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"When 'The Environment' Comes To Visit: Local Environmental Knowledge in the Far North of Russia"

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Based on field research in villages and towns in the Komi Republic (northeastern European Russia), this article compares the perception of the environment with environmental knowledge, and examines their interrelations in local contexts. An individual's perception of the environment is embedded in his/her everyday engagement with the surroundings ('the environment' as seen from within). Environmental knowledge is of more cognitive character: it originates mainly from outside the context of everyday life and is imparted via various forms of communication ('The Environment' as seen from the outside). From the interplay of these two levels arises what we call local environmental knowledge, a kind of knowledge which has its own moral and symbolic dimension within the social, cultural and political setting. Similarly, the concept of environmentalism is increasingly recognised as a wide diversity of 'green' views and actions rather than as a single project of a globally consistent normative character; thus there is a need to examine the contextuality of environmental concern. Our findings explain the failure of the 'information deficit' model, according to which the dissemination of scientific knowledge about environmental problems should result in local inhabitants changing their attitudes towards 'The Environment'. Instead, our findings support the insight that, rather than accepting environmental knowledge from external sources as a factual given, individuals restate it in terms of their everyday life contexts and local discourses about socio-political issues.

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