

Methodology of Socially-oriented Observations Engaging Community Perceptions as an Instrument for Decision-Making: Case of the Northern European Russia

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The methodology of Socially-oriented Observations (SOO) enables to translate results of observations and research of environmental changes into solutions of quality of life (QL) issues and human capital (HC) development. SOO methodology emerged from the experience gained during Arctic Climate Impact Assessment followed by circumpolar discussions devoted to integrated Sustained Arctic Observation Network elaboration. Due to this experience and SOO methodology developed and tested within IPY PPS ARCTIC cluster project in key observation sites of the Russian Arctic, it is revealed that climate change and other environmental issues are better recognized and perceived by both local people and policy makers when they are addressed by the researches in the context of people's quality of life (QL) challenges that arctic residents and governments recognize. According to strategic approach of SOO in order to achieve the main target - the QL improvement and HC development, it is necessary to adapt and implement the development strategies for sound solution of appearing issues of QL and set strategic goals for QL enhancement in interrelated spheres – social, economic, nature-environmental, legal-management as well as the spiritual-cultural. With the help of the strategic approach introduced to SOO observation protocol, based on people's perceptions and statistics, specially recognized main issues and solutions as well as key indicators to observe trends have been identified. First results of SOO, carried out in key sites of observation network including sites situated in diverse bioms (from tundra to southern taiga zone) and various administrative region of the northern European Russia are demonstrated. In many cases they show that environmental changes evident for scientists, such as forested area or treeline changes due to climate change or human impact are not ranked high as limits or opportunities for people QL improvement. This is partly a result of insufficient environmental education and awareness among the local people and their greater concern with the low level of material well-being and unemployment. SOO based on strategic approach, including multidisciplinary scientific research, interviewing and local stakeholders observations, as well as statistics, will help to raise people's awareness of many coupled human-nature issues and opportunities of QL improvement and in such a way will enable to use scientific information and traditional knowledge in decision-making, education and overall HC development.