



Angelina Davydova

Environmental Journalism in Germany and Russia.

WP 2013-05

Bielefeld University



St. Petersburg State University



***Centre for German and
European Studies (CGES)***



CGES Working Papers series includes publication of materials prepared within different activities of the Center for German and European Studies both in St. Petersburg and in Germany: The CGES supports educational programs, research and scientific dialogues. In accordance with the CGES mission, the Working Papers are dedicated to the interdisciplinary studies of different aspects of German and European societies.

The paper presents a comparison of the stages of development of environmental journalism in Germany and Russia. It was written as a result of an internship at the Free University in Berlin supported by the Centre for German and European Studies in 2012 in the framework of the Research Area “Civil Society, Networks and Participation in Europe”.

Angelina Davydova is a senior teacher at St. Petersburg School of Journalism, St. Petersburg State University and Head of the German-Russian Bureau of Ecological Information. Her academic interests include environment and climate change, journalism and mass media in Russia and Germany.

Contact: a.davydova@inbox.ru



Table of contents

Introduction	3
Development and Current Types of Environmental Journalism in Germany and Other EU Countries	3
Development of Environmental Journalism in Russia	5
Similarities and Differences between the Russian and German Environmental Reporting.....	7
Reporting on Climate Change in Germany and Russia.....	9
References	12

Introduction

The development of environmental journalism worldwide, and also in Germany, has gone through a number of stages – from a specialized, science-based reporting to popular publications on green economy and sustainable development. Thus, a very vivid characteristic of environmental journalism in the German mainstream, but also specialized media, is its multi-sectoral approach. Nowadays one may find features of environmental journalism in almost all the sections of the newspaper/magazine/online media: from politics to economics, and from culture to lifestyle. Here Germany, and German media in particular, make a very interesting case for media analysts - with the growing green business, rise of green politics, intensification of local green initiatives and expansion of German green technologies worldwide, the country positions itself as one of the green leaders in the EU.

At the same time, environmental journalism in Russia, which has experienced a recent development over the last few years, in many ways finds itself still at an initial stage, trying to learn best international practices (including the German ones), but also to set up its own standards. This journalistic report on the development stages of journalism in Germany and Russia is oriented on the comparison of two cases and shows the most important trends and examples characterizing them.

Development and Current Types of Environmental Journalism in Germany and Other EU Countries

Environmental journalism has witnessed a rapid transformation over the past decade – evolving from a specialized, science-based reporting into a variety of strands including green economy, sustainable development, and even a green design/lifestyle agenda. It is true that media audience nowadays finds environmental issues in almost all sections of the newspaper/magazine/online media: from politics to economics, and from culture to lifestyle. Consequently, it makes it quite challenging for many journalists to provide a high-quality reporting, grasping all aspects of life – from scientific to social, and further to political and economic.

A number of EU researchers make a clear link between the appearing of quality environmental reporting and the emergence of a wide-spread public ‘green’ movement in the 1960s-1970s. Back then, a vast public interest towards ‘greening’ of the economy, including industrial production, energy production and consumption, a big anti-nuclear movement and many other factors developed first into a mass movement, and later on, institutionalized, both into civil society organizations and bodies of representative power (e.g. Green Parties in many European countries). The media coverage of all these transformations was also

developing gradually, comprising scientific, social, political and economic aspects of the problem.

There are a few classifications of types of environmental journalism available. (Ref. 1,7). One of them (Ref. 12) is based on the type of media – e.g. whether it is a general (business) media, specialized environmental media, or media initiated and supported by an environmental group NGO. The first group is the most present and well-researched at the moment. In case of traditional media – be it print or online – environmental reporting either appears under a specialized section or supplement (it may also be allocated into a section only in the online version of the publication), on a regular or non-regular basis. The section ‘environment’ can be combined with ‘science’, or ‘energy’, or ‘climate’, etc. Another option – environmental topics appearing in non-environmental sections (adding up a ‘green’ aspect to a text covering news/trend which is not originally environmental) or even in an non-environmental text, either as a development of the main theme (e.g. political or economic), or a side-topic.

In addition to environmental sections/special issues/columns in daily media (socio-political, business, lifestyle and other ones) there are two more kinds of environmental journalism present in the market at the moment. The first ones are specialized independent environmental media. The global media market saw a rapid development of this media type over the last five years, directly connected with the growing importance of the topic, growing green business, and rising public interest and awareness. The specialized environmental media also range from a more green business oriented web-portals (like www.businessgreen.com) to the more consumer-oriented (www.treehugger.com, www.mnn.com, www.grist.org). A good German example here could be a print and online magazine Enorm (<http://www.enorm-magazin.de/>), specializing in environmental and sustainable economy reporting, covering the topic not from a ‘traditional green’ attitude, but more from an aggregated sustainability/new business/new economy angle, trying to tackle the innovative side of sustainability, while targeting a younger ‘pro-active’ audience. From this example we can trace a growing importance of an aggregated approach to multi-sectoral journalism, combining business, environmental and ethical issues in one publication. Another German example is an online environmental publication www.klimaretter.info, set up by two former TAZ (a daily German newspaper, with a center-left to leftist political position, owned and run by a collective of its editors and authors) journalists, after they had published a book with the same title (Klimaretter, literally meaning the climate savior). The “Klimaretter” sets itself the aim of independent and critical journalistic reporting, including investigative journalism, uncovering cases of industrial pollution in Germany and worldwide, trying to undermine big business ‘greenwashing’ campaigns, etc. This example is a completely different one from the “Enorm”, as it creates a media link between journalistic reporting and critical evaluation of environmental policies, often with a hint of green activism.

The third type of specialized environmental media are created and largely supported by environmental NGOs or groups, with a few titles going into the professional media market. A good German example here could be Greenpeace

Magazin <http://www.greenpeace-magazin.de/>. While originally set up as corporate NGO publications, the publication developed into a quality publication, attracting professional journalists from mainstream media to do special reports, opinion and comments, while providing in-depth reporting and analysis on many environmental issues. These are often later picked up by the general media. This example, once again, brings in an issue of combining objective and independent reporting with the underlying “green” base.

Development of Environmental Journalism in Russia

The rapid development of environmental journalism in Russia coincides with the change of political system back in mid/end of the 1980s, when many environmental disasters (including the Chernobyl, the Aral Sea, etc) alongside of a Soviet economic/industrial attitude of ‘conquering nature’ while neglecting ecosystems and in many ways negative impacts of mass industrial production on public health – got harsh criticism from both new independent media and civil society initiatives. A rise in interest in environmental issues in the years of *perestroika* went down back in the early 90s, when economic and social problems prioritized issues of day-to-day survival in the media. A corresponding economic policy followed – it declared economic growth to be a ‘priority number one’ and all-time target, while putting many environmental aspects aside, to be considered for later, or not considered at all. (Ref. 10) In mainstream media, environmental topics became somewhat of a radical topic, left for environmental groups and green activists, hardly ever taken seriously and not being widely involved as major newsmakers or commentators.

Interestingly, the massive decline in the Soviet industrial sector, replaced in the new economy of independent Russia by mainly extracting sectors, alongside with retail trade, construction etc – for the first few years even provided a positive environmental effect, as environmental conditions (including quality of air, water, etc) improved in many regions across Russia and other former USSR countries. Yet, as the economy continued to grow, new environmental problems appeared, most of them connected with soaring levels of consumption – the air pollution resulting from private automotive transport in cities (accounting at the moment for approx. 80-90% of overall city air pollution in places like Moscow or St. Petersburg – source Rosstat, August 2013, here’s a RIA Novosti report on that <http://ria.ru/eco/20130806/954546151.html>) , the problem with garbage storage and absence of recycling systems and recycling facilities, etc. Since most acute environmental problems connected with oil/gas/other minerals exploration were not so easy to be seen or felt (since most of the environmental disasters in extracting sectors in Russia happen in extremely sparsely populated areas and, thus, hard to trace and bring to public attention) it was mainly issues of city ecology and ‘consumers’ ecology that came to public and media attention over the last few years.

So, it is predominantly urban environmental problems that are getting most

media and public attention. The issues of air and water quality, city traffic regulations, green zones in cities, campaigns against new large infrastructure and industrial facilities construction – are gaining momentum, with many civic groups and public initiatives created to tackle the issues (Ref. 11)

The first flagship story of the kind, getting a wide media coverage in Russian federal and international media was the fight for Khimki forest north of Moscow, next to the Sheremetyevo international airport. Back in 2007, the plans of cutting down a small forest due to construction plans of a highway connecting Russia's two largest cities, Moscow and St. Petersburg, provoked a wave of protests <http://khimkiforest.org/> all over Russia, made it into Russian and international media, and in many ways created an example of a large scale campaigning for many activists across Russia. Even though the Khimki story didn't end with a complete 'happy end' for the activists, since the highway is to be built anyway (yet the residents of the area got a number of compensation measures and concessions) the history of the protest in many ways provided tools and expertise for many similar cases. Since the story got an extensive and very detailed media-coverage, environmental activities, also the regional ones, made it into general media-accepted "newsmakers", with more environmental protests and a wider coverage of them appearing in Russian media.

The same 'flagship' event brought the climate change discourse into a wide media and public attention – which, interestingly, coincided with the failing UN Summit on climate change in Copenhagen in December 2009. In spite of the results of the summit, the fact that Russia's highest officials visited the climate conference and made a few statements on the importance of the climate agenda – and also due to the fact that for the first time Russia had a strong media presence at the summit – did bring the topic into the country's mainstream media, making leading climate experts, like those of the WWF and Greenpeace trustworthy and widely accepted newsmakers.

At present, environmental topics are beginning to play a bigger role – both in print and online media, and in broadcasting (radio and television). Also in Russia one may find even more examples of specialized environmental media – most of them online and digital "native", that is publications that did not originate in more traditional media.

The noticeably stronger digital native presence in Russia is a basic characteristic not only of environmental media, but of the media landscape as a whole. It had a few underlying reasons to it. One of them is the income structure of most media houses. In Russia, traditionally, revenues from advertisement have always played a major role, with sales/subscription revenues remaining relatively low, while in Germany the income structure has been more balanced. However, Germany has also seen a declining sale/subscription share in the latest years due to print media crisis and a growing advertisement share. Another reason is the media consumption pattern. In Russia, vast geography, historical customs, lower degree of trust in information provided by media and generally poor quality of local media titles do not provide for a 'newspaper for breakfast' model, very widely common in Germany. Print media in Russia keeps its strong presence either in

form of 3-4 daily, mostly business-oriented titles, in big cities (and megapolis areas around cities with population above 1 million inhabitants), or in the form of quite often low-quality “yellow” press or even consumer-oriented popular titles, aimed at rural and small city population.

The third type of environmental reporting – NGO-funded environmental media is also present in Russia in form of the “Panda times” publication (a joint project between the WWF Russia and the Independent media publishing house) and as a magazine “Environment and Law” and an online media www.bellona.ru, set by an environmental Russian-Norwegian NGO Bellona.

Similarities and Differences between the Russian and German Environmental Reporting

There are a number of similar trends between Russian and German environmental reporting. The first one is a growing importance of sustainable development/green economy coverage – that is, trying to link economic, environmental and social aspects in one story. For Russian media (e.g. including the leading dailies, like “Kommersant”, “Vedomosti”, “RBC Daily” and a few online media www.gazeta.ru, www.lenta.ru) in many ways that is the “easiest” way for an environmental story to make it to the headlines – if it comes as an environmental aspect to an economic/political story or if it directly contradicts economic development plans (e.g. Arctic exploration for oil and gas). In most German environmental media coverage the sustainable development/green economy stories have also been on the rise over the last few years. Here an interesting trend is the rising media awareness for themes of fairness, equity – on the national and also international level (Ref.1, 2, 3, 4, Interview with the Chief Editor of “Klimaretter” Nick Reimer). Media investigating environmental and social policy of German companies abroad, working conditions in factories in the developing world, issues of fair trade etc – have been attracting more German media attention recently. Another point is intergenerational equity, widely discussed in German media now (Ref. 7, Interview with “Spiegel Online” environmental/scientific editor Christoph Seidler). All these discourses remain rather little known in Russian media, where environmental/sustainability coverage rarely considers the global level, or pays serious attention to issues of working conditions in other regions of the world/fairness/equity. So if the combination of environmental and economic sectors is already heavily present in Russian environmental journalism, then the ‘social’ aspect rarely comes up to join the two. On the whole, Russian media agenda seems to be much more internally-focused, especially when it comes to reporting on social/environmental problems (Ref. 12, Interview with Alexander Fyodorov, the head of the Russian Union of environmental journalists).

A second common trend present in both German and Russian media is the vast development of consumer-oriented ‘green’ or ‘eco’ media resources (Ref. 5, 7, Interview with Nick Reimer, Russian examples – www.greenrevolution.ru, www.greenhunter.ru, magazine “Nature Product” Here the media markets of both

countries have witnessed a growing public interest towards the topic – both in general/popular media and in specialized print/online media, dedicated to the issue. Covering of green lifestyles, eco-food and other products, green construction, gardening, alongside with green urban issues – interestingly, attracts various audiences, from the traditional readership of women’s and health magazines to younger urban audiences with high awareness of health/environmental issues and interest in urban development practices (Ref. 7).

The third common feature is a rising popularity of green business/green technology journalism, both in general media and through specialized (mostly online) resources. (Ref. 7, 5, interview with Christoph Seidler, www.greenrevolution.ru, www.ecolife.ru)

Still, it should be noted that in many respects Russian environmental journalism is still an emerging market, with many ‘green’ issues just coming to the daily lives of most readers in Russia, and thus just making their way into both the mainstream and the specialized media. Another very vivid characteristic of the Russian environmental media journalism is the close connectedness of environmental journalism with citizenship journalism (journalistic reporting done by non-professional journalists, often the general public, taking an active role in collecting, reporting, analyzing, commenting and disseminating news and information), especially in the area of environmental protests, the number of which continues to rise. (www.ecoreporter.ru, www.ecoportalsu.ru, www.bellona.ru)

As mentioned before, the example of the Khimki movement provoked a whole number of civil society groups to appear all over the country. The major areas of interest for them were local environmental issues and problems connected with urban development and planning. In addition to protest groups formed around a specific problem, another type of civil society involvement appeared. This second type of public initiatives, most of which have not been and are still not officially registered, deals with a specific environmental problem on a ‘do-it-yourself’ basis. A good example here is the ‘Musora.bolshe.net’ movement (literally meaning ‘no more rubbish’), a civil society initiative created in St. Petersburg by a group of individuals worried about the waste problem in Russian cities and countryside. The initiative first started their activities with hundreds of volunteers going to lakeshores, parks and forests to gather waste and submit it for selection and (possible) recycling. Over the last few years many similar initiatives have appeared all over Russia, setting up independent rubbish selection points, organizing environmental awareness campaigns and public ‘green events’, promoting cycling, car-free lifestyles or urban gardening. In many cases, like in the case of rubbish selection, these groups are trying to replace non-existent state infrastructure with do-it-yourself practices and volunteer actions. Quite a lot of them also deal with the issues of urban planning, reconstructing of public spaces or creating a friendlier and greener atmosphere in cities. At the same time, environmental protest groups have continued to appear all over the country – from an all-Russia campaign to protest Baikal from the activities of a pulp and paper factory, to [campaign](#) of residents of the Voronezh district in central Russia, famous for its fertile black soils and unique, biodiversity ecosystem, against plans for a copper-nickel mine (Ref.

10).

All these “green” civil society initiatives find themselves closely linked with the development of environmental journalism in Russia – with the growing environmental awareness and engagement, environmental information is also becoming more requested and socially important, especially with development of civic journalism, blogs and social networks. The latter examples of Web 2.0 and Web 3.0 are also heavily represented in the Russian environmental media landscape, quite often fulfilling many functions as once. The first one of them is social media and blogs being an ‘activist’ platform of environmental activists (helping them to spread information for the general public, enroll supporters, informing the mainstream media, mobilizing the public for offline event), while at the same time being a ‘citizenship journalism’ tool, through which the information on particular disasters/protests, especially of regional importance, can get into local or federal mainstream media, and last but not least – serving a platform for ‘public space’ – since quite often in contemporary Russia the functions of public space are being fulfilled neither by means of representative democracy, nor by means of traditional media (Ref. 11).

Reporting on Climate Change in Germany and Russia

All the three types of environmental journalism to be found in today’s media landscape, both in Germany and Russia, are vividly characterized by their cross-sectoral approach (already mentioned beforehand). And here, climate change and the UNFCCC negotiation process in particular are media topics where one notices this interdisciplinarity most. With international politics, internal politics, economic and business aspects, social and lifestyle dimensions, the whole climate change agenda seems to combine most environmental issues of the past (including energy, waste, water, consumption problems), adding up a deeper socio-economical ‘layer’, when ‘spreading out’ the topic to a more general ‘sustainability/green economy’ reporting. Even natural disaster/catastrophe reporting comes under the ‘climate change’ headline these days, turning the latter into a truly interdisciplinary matter.

Due to the fact that climate change plays a much bigger role in German internal political agenda, than in the Russian one, a journalist reporting for media of both countries, always finds German audience to be ‘more prepared’. In most cases the Russian media tends to require more reasons, to ‘justify’ writing on climate issues – bringing along mostly political and economic arguments (in order to underline the topic’s importance for Russia). On the other hand, media interest towards climate issues in Germany seems to be more fluctuating and more dependent on international/domestic policy priorities. In Russia the interest towards the topic (still at a lower level) remains relatively stable (Interview with Nick Reimer, Christoph Seidler, Ref. 12, Interview with Alexander Fyodorov).

A case in point is UN climate conference, which took place in December 2009 in Copenhagen (also already mentioned beforehand), which turned out to be

the peak of media interest towards the subject, while after failing of many hopes and aspirations for a new agreement to be reached there, the media interest in most EU-reporting on the matter (mostly German and English-language publications taken into account) went gradually down (Interview with Nick Reimer, Christoph Seidler, Ref. 5).

Another significant difference between German and Russian climate change reporting follows directly from the first one. Due to a heavier presence of 'climate' agenda in politics, it also has a much deeper and wider effect on economical and social spheres – from green business initiatives to city climate programs, civic initiatives, etc. With the whole 'green' agenda still less rooted in Russian context, including media context, it always takes more time to 'prepare' your reader and to 'persuade' your reader in the importance of an issue.

In spite of the two differences mentioned above, reporting on climate change both in Germany and Russia comes up against a number of very similar challenges. The first one of them is still the abstractness of the issue, and its global character. Being a global problem, climate change: 1. happens first somewhere else (and if in German media reporting on most vulnerable regions (Bangladesh, etc is largely to be found, in Russia this is still a rather rare case, with readers still mostly concerned about internal Russian problems and preferring to read mostly 'success' stories from the rest of the world), 2. is hard to find and define both 'good goods' and bad guys", and also 'winners' and 'losers', making it into a less of a traditional conflict, 3. it is rather difficult to keep readers' interest at the same level in times of local agenda and short-term problems and conflicts coming up (like the economic crisis, etc). Even though there are a few attempts to interlink current economic and ecological crisis, together with deepening social inequality and growing poverty (as it was the case during the UN Summit at Rio+20 in June 2012), only a few media both in Germany and Russia seem to be taking this integrated approach (Ref. 6, 7, 12, Rio+20 Summit reporting in RIA Novosti, Kommersant).

Yet another challenge faced by climate change reporting is the short-term vs. long-term argument and the issue of reporting about future. Here, even in spite of different political landscapes of Russia and Germany, we still find a prevalence of both professional media people and general audience on the issue that future issues see to be less relevant and, thus, important at the moment, making it harder to get the story into the news. This trend, however, is being overturned more often – both in German and Russian media, with much more research data (also "consumer-oriented" research data) now available and regularly published, however, the issue still remains. Another important challenge is processing scientific (environmental) data, which quite often seems to be contradictory – at times when not all journalists (even those who had a formal academic training) might understand the way science and scientific research functions. And last, but not least, the multi-sectoral approach of environmental journalism makes it especially difficult to turn complex and diverse blocks of information, research data, contradictory opinions, multi-layered background information – into linear stories, accessible to a wide audience. At times data journalism (including infographics)



comes to help with this issue – especially when reporting about global challenges which appear differently in different countries/contexts/time/other terms, or when writing about big blocks (or databases) of information.

In spite of many issues/difficulties mentioned above, one still notices a growing importance of environmental journalism in Germany and Russia. At the same time the growing significance of the environmental news agenda brings international reporting on the issue closer to one another – and here, once again, Germany and Russia prove to be good examples, with similarities between environmental journalism in both countries growing as the time goes.

References

1. Umweltkommunikation im Lokalteil von Tageszeitungen: eine Untersuchung zur Kritik am Umweltjournalismus, Marie-Luise Braun, Frankfurt am Main, Lang 2003.
2. Langfristige Prozesse und nachhaltige Entwicklung : neue Maßstäbe nicht nur für den Umweltjournalismus? Reader Christine Persitzky (Red.), Berlin. Freie Univ. Journalisten-Weiterbildung, 1999.
3. Methoden der Journalismusforschung, Jandura Olag, Ebooks Corporation, Wiesbaden, Springer Fahrmedien 2011.
4. Auslaendische Umweltmedien als Schutzgueter des deutschen Umweltstrafrechts, Robert Sieren, Osnabrueck, Univ. Diss, 2011.
5. Die unterschiedlichen Rhythmen des (Umwelt-)Journalismus und der Nachhaltigkeitskommunkation, UmweltWirtschaftsForum, 2011, Vol.19(3), Jan, 2012, Vol.19(3-4).
6. Participatory Politics, Environmental Journalism and Newspaper Campaigns, Howarth Anita, Journalism Studies, Vol. 13, 2012.
7. Introduction: Environmental Journalism, Bodker, Henrik, Neverla, Irene, Journalism Studies, 2012, Vol. 13.
8. Vernetztes Denken in Journalismus: journalistische Vermittlungdefitize am Beispiel Oekologie und Umweltschutz, Petra Thorbrietz, Tuebingen, Niemeyer, 1986
9. The end of Objectivity and Neutrality in Civic and Environmental Journalism, Beatriz Dornelles, Brazilian Journalism Research, 2011, Vol. 4 (2).
10. Sustainability and Civil Society Engagement in Russia.
11. A Gain for Democracy?, Angelina Davydova, Friedrich Ebert Foundation, Series "Sustainability and Democracy".
12. Few hear the cries of those fighting to save wild Russia, Angelina Davydova, The Conversation.
13. The State of Environmental Journalism in Germany and Russia, Angelina Davydova, Global Media Journal, Volume 3, Nr 1, Spring/Summer 2013, Special issue: Russian and German Perspectives on Transcultural Communication.



ZDES Working Papers

Arbeitspapiere des Zentrums für Deutschland- und Europastudien

Рабочие тетради Центра изучения Германии и Европы

Universität Bielefeld – Fakultät für Soziologie
Postfach 100131 – 33501 Bielefeld – Deutschland

Staatliche Universität St. Petersburg – 7/9 Universitetskaja Nab.
199034 St. Petersburg – Russland

<http://zdes.spbu.ru/>

info@zdes.spbu.ru