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Regional environmental governance of protected natural territories in the European North: Russia, Finland, and Norway, and the case of Pasvik-Inari Trilateral Park

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Abstract
This article explores how international organizations (IOs), national governments, and regional actors interact in the field of nature conservation in the European Arctic, focusing on Russia. I also reveal the unequal role of Indigenous communities, which are stakeholders in protected nature territories in the Arctic but receive limited attention in research.
I present the case of the Pasvik-Inari Trilateral Park, which in 2008 received Europarc Certification as a result of long-term international cooperation dating back to the 1990s. The park consists of five protected natural areas: three in Norway, one in Russia and one in Finland. The areas have different organizational forms and restrictions on human activities, and the efforts of IOs such as the Europarc Federation to increase cooperation and coordination among them in conservation projects, research initiatives, and international travel for tourists, have had only partial success.
I apply insights from regional analysis to discuss how governance at international, national, and local levels shape the practices and ideas of nature conservation in the different parts of Pasvik-Inari. The article also addresses the role of Indigenous environmental knowledge and nature use in protected natural territories in the Arctic. The paper contributes to the special issue on regional environmental governance by expanding the regional focus toward Russia and by stressing the significant relations between Indigenous communities and nature that should be taken into consideration in Arctic environmental governance.

Keywords Cross border nature conservation · Regional environmental governance · Pasvik-Inari Trilateral Park · Sami · Tourism

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1 Introduction

In the Anthropocene, nature conservation is a hot issue. Can protected natural territories contribute to manage climate change and its impacts? These are questions of global significance and nature conservation is an activity of global scale where regional, national, and cross-border cooperation are essential for the realization of the purposes of nature conservation, and sharing its costs and benefits. In this context, transnational protected natural territories are a highly relevant field for knowledge production about how regional, national, and transnational governance can interact better for more effective nature protection and climate action.

The Russian invasion of Ukraine undermines efforts toward international cooperation that have increased in the domain of nature protection in the Arctic since the 1990s (Hønneland 2003). Russian natural areas constitute 16% of worldwide protected reserves and provide the greatest CO_2 sink on the planet. The Russian Arctic contains vast uninhabited natural territories, and about 12% of its land is under some form of protection regime (Bukvareva et al. 2015). Therefore, global environmental governance that aims to limit climate change and preserve ecosystems and biodiversity has to include management of nature in Russia, and research on nature governance in Russia must connect with global issues. Moreover, Russia is one of the most significant stakeholders in the Arctic, with 25% of the coastline, 40% of the land area, the largest Arctic cities, enormous mineral resources, and large military presence. By any measurement, the Russian state is a central actor in regional governance and sustainable development in the Arctic (Lavelle 2021).

1.1 Research purpose and questions

The Russian Arctic is a partner in the Pasvik-Inari Trilateral Park—an ambitious project of cross-border nature conservation in Europe. The park is a result of intense cooperation between Russia and Fenno-Scandia in the post-Soviet years. In 2007, right before the Great Recession in 2008 radically decreased social trust within the EU and activities associated with it (Arpino and Obydenkova 2020), the park was granted a Europarc certificate, a renowned brand for cross-border cooperation among protected natural territories.

This paper explores the forms and results of this cooperation, with a specific focus on Russia. This focus is inspired not only by the present geopolitical opposition between Russia and the rest of Europe (Izotov and Obydenkova 2021) but also by Russia's traditions of nature conservation that took definite shape in early Soviet time and continue to be prominent. In this article, I show how Russian ideas of nature conservation and perceptions of the environment influence international cooperation in Pasvik-Inari Park. Understandings and representations of the Europarc differ among Russian stakeholders and shape different ways of operationalizing and benefiting from this status and the cooperation opportunities that it provides. In harmony with the green economy prioritizing the combination of environmental protection and economic development (Fletcher et al. 2015), Europarc promotes concern for regional socioeconomic development and the wellbeing of local communities (Europarc n.d.). This article examines how these goals are being fulfilled in relation to Indigenous populations in the Arctic.

The following analysis explores debates, contradictions, and negotiations between the Russian and the other partners involved in cooperation within the park. The discussion is based on analysis of legal documents, media publications, organization websites, and other

secondary sources. Due to COVID-19 travel restrictions, fieldwork could not be realized. However, empirical data collected by the author in the Kola Peninsula, Russia in the period 2001–2017 has been incorporated where relevant in the analysis. Of special value is the author's fieldwork with Sami Indigenous communities, focusing on their experiences of nature conservation and cross-border cooperation. This article employs interpretative qualitative research, with close attention to context and textual analysis.

I emphasize interactions and cooperation between Indigenous communities and nature conservation practices that aim at more sustainable environmental governance in the Arctic. Indigenous people are significant stakeholders: contrary to popular representations that suggest they are peripheral communities in Arctic localities, they are politically active agents in the spheres of both human rights and environmental issues, and mobilize in global solidarity networks. Knowledge how Indigenous communities operate in both local and international arenas, contributes to a more nuanced understanding of cooperation in nature conservation. Indigenous environmental knowledge is also essential to nature preservation and climate change research.

1.2 Epistemological framework

The anthropological analysis of Pasvik-Inari Park here is inspired by the focus of this special issue on regional environmental governance for sustainable development in the Arctic. I borrow a broadly agreed-upon conceptualization of region "between the national and the global,… [made up of] social constructions that make references to territorial location and to geographical or normative contiguity" (Börzel and Risse 2016, p. 24). Debarbieux points out the huge diversity in the ways social scientists apply the notion of region. Natural regions (the Pasvik River Valley, for example) are often the primary sense, which he interprets as indicating that regions exist prior to institutionalized governance (2012). Other scholars, however, use region to refer to supranational organizations (like Pasvik-Inari Europarc), with clearly stated agendas for dealing with environmental issues. In some instances, these are even "decentralized affiliates of global organizations," or "social configurations shaped by collective mobilization or public participation, if not collective identities" (Debarbieux 2012, p. 120).

Debarbieux shows that sometimes "region" combines more than one understanding. I use this insight when I discuss how different but overlapping understandings and knowledge about Pasvik-Inari Park shape cooperation and nature preservation. The ways different epistemological premises shape practices are thus key to understanding environmental governance and cooperation. In this article, I discuss the role of Soviet nature conservation in the trilateral park cooperation. Relying on some studies on Soviet legacies and concepts of region as socially constructed, I trace transformations in environmental knowledge in Russia through the establishment of the Europarc. As Balsiger and VanDeveer write, a region is constructed through governance within social processes, institutions, and organizations, as well as knowledge practices (2012). In this paper, I initiate research on how institutionalized cross-border cooperation influences governance of protected natural territories in Russia.

I take inspiration from scholarship that ascribes to regional environmental governance and regional IOs the mission of diffusing norms, values, and scientific knowledge, by including societal actors at different levels of decision-making (Ambrosio et al. 2022; Lankina et al. 2016b; Lavelle 2021). These organizations promote social awareness and collective action with the goal of increasing sustainable resource management as well as

public support even in societies with different historical legacies (Conca 2012; Libman and Obydenkova 2014; Selin 2012). More problematically, regional environmental governance can be exploited to increase the legitimacy of political and economic actors. As shown by Obydenkova and Libman (2019) in the case of Russia, including autocratic regimes in IOs can increase popular support for these regimes. "Establishing regional organizations helps to legitimize authoritarian governments by invoking a domestically and internationally recognized standard" (Libman and Obydenkova 2018, p. 152). Membership in international forums also enhances direct information exchange that can help authoritarian regimes suppress threats to their rule (Libman and Obydenkova 2018).

Theorists of regional environmental cooperation point out that it is "situated in multilevel contexts. Extensive substantive, organizational, or operational connections link regional initiatives to each other and to overarching regional integration" (Balsiger and VanDeveer 2012, p. 6). Only recently have autocracy-led regional IOs begun to be analyzed within the context of environmental governance and sustainable development (Ambrosio et al. 2022; Hall et al. 2022; Obydenkova 2022a, b). Building on these studies, I explore interactions among multi-level governance contexts, such as the Europarc Federation, the trilateral Pasvik-Inari Park, and the Pasvik Zapovednik, with attention to the local, regional, and cross-regional governance scales. I outline different levels of governance and describe how they interact within Zapovednik Pasvik with special attention to the connection between such interactions and the outcomes for Indigenous communities.

The chapter is structured as follows: I first describe the Pasvik-Inari Europarc and key points in its history. These historical legacies are under-explored in the studies on environmental governance (Lankina et al. 2016a; Nazarov and Obydenkova 2022). I outline patterns of governance and cooperation among national partners. I discuss the impact of Europarc Federation on the process, as well as its operational principles. Then I introduce dilemmas of governance and cooperation within the Europarc across states, regions, and levels. I focus on tourism as a priority area of the Europarc Federation, and on the ongoing tensions over reindeer trespassing the national border. Finally, I discuss the recurring conflicts within the park and contradictions that occur between international, national, and regional mechanisms of governance. The analysis also sheds light on the ideas about nature conservation and about Indigenous people in Russia which influence multilateral cooperation. The Europarc in its turn is becoming entangled in political and economic representations in Russia and in epistemologies of neoliberal nature governance.

2 Pasvik-Inari Trilateral Park

The park started with a Norwegian initiative in the late 1980s, based in the first bilateral environmental agreement between Norway and Russia (Hønneland et al. 2003). Finland joined soon after and two intergovernmental agreements from 1992 (Finland-Russia and Norway-Russia) provided foundations for developing trilateral cooperation. The Russian side emphasizes, however, that no formal agreement has ever been signed between the governments of Norway and Russia to regulate cooperation (Trusova 2011). Such a governmental agreement between Finland and the Soviet Union in 1989 established the Nature Park "Friendship" (*Druzhba*), and is seen as a model for formal cooperation (Pasvik-Inari Trilateral Park n.d.). As literature on international environmental agreements and political regimes (e.g., Obydenkova and Salahodjaev 2016) also shows, the lack of a formal

governmental agreement creates ambiguity about Pasvik-Inari Park cooperation for Russian authorities, and undermines the significance of Pasvik-Inari as a region.

2.1 Areas

The five different areas that Pasvik-Inari incorporates (see Fig. 1) have diverse histories, purposes, and organizational forms, which has been discussed as the largest challenge to cooperation. The epistemological and practical consequences of these differences are discussed below.

Comprising an area of 1889 km^2 in total, Pasvik-Inari consist of: Vätsäri Wilderness Area (1550 km^2) in the county of Lapland (Finland) which includes the north-eastern part of Lake Inari and a vast area up to the Norwegian border. It was established in 1991 to protect unique bogs, hills, and pine forests, while safeguarding Sami traditional land use. The term Wilderness Area puts the least restrictions on human use and was the last category introduced in the 1990s, while the first Finnish national parks and reserves appeared shortly before WWII (Nature Conservation Act of Finland 1996). Vätsäri is managed by the Natural Heritage Services of Lapland and is also part of Natura 2000. In the IUCN (International Union for Conservation of Nature) categorization, which is globally accepted, Vätsäri is category VI: Managed Resource Protected Area: managed for the sustainable use of natural ecosystems (Ojanlatva 2008). Sustainable use of natural resources is the main purpose after maintaining biological diversity and conserving scenic values, which are the primary objectives of nature reserves and parks in Finland.

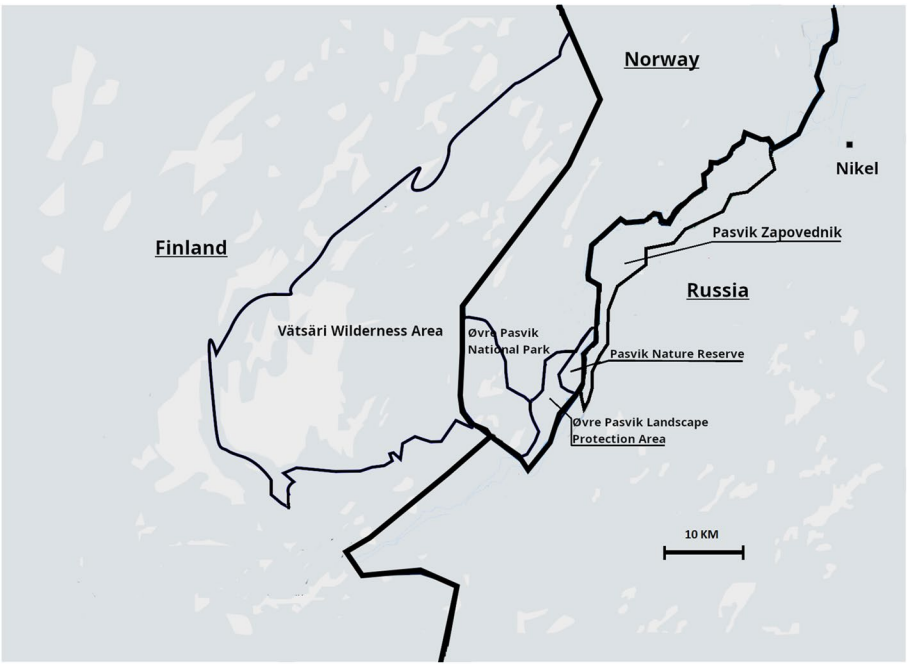

Fig. 1 Pasvik-Inari Trilateral Park. State borders are marked with thicker lines and protected nature territory borders with thinner lines. CC BY 4.0, Nathan Light

Nevertheless, reindeer herding is allowed in all protected territories according to the Finnish Reindeer Husbandry Act of 1990 (Allard 2017). Vätsäri is located to the south of the Koltta Sami village of Sevettijärvi, and it also serves as grazing land for their reindeer.

Øvre Pasvik National Park, Øvre Pasvik Landscape Protection Area and Pasvik Nature Reserve are located in the Norwegian County of Finnmark. They were established through the Nature Conservation Act of Norway (Naturvernloven 1970) and managed by the Office of the County of Finnmark Governor (Ojanlatva 2008). Norway's first protected natural territories (predominantly national parks) were established after the mid-twentieth century and followed the model of centralized state management in cooperation with scientific institutions. Since the 1990s, Norway has been undergoing a transformation where the management of protected territories has been delegated from the national to local governments. In 2002, in order to make nature conservation more popular, the authorities initiated the merging of the objectives of biodiversity and landscape preservation with local economy and tourism (Fallet and Hovik 2009). Decentralization of nature conservation might have led to the lack of governmental agreement about Pasvik-Inari between Russia and Norway: nature reserves in the two countries are managed at different levels of governance. This mismatch may have caused the difficulty in making political decisions about the park in Russia.

Øvre Pasvik National Park (119 km^2) protects natural environments that have undergone little human impact. Since the 2000s, recreational activity is often bound with this form of conservation. Øvre Pasvik National Park is classified in category IUCN II: National Park, managed mainly for ecosystem protection and recreation (Ojanlatva 2008).

Øvre Pasvik Landscape Protection Area (54.2 km^2) was established in 2003. This form protects distinctive natural and cultural landscapes, and prohibits activities that may change their character. Øvre Pasvik Landscape Protection Area is classified in category IUCN V: Protected Landscape: managed for conservation and recreation (Ojanlatva 2008). Øvre Pasvik embodies Norway's new nature conservation thinking where protected areas are open to local residents and sustainable land use, and is thus similar to Vätsäri in Finland. Both areas provide grazing lands for Indigenous reindeer husbandry. Some scholars assert that altogether about six thousand reindeer are being grazed in Øvre Pasvik (Vasilenko and Bliznetskaya 2021). In contrast to other countries, Norway emphasizes continued use of protected territories, where traditional economies are allowed. Ecologists also increasingly speak of the positive impact of reindeer herding on the natural environment, which points to a conception of nature as co-produced by natural and social processes (Riseth 2017). Norwegian law emphasizes the relation between nature and culture and their vital national significance. It puts stress on sustainable nature use and claims careful weighing of conservation interests against economic, social, and cultural needs, including those of Sami people (Allard 2017).

Pasvik Nature Reserve (19.1 km^2) was established in 1993 and it extends on the Russian side of the border into Pasvik Zapovednik. Norway's nature reserves are intended to protect representative types of environment that are nearly intact, as well as serve for education and research. Nature reserve is the strictest form of protection in the Norwegian Nature Conservation Act. Pasvik Nature Reserve is classified in category IUCN Ib: Wilderness Area: managed for wilderness protection. It comes closest to the Pasvik Zapovednik in terms of its objectives and high level of restriction. In such areas, human activities are limited, with the exception of hunting, fishing, and berry picking (Allard 2017).

Pasvik Zapovednik (147.27 km^2) is situated in the Municipality of Pechenga, Murmansk Region. It was established in 1992 by Russia's Governmental Resolution No. 493,

and the Order of the Ministry of the Nature Resources No. 202. Its territory is under the supervision of the Federal Ministry of Nature Resources. The Zapovednik is a Federal state budget organization, with a director, staff, acting scholars, and its own guards assuring that restrictions are observed.

The main objective of Pasvik Zapovednik is the protection of pine forests, monitoring northern ecosystems, and protecting wetlands of global importance, micro populations of elk, brown bear, golden eagle, and waterfowl, and cultural heritage. Pasvik Zapovednik can be compared to IUCN category Ia: Strict Nature Reserve/Wilderness Protection Area managed for science or wilderness protection (Ojanlatva 2008). Russia joined the IUCN in the 1980s, but maintains its traditionally established taxonomy. The most common categories are *zapovednik* (enclosed, protected natural zone) and *zakaznik* (an area where certain economic activities, like logging, mining, grazing, hunting, are limited; this corresponds to IUCN III, Natural Monument, or VI, Protected Area with Sustainable Use of Natural Resources). Zapovednik is the oldest category of protected territory, and predates Soviet times even though the first state-organized zapovedniks appeared right before and after the revolution to restore species threatened by extinction, such as sable and wild reindeer. They reflect ideas of fortress conservation, grounded in a dualistic understanding that nature and society constitute separate domains and the purpose of nature protection is to preserve "pristine nature" from the destruction and threats of society and for further scientific exploration (Weiner 2000). Fortress conservation often involves direct state management and control over land and nearby populations.

2.2 Institutions of cooperation in Pasvik-Inari regional governance

Key to cooperation are annual meetings between all partners: (1) from Norway—the Office of the Finnmark County Governor, and the Directorate of Nature Management; (2) from Finland—the Natural Heritage Services in Lapland, the Ministry of the Environment, and the Lapland Regional Environment Centre; (3) and from Russia—the State Committee on the Environment, the Committee on Natural Resources, the Pechenga Regional Administration, and the administration of Pasvik Zapovednik (Trusova 2011). In 2008, in relation to the establishment of the Europarc, an Advisory Board has been appointed consisting of the representatives of the main partners, and regional and local authorities of the three countries. Russian border police, industrial companies, tourism operators, and other stakeholders also take part in the annual Advisory Board meetings.

Annual meetings and joint project work have developed three key documents: Cooperation Agreement, Action Plan, and Guiding Rules for Cooperation. In January 2008, the Cooperation Agreement was signed by Lapland Natural Heritage Services of Metshällitus (Finland), Pasvik Zapovednik administration (Russia), and the Finnmark County Governor (Norway). This agreement formulated main areas of cooperation: to preserve the unique values of the area, identified as its wilderness characteristics and diverse natural, cultural, and historical values; and raising its profile as a sustainable tourism destination (Ojanlatva 2008, p. 39). The cooperation agreement reveals differences among the bodies and mechanisms of management of the protected territories: Pasvik Zapovednik has its own administration, making it an autonomous organization accountable to higher levels in the government bureaucracy following Soviet legacies that dominated social and cultural aspects of development of former Soviet states, including Russia (Lankina et al. 2016a; Iman et al. 2022; Nazarov and Obydenkova 2022). In contrast, the areas in Norway and Finland are managed directly by regional administrators, and in the Finnish case—also by

a state-organized and managed forestry company (Metshällitus). The latter are subject to requirements about openness and public oversight. Because the signing organization for Russia is on a lower administrative level than the represented Finnish and Norwegian signatories, it suggests a lower level of commitment according to Russian understandings. By extension, the status of this agreement and its binding force in Russia is also lower. The same applies to the level of accountability of Russian administration and transparency of their actions, because there is little public access to information and less media freedom to criticize policy-makers' decisions about land use and tourism (Demchuk et al. 2022; Mišić and Obydenkova 2022).

The Action Plan also specifies the objective of promoting cooperation at all levels – between administrators, scholars, border authorities, municipalities, stakeholders, tourism entrepreneurs, and local residents; preserving and popularizing natural and cultural values of the area; improving infrastructure and accessibility; contributing to local economic development through sustainable nature tourism. The Action Plan and the Principles of Sustainable Nature Tourism in Pasvik-Inari specify further strategies and actions for implementing these goals (Plan 2008, p. 55). Cooperation in research and biodiversity preservation is represented by several joint projects where partners have focused on harmonizing monitoring methods for core species such as brown bear, golden eagle, and ants (Beddari et al. 2020). The EU funded project *Promotion of nature protection and sustainable nature tourism in the Inari-Pasvik area (2006–2008)* resulted in the Action Plan and Principles. The project aimed to promote and develop sustainable tourism within nature conservation and strengthen cooperation via an application for an Europarc license (Ojanlatva 2008).

The wider public is informed through the website of the trilateral park which is translated into four languages (Russian, Norwegian, Finnish, and English). Infrequent open events are also organized, such as the 15th anniversary of Pasvik Nature Reserve and Pasvik Zapovednik that was celebrated by crossing the bordering Pasvik River. Also, an annual festive skiing event takes place, where skiers cross the national borders (Race 2017).

The listed institutions for cooperation, the Europarc Certificate, and the strategies for implementation of the cooperation goals elaborated in the Action Plan, indicate that partners seek to develop long-term relations. Partners also monitor cooperation and seek ways to improve it. An analysis, for example, has been carried out to identify strengths and weaknesses of the cooperation and design strategies for improvement. The major challenge recognized was the differences in legislation and management of the national protected areas, and the non-standardized restrictions on anthropogenic activity. Differences in the ways that projects are managed due to differing cultures of administration have been identified. The internal exchange of information is affected by a lack of understanding, as there is no shared language between the three countries (Plan 2008).

Below, I expand the analysis of regional cooperation grounded in a critical evaluation of data about tourism in Pasvik Zapovednik, and the trespassing of reindeer from Norway into Russia. Before this, however, I introduce Europarc and discuss further its impacts on Pasvik-Inari.

3 Europarc and its impacts on Pasvik-Inari

Europarc Federation works to enhance practical nature conservation and sustainable development of biodiversity in Europe. Its vision is that a holistic landscape approach should be applied in managing biodiversity, natural and cultural heritage (Europarc n.d.). The Federation was established in 1977, at a time of political and economic crisis, when human pressures on the environment were also recognized (Europarc n.d.). Members of Europarc Federation are 385 governmental and non-governmental organizations from 36 countries. Europarc's Transboundary Parks Program is a certification system that promotes transboundary cooperation between European protected areas. It seeks to facilitate common action for nature protection and sustainable development in Europe across physical national borders, and virtual administrative, political and cultural divisions. It particularly tackles cases where complex historical predicaments hinder dialog and cooperation (Europarc n.d.).

There are four elements to the system: the Europarc Basic Standards for trans-border cooperation; a verification process carried out by external verifiers; the formal certification as a Europarc Transboundary Area if the application was successful; and the renewal of the certificate every five years (Europarc n.d.). The advantages of the Transboundary Parks Program for the member-protected areas are increased mutual information flows (brochures, guided tours), developing a shared vision for cooperation, holding regular multilateral meetings, improving biodiversity-monitoring and data exchange, and developing shared action plans (Europarc n.d.). The application is open to European protected areas involved in trans-border cooperation, that are members of Europarc. Even though two protected territories and one NGO from Russia are accepted at the Federation, no Russian governmental organization is a member, which influences also how Pasvik Zapovednik's role in the Europarc is discussed in Russia, as I show below.

In a Nordic context, the benefits of the Certificate are more obvious and predictable: higher status, political mobilization and accumulation of social capital nationally and internationally, and advertising (Pasvik-Inari Trilateral Park n.d.). Pasvik Zapovednik has a section on its webpage about the certificate and also names some of its benefits, like anticipation of international projects, joint nature monitoring activities, and international meetings and events (Pasvik n.d.). The sustainability and tourism that are emblematic for the Europarc brand are less emphasized in Russia.

Pasvik-Inari Europarc Certificate is little known in the Kola Peninsula. The trilateral park has little visibility in public space due to its relatively recent creation, and peripheral location near the national border. This location also makes it hard to access for both Russian and foreign tourists—it is in a restricted border zone where no one can travel without a permit issued by the border security authorities. The Europarc has been only infrequently a subject in Russian media releases. A few news reports in 2013 mention the first renewal of the certificate five years after its granting (TV21 2013). What is remarkable in these notes, is the emphasis on the proximity of the park to the notorious town of Nikel (Norseth 1994). Near it are located facilities of AO Kol'skaia GMK—a daughter company of the Norilsk Nickel, one of the biggest mining and smelting companies in Russia, and the world's biggest exporter of nickel. Nikel is often presented as one of the biggest polluters in the Arctic and an ecological threat. The city and its vicinity present a picture of nature devastated by industrial pollution. Nikel has been discussed as one of the most serious challenges to both biodiversity conservation and nature tourism in Pasvik Zapovednik (Aamlid and Myking 2010; Trans-Parc-Net 2012). In the contemporary political context of

Russia, however, ecologists and environmentalists cannot freely express criticism against powerful business actors such as Norilsk Nickel (Vladimirova 2017b). Like other industrial companies in Russia, AO Kol'skaia GMK has a detailed plan on its homepage for sustainability and ecological projects, and replacement of old smelters and technologies with new environmentally friendly ones. There it emphasizes that it works in tight cooperation with Pasvik Zapovednik and currently does not pollute its territory (Nornickel n.d.).

Kol'skaia GMK has several plants in Murmansk Region and is one of the biggest employers, so regional politicians have no interest to take the side of nature conservation against it. By emphasizing that Nickel's proximity is not a hindrance to a Europarc certification, politicians pursue the goal of reconciling the conflicting values of nature preservation and industrial pollution. The internationally renowned Europarc brand for cooperation for nature conservation and sustainability is being incorporated into a rhetoric that justifies the continuing exploitation of nature without enough concern to environmental destruction and health risks. In this way, regional environmental governance becomes a tool for increasing the legitimacy and popular support of powerful political and economic actors (Obydenkova and Libman 2019). As part of the region, the zapovednik is associated with the high standards represented in the Europarc Certificate. Nickel pollution is being normalized and reconciled with nature conservation goals. One example of a concrete instantiation of this rhetoric can be seen in the joint opening of the Zapovednik Pasvik information center in the town of Nikel in 2017 by the Murmansk administration and AO Kol'skaia GMK (Photoexhibition 2020).

4 Sustainable tourism in Pasvik-Inari: an area for cooperation?

Following the holistic Europarc vision, the Pasvik-Inari homepage stresses that tourism is compatible with preserving nature and important for developing sustainable and diverse rural economies, especially for local and Indigenous communities (Pasvik-Inari Trilateral Park n.d.). The joint project *Promotion of Nature Protection and Sustainable Nature Tourism in the Inari-Pasvik Area* has as its main objective combining nature conservation with sustainable tourism through cross-border cooperation (Plan 2008). The project was coordinated by the Finnish side, and the coordinator represented the Siida Sami Museum in Inari. Siida museum has a history since 1960s, and is a popular tourist destination—in 2018, it had 117 079 visitors (Siida n.d.). The project was designed according to Nordic standards for democracy, equality, and respect for Indigenous cultures and people. It applied a participatory approach, with local interest groups in Northern Finland interviewed to identify stakeholders and ideas, wishes and concerns in relation to developing nature and culture tourism in Pasvik-Inari (Plan 2008). Later on, the compiled ideas and project objectives were presented to Norwegian and Russian partners. Even though the project is grounded in a participatory approach, it did not reflect the needs and ideas about tourism of Russian interlocutors, or reach Sami communities in Russia.

More specific objectives of the project, in addition to the preparation of the Action Plan, and Principles for Sustainable Nature Tourism, were the production of facilities, information materials, and public events that would popularize the area. The Pilola Wilderness Trail was built between Finland and Norway, in consultation with the local population (Ojanlatva 2008). On the Russian side, four routes were planned, of which only two were partially completed. Those routes were coordinated primarily with the regional and federal authorities—the Pechenga District Administration, the Murmansk Region Nature

Resources Committee, and the Ministry of Natural Resources (Ojanlatva 2008). While visitor surveys were conducted in Finland and Norway in order to measure the impact of the project results, they were not extended to Russia, because tourism in Pasvik Zapovednik, even though slowly increasing (from 260 visitors in 2003 to 600 in 2006), was still too small (Plan 2008). The zapovednik offers three tours, lasting from one to three hours, and a guided tour of the exhibit at the visitor center in Nikel (Pasvik). Prices for the tours vary between 950 and 730 RUB (since May 2022), while the visit to the center costs 2000 RUB. Tourism is clearly not generating significant income for the zapovednik, local population, or the region. Visiting the zapovednik is also complicated and time consuming. The webpage advises that a tour is booked at least a month in advance. The next step is filling an application to the border authorities to issue an access permission to the territory of the zapovednik. For Russian citizens, it might take two weeks and for foreigners—around a month (Pasvik). Access to the zapovednik of non-authorized persons or walking outside of the marked routes or without supervision by a guide is banned.

Cooperation in tourism across the Pasvik-Inari Russian border is hindered by the visa regime between EU and Russia, the expanding border zone and the insecure legal basis for tourism businesses in Russia (Plan 2008). In my previous research on tourism in Murmansk Region (between 2008 and 2016), interviews with tourist operators revealed claims by the regional administration about supporting the development of tourism as an important economic sector in the Arctic. These promises were only occasionally fulfilled in relation to investments in infrastructure outside of the regional center, Murmansk. Informal conversations with tour operators and municipal administrators show that the regional authorities are not very strict in monitoring and limiting illegal tour operators, nor checking income from tourist business. Leaving space for informal economy was emphasized as a way to support tourism, and circumvent badly designed laws. The majority of tourists coming to the area are Russian residents from the bigger cities, primarily from Moscow and St. Petersburg (Mikhailov 2019). The most popular tours are two or three-day snow scooter (in the winter) and boat (in the summer) trips in the tundra and forest areas. Fishing tourism is also an attraction. Tourists are primarily interested in what interviewees described as adventure tourism in nature (Vladimirova 2011).

Another challenge to tourism that has been overlooked in Pasvik-Inari cooperation is the Russian tradition of fortress conservation that influences perceptions and practices in Pasvik Zapovednik. Soviet authorities had inconsistent attitudes and policies about nature conservation with periods of contestation of strict nature preservation and of its purposes due to a dominant materialist ideology that nature should benefit society (Shtil'mark 2006). Nevertheless, fortress conservation ideas are fairly strong, and hinder inclusion of local and Indigenous communities and tourism. In the early twentieth century, some environmentalists argued that Indigenous people should be protected as noble savages and natural land guardians in situ with their environment (Arzyutov 2021). These ideas did not gain popularity and only were briefly revived in the 1990s in the project of establishing the cross-border park Beringia that would protect vulnerable island landscapes, biodiversity, and Indigenous cultures of the Bering region. This project did not materialize in the planned format, as I discuss below (Krupnik 2016). Fortress conservation ideas are particularly strong in Murmansk Region, where Laplandskii Zapovednik, one of the earliest Soviet protected territories, was organized in 1930, on the initiative of scholars and a local forester, who observed how deforestation and the building of the railway permanently damaged the area and depleted many species (Bruno 2017). Laplandskii Zapovednik played an important role in the formation of the ideas of zapovednik and fortress nature conservation in USSR and also reveals that to a certain degree Soviet nature conservation was a bottom-up

process negotiated and shaped by heterogeneous discourses (Shtil'mark 2006). Occasionally, local communities had some access to the process of decision-making, but it was often mediated through local officials (Arzyutov 2021).

Laplandskii Zapovednik has only recently opened its "buffer" zone for visitors, who are only allowed to follow the marked paths (Laplandskii n.d.). Nature conservation and nature tourism in the Soviet context had desperate origins in time (the former earlier than the twentieth century, and the latter in the late 1950s), conflicting purposes and different geographies (Roe 2020). Inspired by American parks, Soviet scholars and environmentalists have early on initiated discussion about their creation in Russia, but first parks were established only in the 1970s and 1980s. Despite increased interest in the 2000s, and Vladimir Putin's legislative effort to combine the concept of park and zapovednik in order to attract private investment in tourism, success has been limited (op. cit.). For example, in a program on a Murmansk TV Channel in 2012, Pasvik Zapovednik's director comments on the comparison between tourism in Norway and Russia, explaining that in his view paths should not go through the reserved area, like in Norway, but only around it, as they interfere with the goal of preserving nature. He does not recognize that his view contradicts the main premises of sustainable tourism, and the values expressed in the Pasvik-Inari Action Plan (Trans-Parc-Net 2012).

Another disjunction between Zapovednik Pasvik and the Nordic partners concerns cultural heritage. In the Finnish and Norwegian sides of the park, Indigenous culture constitutes part of what is being preserved. The development of Indigenous economy is also targeted, both by accommodating reindeer grazing within the protected territories, and by the development of sustainable tourism alongside with biodiversity preservation. This reflects the vision of the Europarc Federation for a holistic approach evoked by the notion of landscape, where nature is seen as co-produced by natural processes and anthropogenic activities.

In a webinar on *Transboundary Cooperation for Nature and Local Communities*, from 2017, the Europarc Net presented among other case studies, the Pasvik-Inari Trilateral Park. The presenter emphasized the promotion of dialog and common understandings for the shared goal of protecting the forest between different cultures: Northern, Inari and Skolt Sami, Finns, Norwegian, and Russians (Europarc n.d.). The website of the Pasvik Zapovednik also names these cultures under the rubric of cultural heritage. However, there is no further information about their role and history in the area (Pasvik). Sami were alienated from the place through a Soviet history of forced displacement from territories along the border due to militarization (Afanasyeva 2018). Cultural heritage is briefly named in the webpage, without much detail. Laplandskii Zapovednik, too, on the webpage makes the erroneous claim that no Sami have ever lived on its territory (Laplandskii n.d.). The abovementioned Beringia Ethnic Park project, that was being planned in the same time with Pasvik Zapovednik, in the turn between 1980–1990s, and as part of Soviet cooperation with the West, demonstrates that other categories of protected areas could be considered to also protect Indigenous culture. Beringia Park project received the support of Moscow politicians and scholars, but was resisted by the regional authorities, who finally established the park but excluded from its objectives protection of Indigenous culture (Krupnik 2016). In Murmansk Region, Zakaznik Seid''iavvr' is an example of Sami historical heritage and contemporary reindeer economy singled out together with natural heritage and biodiversity as targets for preservation. The zakaznik was established in 2003 as a joint project of Sami and environmentalist NGOs in Russia and Scandinavia, and the local administration, but Sami reindeer herding economy was only briefly practiced within its territory. Even though it is a popular visitors' destination, it is not a resource for Indigenous

economic development (Vladimirova 2017a). Due to Indigenous people's exclusion from nature conservation and the repressive politics in Russia toward environmental activism in recent decades, Sami activists whom I interviewed in 2014–2015, did not express solidarity with environmentalism. They show skepticism that nature tourism can be compatible with Indigenous economy, and instead point to its destructive side-effects, like pollution, destruction of landscape, poaching, and interference with reindeer husbandry (Vladimirova 2017b).

Nordic Sami and scholars have condemned state governments for imposing domestically colonial rule, including through the establishment of protected natural territories that displaced Indigenous people and erased their history from their ancestral lands (Andersson et al. 2021). In response to such criticism, while strictly protected areas still exist (for example the Malla Strict Nature Preserve in Finnish Lapland), the recent trend is toward decentralization of nature conservation governance and increasing participation of local and Indigenous communities. Many protected territories are now open for traditional subsistence economy, culture preservation, and sustainable tourism. This kind of governance through consultation and direct participation of Indigenous communities while acknowledging Sami political and procedural rights helps consolidate existing governance and management structures and power asymmetries and precludes radical questioning and fundamental reconceptualization of nature-society relations (Reimerson 2021). Such criticism has not yet occurred in Russia, and the current political situation precludes it.

Decentralization and public–private partnership are central to the green economy and its push toward neoliberal nature conservation, which envisages the parallel preservation of ecosystems with their sustainable use to generate local development. Neoliberal nature conservation has been a hot topic in conservation debates and research for the last 15 years, and it constitutes practices and concepts, both local and global, which integrate nature and its conservation into global capitalism. Nature that was primarily governed by states and constituted some form of state or communal property is increasingly being subjected to different forms of economic valuation and use through the application of market-based logics and instruments such as ecosystem services and natural capital accounting. In a parallel way, neoliberalization transforms nature into a marketable commodity and a site of capital accumulation and economic profit. Such processes are justified by a belief that nature can only be preserved and valued if incorporated into the market economy. Critical scholarship has traced multiple cases of enclosure, privatization, marketization, securitization, and land grabbing in the name of green economy and nature preservation through mainstreaming of market-based instruments, expansion of public–private partnership, and the normalization of private interest's decisive role in nature governance (Apostolopoulou et al. 2021; Fletcher et al. 2015).

Russian nature conservation is being transformed by incoming neoliberal ideas and practices (Müller 2014). In Pasvik Zapovednik, like in Hibiny Park in the same region, neoliberal ideas have the strongest and most immediate impact on political rhetoric (Vladimirova 2017b). Regional cooperation seems to have influenced how Pasvik Zapovednik is being represented on the internet, primarily in foreign languages, and less in Russian for domestic audiences. The emphasis on tourism comes from global neoliberal ideas (Roe 2020), even though the notion of sustainability is less prominent in Russian representations of tourism (Maklakova 2016). Pasvik-Inari Park as a region helps dissemination and sharing of ideas. However, not all values are equally shared by members. Holistic approach to nature conservation that makes protected natural territories inclusive to local and Indigenous communities and their sustainable economic development are left out in Russia. In the next section I show how this causes conflict when reindeer cross the national border.

5 Reindeer trespassing state borders

According to a legal agreement between Norway and Russia from 1977, when domestic reindeer cross the border, they should be driven back. This agreement and the practices that it motivates have raised many debates in Russia. Russian news reports indicate the scale of the problem: in the spring of 2007, 362 reindeer have been returned to their owners in Norway (Pogranichniki 2007).

The Norwegian conception of sustainable use of protected natural territories for reindeer grazing contradicts Russian ideas of conservation of "pristine nature." Not only do reindeer destroy vulnerable lichen, grass and tree species in Pasvik Zapovednik, according to Russian reports, but the herders who collect the reindeer on snowmobiles violate bird and animal habitats (Vasilenko and Bliznetskaya 2021). Norway has been accused of not implementing the clause of the 1977 agreement that requires each side to take measures to prevent animals trespassing the border, and that it does not pay regularly the stipulated damage compensation (Pogranichniki 2007).

Europarc's goal is to implement conceptions of nature and approaches to conservation that transcend state borders. This mission is undermined in recent years by mass-scale global construction of material fences and legal borders, justified as a prevention to booming immigration. Biologists speak of fence ecology as a new field of study of the positive and negative effects when physical boundaries constrict biodiversity (McInturff et al. 2020). Scholars warn that this might lead to the end of transboundary nature conservation (Linnell et al. 2016). Theorists have offered new perspectives on borders as processes of social construction and material infrastructures that have profound impact on humans and non-human nature (Netz 2004). Ecologists state that animal mobility takes place in social worlds and spatial relations and is shaped by habitats, geological and climatic features, and human infrastructures, including borders and fences. This research is premised on conceptualizing animals as subjects that move and react in relation to the world and experience their life activities subjectively and affectively, and on multispecies research methodology (Hodgetts and Lorimer 2020).

Building on these ideas, the present study suggests that reindeer mobility and ideas about reindeer are governed by human created borders, national, and others. Borders in fortress conservation, which are imagined as impermeable and also containing and isolating protected biodiversity, become foundational of conceptualizing reindeer. Pasvik Zapovednik administrators represent trespassing reindeer as a transgression of the designed model of conserved biodiversity and blame it to the form of governance of protected natural territories in Norway. Pasvik Nature Reserve is under a management board which includes representatives of the municipalities (the governor), representatives of regional councils, and members of the Sami Parliament. The problem, in Russian view, is that management board is more likely to prioritize the interests of the population in the area, who also elect the local government and the Sami Parliament. Such interests may not favor the goals of nature conservation, but prioritize other forms of resource use and tourist businesses (Gulbrandsen 2012; Vasilenko and Bliznetskaya 2021). The Russian interpretation is grounded in fortress conservation assumptions and the dominant model of governance of protected natural territories where the central government is expected to take control and responsibility to preserve nature. This view is controversial and also not in harmony with the context of Post-Soviet state practices for developing the fossil fuel economy at any price and the level to which the latter has taken over the leadership of the state (Danilenko 2013).

First the COVID-19 pandemic and now the war in Ukraine have posed multiple challenges to international regional collaborations in relation to climate change and the environmental agenda (e.g., Obydenkova 2022c). For example, in April, 2022, the Norwegian reindeer herder Egil Kalliainen expressed his concern in a Swedish Radio forecast that he has not been able to retrieve his reindeer from Russian territory since 2020, which causes serious economic loss for his family (Labba and Ahlén 2022b). Egil Kalliainen sees Indigenous people as victims of geopolitics. The vice-director of the Pasvik Zapovednik assured that the Zapovednik continues to provide access, but the Russian border security, who should issue permits to cross the national border and monitor the process is not responsive (Labba and Ahlén 2022b).

Jens Høilund, a border police inspector, describes the procedure of retrieving reindeer: at an appointed time, Norwegian border security together with Sami owners are met at the border by a Russian representative. A territory is marked, within which the Sami can seek their reindeer. In 2020, this procedure was complicated by a requirement from the Russian side for documentation, including photos, of the trespassing reindeer. This requirement is difficult for border police or Sami owners to fulfill. Jens Høilund explains that the state border within the Pasvik Zapovednik is more heavily guarded than other sections, which explains the demands to and obstacles for Sami herders. He also hints that because of the heavily guarded border zone on the Russian side, wildlife from Russia normally does not cross into Norway whereas Norway has no border zone and its border is more permeable for animals. Different ideas and functions attributed to borders in this case create a sense that the process of containing and returning reindeer and wildlife between Russia and Norway is not reciprocal (Labba and Ahlén 2022a).

The construction and governance of human-animal relations is an arena for state power and control over Indigenous people (Anderson and Nuttall 2004; Anderson et al. 2017). Relations between humans and reindeer have been described and regulated through different metaphors, such as domestication, tameness, productivity, rationalization, and intensive and extensive breeding. These metaphors have produced multiple qualitative and moral representations that marginalize both reindeer (like wild or feral,) and Indigenous people (as inefficient, primitive, with loose morals and bad work ethic) (Vladimirova 2014). Corinna Röver explores one of these stable representations in Sweden: through the imposition of legally and scientifically established geographical delimitations of movement (borders), the authorities represent reindeer as trespassers (2021). This specific representation has not been studied in the Russian context, but anthropologists have written about reindeer trespassing and being blamed as too wild to be satisfactorily domesticated in contrast to cattle, and about herders as lazy, irresponsible or unskilled to take proper care in guarding their herds (Vladimirova 2014). Röver (2021) relates this representation to state colonization and domination over Indigenous people, through the creation of borders and partition of land into different categories. The role of protected natural territories in Russian domination over Indigenous people is understudied and I have no space here to give it due attention. The commentaries of the Russian side on trespassing reindeer, however, can be better understood within the history of domination over Indigenous people through representations of human-reindeer relations. Identifying domestic reindeer with nature preservation is challenging to understand or implement for Russian partners of the Europarc.

Debates about reindeer trespassing the national border challenge the Europarc value of the unity of nature across human-imposed borders, and reveal a representation of the Pasvik-Inari as a zone of increased risk both for state security and for wildlife. The zapovednik webpage has a section on security that is much longer than the one about heritage. It

explains that the zapovednik is in close cooperation with regional border and state security organs, because of its border location (Pasvik). Border and state security representatives are also members of the Advisory Board, and participate as stakeholders at annual meetings and other events (Plan 2008). They represent an important level of regional governance. By being part of this cooperation, they are silently accepted as legitimate international actors in nature conservation, and nature conservation thus becomes a domain for securitization.

6 Conclusions

Stretching through Norway, Russia, and Finland, Pasvik-Inari trilateral park shows a low level of integration in regional environmental governance. Its strongest centripetal forces are the shared values of preserving biodiversity, and the Advisory Board and regulating documents, such as the Action Plan. This study indicates that environmental cooperation is a shared value, but other values and ideas about the benefits of cooperation differ among the three partners due to historical differences in environmental management models and political regimes. On the Finnish side, cooperation has increased chances for project grants, and the Europarc certification contributes to the development of sustainable tourism. Norway profits by developing sustainable tourism in its parts of Pasvik-Inari. In Norway and Finland, acknowledgment of Indigenous communities as legitimate stakeholders in the protected natural territories with agency in local politics and governance has been strengthened. In these countries, regional environmental governance has helped popularize new norms and values among societal actors and politicians. It also continues to raise social awareness about more fair and inclusive resource management according to standards for Indigenous rights, sustainability, and nature protection (Conca 2012; Libman and Obydenkova 2014; Selin 2012).

Unfortunately, regional cooperation has so far not been successful in promoting sustainable land use in Pasvik Zapovednik in Russia. In line with studies on historical legacies on public and state attitude (Lankina et al. 2016a; Libman and Obydenkova 2020; Iman et al. 2022), and marginalization of Indigenous rights, Sami are not acknowledged as stakeholders in nature conservation in Russia. As a consequence, regional cooperation has not been successful in empowering them, raising their status on national level, or raising popular awareness about their cultural and land rights.

The most obvious benefit for the Russian government from the Europarc certificate is reaffirming internationally Russia's role in protecting nature in order to improve the country's image and legitimize its autocratic regime globally. Cooperation has also raised the status of Russian scholars and facilitated involvement in international projects, as well as attracted public attention to Pasvik Zapovednik. Positive outcomes from regional cooperation have raised awareness among Russian citizens about nature conservation in a region that is heavily damaged by industrial development in the area of Nikel. Although largely rhetorical engagement, such activity has elsewhere been demonstrated to increase social awareness and to result in public protests in other environmental conflicts not only in the Arctic but also in China and in some post-Communist states like Kazakhstan (Demchuk et al. 2022; Lavelle 2021). On the other hand, politicians take advantage of regional cooperation in justifying their neglect for environmental pollution and giving priority to industrial development and short-term economic benefits (Ambrosio et al. 2022; Obydenkova 2022c; Hall et al. 2022).

Due to the low integration of Pasvik-Inari Park, Soviet historical legacies, and the consolidation of Russian autocracy which also leads to securitization of Murmansk Region as a border zone to Europe, Pasvik Zapovednik cannot develop tourism to the same extent as Finland and Norway. Pasvik Zapovednik is under the bureaucratic control of a number of federal and regional organizations. Due to limited data, it is hard to delimit the degree of control exercised by each organization, but nature conservation is currently managed by the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment. Ongoing transformation of Russian government organizations further complicates the task of understanding decision making. A revealing example is that since 1990, responsibilities currently vested in the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment have moved eight times. The constant shifting of the roles of federal and regional offices undermines zapovednik administration, and limits international cooperation. Interference from different state organizations, such as those for border and state security, introduces conflicting agendas into Pasvik-Inari regional cooperation. These agendas and concerns do not always align with Europarc's goal of promoting holistic nature conservation alongside sustainable development for local and Indigenous people.

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Data availability Data and materials are not available publicly due to the confidential character of some of them. This is a common practice in anthropology.

Declarations

Ethics approval and consent to participate Until the present, Russia has no formal requirements for ethical clearance when work with human subjects is conducted. At the time when anthropological field research used in the article was conducted, Uppsala University required no formal clearance and a National Ethical board did not exist in Sweden. Research has been conducted following the document Good Research Practice published by the Swedish National Science Foundation. I have also followed strictly the recommendations for ethical research in Anthropology published by leading professional organizations in the field, like the American Anthropological Association, The Anthropological Association of Britain, and later the guides for social science research issued by EU. Research participants have given their consent orally, after careful description of the research objectives and topic, and the possible implications from it.

Consent for publication Research participants have given their consent for publication of the research findings.

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