia chose local government institutional arrangements that, to a certain extent, reflected the western ideals discussed above, while resisting federal efforts at re-centralisation.

There is substantial evidence that the national government sought to impose a particular local government template in the localities. The pro-Putin United Russia (UR) party, through its centralised structure with branches in all regions, establishment of factions in many regional legislatures and co-optation of governors of some seventy regions, became a major instrument of the Kremlin local government agenda in the regions (Gel'man 2006; Hale 2006; Goode 2007).

According to the new local government law, Karelia was to set up new municipal formations by the end of 2005. Many regions opted for chief executive election by the local council from amongst local council deputies. In Russia, this practice is considered to be easy to manipulate from above.[10] Significantly, many of Karelia's localities opted for the alternative arrangement of popular election of mayors. This choice was pointed out in an interview as an example of Karelia's more western orientation by one of the mayors elected according to the new legislation.

Developments in the regional capital, Petrozavodsk, further illustrate the struggles between efforts to preserve local autonomy—with western influences playing a strong role—and federal and regional attempts at curbing it. In 2006, the regional governor, a UR supporter, insisted that the city council amend its charter to eliminate popular election of the mayor and reduce the size of the council. While the UR deputies endorsed the proposal, opposition deputies vetoed it.[11] The governor and the UR dominated republican legislature then secured the regional court's decision to dissolve the council. In response, the deputies appealed to the Council of Europe. Invoking democratic norms and the need to abide by the European Charter of Local Self-Government, they also

went on hunger strike; some were hospitalised. In March 2007, the opposition secured a stunning victory in the Petrozavodsk council elections. Petrozavodsk thus preserved the institutional *status quo* and the independence of its local government (Gel'man & Lankina 2008).

CONCLUSION: INTERNALISING THE EXTERNAL

Karelia illustrates that representation and citizenship cannot be conceptualised solely in national terms. Actors beyond the central state contribute to the generation of norms and influence local discourse and choices of local government arrangements. These trans-boundary processes have become even more prominent in the era of globalisation (Keohane 2002; Grugel 2003).

The central state continues to control the procedural aspects of local government institutions. If these institutions fail to safeguard the social, civil and political components of citizenship, then local actors will look beyond their national government for normative reference points to back their claims for local empowerment. Multiple referencing and domestic-external links are now characteristic of governance worldwide (Keck & Sikkink 1998; Mukhopadhyay 2005). They are particularly pertinent in frontier regions like Karelia. Here formal belonging in a closed, predatory and authoritarian state is contrasted with the Joneses right across the fence, who are not simply western, but exemplify all that is best in the West, from the Nordic states' democratic local government models, to their social cohesion.

Here the imposed central state authority is locked in conflict with western actors' more empowering and enabling normative and institutional frameworks. Does this result in 'fragmented belonging' (Ribot 2007)? Yes. But the authoritarian state associated with Moscow, hundreds of miles away, that denies citizenship rights to its own nationals may not be any more 'internal' than western neighbours a stone's throw away who seek to foster this very citizenship. While the liberal project of a 'national society of citizens' is of questionable appeal for those to whom substantive citizenship is denied, new kinds of citizenship emerge with new sources of law and authority beyond the nation state (Holston & Appadurai 2003: 297). In the case of Karelia, the proximity to democratic neighbours produces local expectations of similar institutional arrangements; a sense of belonging to both Russia and to the normative order of the West next door.

'Mental maps', while being social constructions, also 'mark and maintain the separation between groups' (Migdal 2004). Karelians' perceptions of local realities in juxtaposition to the West appear to be an example of such group boundary maintenance: however positive the references to the West, it is still 'them' versus 'us'. The dynamic nature of such identity boundaries, nevertheless, is most evident when 'competing boundaries, demanding

different, even contradictory practices and mental images, bump against one another. . . And as boundaries do clash and people encapsulated by them make choices about which demands to follow and which to ignore, those boundaries change', 'inducing them to choose which boundaries, principles and practices to submit to and which to violate'. It is in such situations, writes Migdal, that 'one finds sites of social struggle and social change' (Migdal 2004: 13, 23).

Karelia's choice of more democratic local institutions illustrates an unfolding social and institutional process that resists the wider authoritarian context. Rather than being recipients of externally imposed 'politics of choice and recognition', (Ribot 2004) local people are themselves important agents in the choice and transformation of local institutions. This makes us optimistic that over time Karelia is likely to witness an even more active 'renewal of citizenship and struggles for it', rather than wallow in a 'more passive sense of entitlement to benefits which seem to derive from remote sources' (Holston & Appadurai 2003: 299).

Notes

1. Projects by main beneficiary for Karelia—local governments: 24; regional bodies: 24; NGOs: 7; universities: 4; federal bodies: 2; unspecified: 2; think tank: 1. Breakdown for all Russian regions— university: 283; regional bodies: 246; NGOs: 184; federal bodies: 139; private agencies, such as corporations and utility companies: 137; local government: 124; unspecified: 23; think tank: 9; schools: 2. Source: author-compiled from data available at: http://62.38.207.105/tacis/en/index.asphttp://www.tacis-lso-rf.org/en/objectives.asp (accessed 15 November 2005).
2. Interviews in Petrozavodsk with Tatyana Klekacheva, Executive Director, Swedish Karelian Business and Information Center, 9 July 2004; Galina Yushkova, Karelian Center for Gender Research, 9 July 2004; Irina Nazarova, Project Coordinator, Information Office and Contact Centre, Nordic Council of Ministers, 7 July 2004; Vera Meshko, Chief Specialist, Department of External Affairs, Petrozavodsk City Administration, 7 July 2004.
3. For example, a Swedish project working with trade unions aimed at combating alcohol use on the workplace. Tatyana Klekacheva.
4. Top participant countries—Germany: 203; Finland: 181; UK: 159; France: 141; Netherlands: 70; Italy: 68; Belgium: 51; Denmark: 46; Sweden: 45; Austria: 30.
5. Law on The Common Principles for Organizing the Legislative and Executive Branches of State Power in the Russian Regions.
6. And forestry experts. Interviews with Alexey Yaroshenko, Forest Campaign Coordinator, Greenpeace Russia, Moscow, 2 February 2006 and Andrei Gromtsev, Vice Director for Science, Forest Research Institute of the Karelian Research Center of the Russian Academy of Sciences, Petrozavodsk, 16 January 2006.
7. Article 50. Available from http://www.rg.ru/2003/10/08/zakons-amouprav.html (accessed 1 August 2007).
8. Available from http://www.duma.gov.ru/cnature/workgroups/les/les_kod.htm (accessed 1 August 2007).
9. See Paavo Pelkonen, 'Nachalas' razrabotka initsiativy Barentseva regiona po lesnoi otrasli', University of Joensuu, http://www.web-studio.fi/vyh/archive/2002_1/juttu551.htm (accessed 1 May 2006)
10. Assessments of merits of the respective institutions should be grounded in specific contexts. The empirical record is mixed. I am grateful for this point to Ashwini Chhatre.

11. On the protests, see http://www.newsinfo.ru/news/2006/04/prn_news1311791.php?id_r= (accessed 15 June 2006).

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