

IMPLEMENTING PAs STRATEGY WITH INVOLVEMENT OF LOCAL/INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES IN THE ALTAI REPUBLIC OF RUSSIA

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Altai Republic¹ (or Gorny Altai, 92, 9 km²), located on a junction of 4 countries (Russia, Kazakhstan, China and Mongolia), and occupies about 50% of all Altai Mountain system and a significant part of the Altai-Sayan ecoregion. The highest peak of Siberia – Belukha Mountain (Uch-Sumer, 4560m.) is situated in the republic. Gorny Altai - is the western end of a major mountain region of Western Siberia, rising like an enormous vault to a height of 4,000 m.

Altai Republic is a semi-independent subject of the Russian Federation and it has its government, parliament and other attributes of the republic. Local population of 207,000 people of different ethnic (Russians, Altaians, Kazakhs, Telengits and others) and religious (Christianity, Islam, Buddhism and Shamanism) groups peacefully live in this less economically developed republic. Livestock production and farming are the mainstays of the rural economy, and sheep, goats, cattle, yaks and horses are crucial for people livelihoods. Industry is not developed.

In 1998, five natural sites of the Altai were inscribed by UNESCO as a World Heritage Site «Golden Mountains of Altai». The Altai region is among the 200 priority global eco-regions of the WWF. The region is characterized by a mix of mountain ecosystems, which consist of tundra, forest, steppe and desert biomes. The Altai represents the most complete sequence of altitudinal vegetation zones in Central Siberia. It is an important area for the endangered Snow leopard, Mountain sheep – Argali. The Altai Mountains contain about 60 species of mammals, 350 birds, 11 reptiles and amphibians. About 20 fish species have been registered in the rivers and lakes. Altai is also home to important and rare birds: the Dalmatian Pelican, Altai ular, Golden Eagle and others. Numbers of endemic and rare plant species are very high in this eco-region, with over 213 rare plant species represented and distributed throughout the Altai-Sayan. It is estimated that almost 12% of the flora are endemic. The vertical climatic conditions and the isolation of distribution areas determine the richness and endemism of the floral species. Altai contains one of the world's three boreal-region IUCN Centres for Plant Diversity and the oldest pine forests are located in the Altai.

Because of remoteness and being less developed the Altai Republic has preserved most of its untouched environment and its historical heritage, mountain landscapes and unique biodiversity. Accelerated development (highways, gas pipelines and hydro power stations construction) pressures currently threaten the unique biota of the Altai. If current trends are allowed to continue unchecked, the default scenario is one of significant habitat destruction with the loss of native forests and their associated biodiversity.

Although 25% of the Altai Republic is protected (2 Federal *Zapovedniks* - strict nature reserves, 2 regional *Zakazniks* and 6 regional Nature Parks), the areas' spatial arrangement does not allow for ecological corridors between principal habitats. The snow leopard and Argali sheep, while found and protected to a limited degree in the existing protected areas (PA), are also found outside of them. Although the Altai Republic has established a number of PAs, however, these are largely without management capacity, due to a serious decline of financial resources available. The following principal threats are identified by international organizations:

- inadequate management of existing PAs,
- poaching of and illegal trade in rare and endangered species,
- uncontrolled tourism,
- inappropriate exploitation of natural resources,
- commercial logging and
- over-grazing by domestic animals.

Poaching makes rare species disappear at alarming rates especially musk deer and snow leopards: according to the most optimistic prognosis less than 60 species left in the republic.

¹ More about the Altai Republic at www.altai-republic.ru

Nature Parks (NP) comparatively with *zapovedniks* are a more flexible form of Protected Areas (PA) in Russia and Altai which allow compatible human interference (traditional land use – cattle and sheep breeding of nomadic people, berry/roots gathering, hunting and fishing) at the same time protecting lands of natural, historical and cultural importance.

In Altai since 1998 different nature conservation and sustainability projects of international organizations have been implemented. Interesting effect has happened – some motives of local population in conservation and development issues have coincided with international agencies interests. A strong synergy effect occurred out of interrelations of these two levels – international and local. By local we also mean regional - Altai Republic which officially supported establishment of regional NP making necessary decisions, issuing legal documents and advocating these establishments on federal level. So this correlation of local and international level interests look like this (in table1).

Thus in some districts of Altai new local stakeholders and leaders appeared who united into formal (non governmental and public organizations) and informal bodies (initiative or working groups), took NP model as an appropriate model applicable type of PAs and started to lobby their interests at the district authorities. This resulted with creation of the first NP Uch Enmek in the Ongudaisky district, which can be considered as a classical sample of practical embodiment of local motivations scale shown and described in the table. Though international environmental organizations do not consider this NP model as an ideal one as their main priority - biodiversity conservation has not been identified e.g. by Uch Enmek as one of the important. This NP territory does not distinguishably represent key species of flora and fauna of the Altai-Sayan. Indirectly for the locals this means evaluation and recognition of local interests.

This basic sample fostered a movement toward creation of new form PAs, which are now found in Altai only. Two more NP appeared in the Ongudaisky raion: Nature and Farming Parks (NFP). This type is a symbiosis of a farm and park sustained with revenue coming from economic activities (cattle breeding farm and its entrepreneurship business like road café, hotel and tourism services) that fulfils nature and historical monument protection functions/ They grow endemic and endangered species of flora in nurseries and reintroduce them into native habitat. This benevolent work is done in NFP Chui Oozy. NFP Argyt is a migration site of snow leopard – Irbis (*Uncia uncia*). These NPs' priorities set is the same as of NP Uch Enmek but with addition of one more – traditional land use (cattle breeding) as a sustainable practice which has not destroyed this land and turned out to be sustainable and environmentally safe for thousand years. Cultural heritage preservation and traditional land use practice priorities dominate here.

Almost ideal correlation of international and local interests is NP Ukok. This territory, a high mountain plateau Ukok, for its spiritual cultural and natural importance on local, regional, national and international levels in 1994 was given a protection status which was specially invented and approved by legislative documents of the Republic as a new form – Natural Preserve Quiet Zone (QZ). But given QZ was a temporary status which was given to Ukok for 10 years and this status terminated in August 2004. Only in May of this year the plateau Ukok obtained a permanent protection status as a NP with strict classification of its functional lands in it: z.A - core areas, biodiversity hotspots and historical monuments concentration, z.B - buffer areas where ecotourism, traditional land use is allowed, z.C – development/cooperation areas with a mining factory and open for trekkers and visitors. In NP Ukok case local/regional interests scale have coincided with international. But this case has an important lack – it does not consider national level interests (i.e. federal, Russian Federation represented by RF Government). This fact can potentially lead to tension. In geopolitical respect Russia wants to develop this less populated and less economically developed area in integration with China. This transboundary mountain part of Russia is a nearest access to China and if a highway constructed through NP Ukok of Russian Altai and NP Kanas of Chinese Altai it will be a strategic economic crossroad. Chinese scientists declare their ambitious plans on construction of a gas pipe line afterwards and a railway to the Trans-Siberian railway network through Ukok in the future. These projects were announced at many joint conferences and workshops organized and held by an international AMR Coordination Committee “Our Common Nome Altai”.

Ongoing processes in the Altai Republic which can be taken characteristic and indicative for the entire Altai-Sayan ecoregion as the republic due its geopolitical, biophysical, spiritual, cultural and socio economic characteristics is a catalysis region where conservation and development movements are happening rapidly and ahead of the whole region. Summing up we want to underline an increasing role of local communities in Altai in conservation and development issues but at the same time a parallel strengthening of federal level

through centralization of all entire society system which leaves no room for regional/local initiatives and processes. Level of participation of the Altai local/indigenous communities in conservation/development processes of the region can be considered one of the key indicators of sustainable development of the Altai-Sayan ecoregion. If these trends of development in Altai can be estimated correctly and correlated to a system of regional/local motives/interests this can serve as a consensus finding mechanism in a dilemma whether to conserve or develop. Nature Park being an incentive to rediscover the indigenous people spiritual and cultural values it is not a perfect model but an attempt to find solutions in conflict situation with land issues. The Altai Nature Parks' definition of these solutions is "Development through Conservation".

The Altai Republic is in the process of seeking for optimal model of territorial organization for its sustainable development which will combine traditional land use, conservation of its environments, associated biological and bio-cultural diversity. Altai has one of the well developed Protected Areas' (PA) networks (econet) which cover more than 25% of its territory. Altai Republic's Law "On Protected Areas and objects of the Altai Republic" dated 4.11.1994 № 6-15 allows and defines ways of creation of 7 forms of PAs of regional status including of Nature parks. State nature *zapovedniks* "Altaisky" and "Katunsky" have federal status, and financed by federal budget while 4 *zakazniks*, nature monuments and 6 Nature parks have regional status. According to federal legislation on PAs nature parks being state establishments of regional level are financed by the republic' budget.

In practice the first park in Altai in June 1997. Nature park "Belukha" comprising 131 337 ha is located in the area of the highest peak of Siberia – Mt. Belukha (4506m.) in of Altai. Though development problems NP "Belukha" played a role of "pioneer" in seeking process of appropriate regional PA which will allow compatible economic interference while protecting its natural and cultural heritage. The second park– Nature and economic Park "Chui-Oozy" was proposed and established by the Gorno-Altai Botanic Garden and Agricultural Cooperative "Chui-Oozy". This model of the proposed park is local adoption of biosphere reserve micro scheme and with its principle of territory division into three functional zones (core, buffer and development) declared by the Seville strategy on biosphere reserves (1995). "Koby" (valley, in the Altai language) principle of valley division of the Altai people is taken as the main principle of zoning with its functional areas (summer and winter pastures and areas not allowed for any economic activities, hunting and etc.) The third park – Ethnic and nature park "Uch-Enmek" proposed by the indigenous leader Danil Mamyev (NGO "Ecology of Spirit Tengri") incorporated indigenous approach in organizing protected area where core zones are ranges of the sacred mountains, rock pictures, petroglyphs and etc. Scientific studies held later showed that biodiversity hotspots coincide with A zones identified as sacred sites. Combination of both scientific and indigenous approaches in zoning is a significant feature of "Uch-Enmek".

Leaders of parks and local communities united in NGO "Association of Protected Areas of Altai" lobbied local interests and insisted in establishing status of liquidated parks. Thanks to this NGO constructive work besides reestablishment of all parks one more park – the biggest park "Quiet zone Ukok" was created. Local leaders motivated to protect their traditional lands, environments from modification and pollution, e.g. "wild tourism", unsanctioned diggings and destructions of archeological monuments, rock pictures and etc. became main stakeholders and participants of environmental projects funded by international organizations (UNESCO, WWF, UNDP and others) in Altai. This led to a strong synergy effect and predetermined appearance of these parks hereinafter. Now we have six parks in Altai totaling 727,562 ha: nature park: NEP Argut (20,500ha), NP Belukha (131,337ha), NP Katun (73,100ha), NP Ukok (254,000ha), NP Uch-Enmek (65,000ha), NEP Chui-Oozy (9,538ha). One more park "Ak Cholushpa" (173 400ha) along the watershed of the Chelushman River is planned which could serve function of a buffer zone to the Altaisky *zapovednik*.