

## Environmental issues in Russian cities

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**Environmental issues in Russian cities:  
towards the understanding regional and national mass media discourse**

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**Abstract:**

Based on the media discourse analysis of twelve national and six regional Russian online mass media, the study provides critical reflections on the environmental media coverage across two Russian cities following environmental themes including air and water pollution, waste, sustainable transport, energy, environmental civic engagement, and organic food. The findings suggest that the commonalities of the media coverage include the distribution of diagnostic and prognostic framing of motivational, informational articles over analytical, and the domination of discourses of 'sustainable innovations', 'modernisation', 'environmental alarmism' and 'environmental conflicts'. The differences include the higher coverage of the city of Moscow and pro-governmental journalists in the national media in contrast to coverage in the regional press where the voices of environmental activists and non-governmental organisations are presented equally alongside those of the pro-governmental journalists. Collectively, the results demonstrate that media coverage does not accurately reflect the complex issues of urban stakeholders' relationship with environmental conflicts which are inevitable in the context of Russia's continuous reliance on the hydrocarbon sector.

**Keywords:** Environment, mass media, media discourse, Russia, Moscow

**Introduction**

Media communications on environmental issues have been a prominent topic for multidisciplinary studies for many decades. The interest in the study of media coverage of environmental issues among scholars can be explained by the crucial role the media plays in bringing the environmental risks (e.g. climate change, ozone depletion, etc.) to the attention of the general public (Antilla, 2005; Gurwitt, Malkki, & Mitra, 2017); in shaping perceptions and

reactions to the danger posed by environmental risks (Lockwood, 2009); and, in serving as a mediator between the public, science, business and policymakers (Pidgeon, & Butler, 2009). There have been studies on the factors that affect media coverage (Dispensa, & Brulle, 2003), the influence of news sources (Antilla, 2005), urgency (Major, & Atwood, 2004a, pp. 295–308), and claim-makers (Meindle, Alderman, & Waylen, 2002). However, as Comfort and Park's systematic review showed, most of the abovementioned environmental media research has been undertaken in high-income countries (Comfort, & Park, 2018). There is a lack of studies both in English and Russian language academia of environmental coverage in the Russian media landscape and in comparative analysis of media coverage in cross-sectoral (across environmental issues) and cross-geographical (across Russian cities) perspectives. As one of the key greenhouse gas emitters, Russia remains significantly under-studied in this regard.

There have been a few publications on such topics, such as Tokunaga's (2018) research on Arctic environmental discourse in Russia from the Russian domestic mass media; Rowe and Blakkisrud's (2014) research on the discourses of Arctic conflict and geopolitical competition; Ermolaeva's (2012) comparative study on the United States and Russian environmental agenda, in mass media; the research of Orlova (2016) and Golbraih (2015) on the construction of the environmental media agenda with a focus on the analysis of the 'public arenas', and also Poberezhskaya's (2016) study of the media coverage of climate change, etc.

Thus, the paper addresses this gap focusing on the representation of multi-themed environmental issues in Russian federal and local mass media such as air and water quality, green zones, sustainable transport and mobility, energy efficiency and energy preservation, food and environmentally friendly consumption. These topics were chosen because they are considered to be the key dimensions of sustainable cities transitions.

The cities of Moscow and Kazan were selected as case studies for our research. In both cities a large number of innovative local initiatives lead by municipalities and/or civil society aimed to improve the environment by reducing air and water pollution and providing efficient waste management and sustainable transport. Both cities have undergone significant recent urbanisation, and have higher than average levels of infrastructural advancements in comparison with other Russian large cities (Russian cities sustainability index, 2017). At the local government level, Moscow has several projects which aim to increase the number and quality of green zones, such as the ‘Green techno park’ and ‘City in a park’. The project ‘Smart city’ (*Umnyi Gorod*) in Moscow focuses on the creation of a new energy power system in the form of smart grids, and also the development of improved and automatised environmental monitoring. Kazan has projects such as ‘Kazan – territory of health’, and active development of parks, the introduction of electrobuses, and cycling trails. In both cities, civil society stands actively for the environment, including independent air pollution monitoring, protection of green and blue zones, protests against incineration plants and initiatives around sustainable food consumption, cycling etc. Observation of these initiatives enabled us to formulate a series of research objectives. Firstly, we aim to analyse how environmental mass media bulletins on topics such as air and water pollution, waste, sustainable transport, energy, and (organic) food are portrayed and framed in the Russian mass media and what frame(s) are dominant. Secondly, to compare how these issues are framed in mass media across two Russian megacities (Kazan and Moscow) and identify who are the main claim-makers. Finally, the paper will provide critical reflections on how these findings reveal the broader social-political, environmental and economic landscapes of mass media and environmental policy in post-soviet Russia. With these in mind, the authors thus seek to generate a better understanding of the current mass media portrayal of environmental issues in Russia.

## **Methodology**

The Putin presidency is often characterised by the centralisation of the media market (Becker, 2004; Zassoursky, 2016). Mass media in Russia has been harnessed to multiple and conflicting ideological interests. A lot of Russian mass media are challenged by various questions which arise because of economic and political dependency (Simons, 2015), leading to questions on how journalists are represented, and to whom they owe their labour, which still remain topical (Roudakova, 2017). This determined the approach of our research for the selection of ten national Russian online media which represent different perspectives: official (RIA Novosti, TASS, Rosiskaya Gazeta, informational agency RBC, Izvestiya, Kommersant) and alternative (Meduza, Vedomosti, Mosckovsky, Komsomolec, Novaya Gazeta). However, the authors agree with Boussalis, Coan and Poberezhskaya (2016) that in the Russian context the ideological orientation of the newspapers should be treated with caution, as the distinction between left, centre, and right is often blurred and must be considered in the context of media ownership structures and their governmental connections. All of the abovementioned newspapers are the most popular in Russia according to the numbers of their audience (Federal, 2019). The regional press represents six e-journals such as M24.ru, RIAMO, mospravda.ru, Business-Online, Tatar-inform, Vechernya Kazan. The given newspapers were chosen because they have varying circulation figures and target audiences. The items from online media were studied from September 2017 to December 2018. This timeframe was selected as the result of the completion of the Year of Ecology in Russia, when most of the programme's activities were finished. Articles were selected by the key words of main subthemes (see Table 1).

The study is based on qualitative exploratory analysis. In the first stage, in order to structure the material, we used qualitative discourse analysis by Mayring (1991), which aims to describe patterns or the whole core in the analysed text, where the subject of discourse is the

acknowledgement of key claim-makers, and the ways that the key issues for each research component are explained (main discourses) (Table 1). The method involves the following procedures: (1) Reduction of the material to a brief content by paraphrasing and preserving the leading categories of meanings. (2) Explication of the text, and explanation of the selected categories for task solving. (3) Structuring – filtering of text structure. (4) Description of the ‘core’ texts, consisting of the sum of discourses.

To study the content of the discourses, we employed framing analysis suggested by Benford and Snow (2000). Frames are the mental scheme which construct images and meanings of social phenomena which organise people’s experience and guide the collective subjects in their routine experiences (Snow, & Benford, 1992; Goffman, 1974). These mental structures, called the ‘collective actions frames’, are strategic, action-oriented beliefs and meanings which mobilise consensus in collective actions. There are three core framing techniques – ‘diagnostic’, ‘prognostic’, and ‘motivational’ framing. Diagnostic framing involves the identification of a problem and the attribution of responsibility, including the subjects for blaming. Prognostic framing involves the articulation of a proposed solution to the identified problem. Motivational framing involves the provision of a rationale for engaging in collective action and for sustaining participation (Benford, & Snow, 2000; Lindekilde, 2014). The functions of diagnostic, prognostic, and motivational framing are used by researchers to understand the multi-dimensional frames of sustainability. The analysis of the frames was undertaken by qualitative linguistic analysis via an induction technique by identifying keywords, metaphors, prototypical examples, analogies, and distinctions (Matthes, & Kohring, 2008; Coleman, & Dysart, 2005). The frame that was identified most often – the most prevalent frame – was coded as the master frame.

Frame credibility (Benford, & Snow, 2000) is based on the power relationships among the key claim-makers such as environmental groups, government officials, private industry and

scientists. Thus, in the media coverage we analysed who has access to the arena, who can participate in the discourse, and the issues that can be discussed (Cox, 2006). The groups who have more power have better chances to legitimatise their claims and play a more significant role in shaping the discourse about environmental images. The claims made by less powerful groups can be interpreted by more powerful groups in a way less powerful groups neither expect nor support (Ermolaeva, 2012).

Table 1. Results of the media analysis across sustainability issues

<b>Sustainability themes, total number of articles</b>	<b>Key words for search</b>	<b>Key claim-makers</b>	<b>Key discourses</b>	<b>Master frames</b>
Water and air quality (N = 720)	Air, air pollution, atmosphere, air pollution monitoring, waste burning plants, water, water pollution, water supply, water consumption	Authorities, citizens, experts in the field of environmental protection, Greenpeace, independent journalists	Local problems of water supply and water quality, adaptation and mitigation measures	Diagnostic, prognostic and motivation
Green zones (N = 188)	Greening, green areas, parks, landscaping	Authorities (city management), citizens, architects, businesses	Urban beautification programmes and greening as the achievements of the city management; territory development (city master plan) as a subject of discussion	Diagnostic and prognostic
Food products and environmentally friendly consumption (N = 120)	Eco-consumption, organic, organic food, eco-market, food-sharing	Business communities, independent journalists and bloggers	Food courts, healthy organic food, bio & organic standards, halal products, food waste, freegans, food chemistry industry	Diagnostic
Sustainable transport and mobility (N = 470)	Sustainable transport, sustainable mobility, environmentally friendly transport,	Municipal officials business communities, Greenpeace	Transition towards more sustainable transport, adoption of more ecologically friendly and cost-effective technologies, the implementation and	Diagnostic and prognostic



	e-mobile, electric bus, hybrid transport, gas engine transport, public transport, cycling, car sharing, automated vehicles, free parking spaces	independent journalists and bloggers	development of electric and gas engine transport, the development of unmanned vehicles, car sharing, bicycling, a system of light rails, introducing free of charge parking spaces and lowering the taxes on the environmentally friendly transport	
Energy efficiency and energy preservation (N = 300)	Energy, sustainable energy, renewable energy, energy efficiency, energy saving	Government authorities, businesses, energy companies	New gas economy, renewable resources, smart grid cities, energy efficiency, energy management, energy standards, programming energy, copengenisation, low carbon economy	Prognostic and motivation

## Results

### *Water and air quality*

Media reports on water issues reproduce the positions of authorities, local population and experts in the field of environmental protection from different points of view, defining water as a requirement for the well-being of human life. In particular, discussion covers local problems of water supply and water quality, measures for their prevention and elimination of the consequences of pollution, as well as the value of water as a resource and the importance of its conservation (Table 1).

Both in Moscow and Kazan the construction of the discourse on water resources is carried out mainly with the help of diagnostic framing and involves the disclosure of water and water infrastructure issues and confirmation of their resolution by responsible persons and organisations. The issues of water supply and water quality in the cities under consideration are thus deproblematised. However, there are differences in the completeness of the description of the steps taken and in the distribution of responsibility for their implementation.

Reports by the Moscow authorities on water problems, on the measures implemented and planned to resolve them are detailed, specific and unambiguous: the full cycle of developing the problem from its detection to elimination is described ('in the first half of 2018, 1 thousand 727 samples of bottled water were examined. About four percent of the samples did not meet the standards... 19 persons were found guilty and brought to administrative responsibility for violations'<sup>1</sup>), while journalists operate with numbers, data of forecasts and mathematical calculations ('by the end of 2018, 94% of residents of the Moscow region will be provided with quality drinking water at home'<sup>2</sup>).

In contrast to Moscow, in Kazan problems with water supply and water quality are resolved through complex interactions of government, environmental activists and ordinary citizens, and the effects of the measures announced are not so detailed and specific, but shown through the prism of expert and public opinions.

Air pollution was very topical in the mass media during the research period. This, first of all, could be explained by the matter of 'urgency' (Major, & Atwood, 2004a) because media reacted to current technological accidents which could impact on air pollution. These included incidents

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<sup>1</sup>'Almost 760 thousand rubles of fines were issued after checking bottled water in Moscow' m24, accessed August 9, 2018, <https://www.m24.ru/news/bezopasnost/09082018/41692>

<sup>2</sup> RIAMO, accessed July 4, 2018, <https://riamo.ru/article/297959/k-kontsu-2018-goda-doma-94-zhitelej-podmoskovya-obespechat-kachestvennoj-pitevoj-vodoj.xl>

such as hydrogen sulphide release in the waste station Yadrovo near Volokolamsk (Moscow oblast) on 21st of March 2018; the fire in the Moscow waste plant in Kapotnya; the conflict around the construction of the waste incineration plant near Kazan; and the alternative measurements of air quality by the Greenpeace activists in Moscow and Kazan (Meduza 2018, March 22).

Importantly, the mass media coverage of environmental issues related to waste burning plants were reflected extensively in civil activism. For example, leading Russian news agencies reported that citizens of Volokolamsk went to the meeting on 24th of March 2018 near the administration of a city with a demand to decrease the amount of waste which often comes from Moscow; there was also another demand to halt the construction of another waste incineration plant elsewhere. This opposition from the community was a result of hydrogen sulphide release in the waste station Yadrovo (Novaya Gazeta 2018, March 24). This action was initiated when over 50 children had to seek doctors' appointments as a result of atmospheric pollution, and some of them were later admitted to hospital. In connection with reports of the poisoning of children, the investigative committee began checking for signs of a crime under part 1 of article 251 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation (air pollution). Despite the attention of mass media to this issue, RIA Novosti and TASS did not present city citizens as main claim-makers but just represented the situation (TASS 2018, March 21; RIA 2018, March 22). The statement made by TASS that doctors did not confirm the impact of hydrogen sulphide release on children does not seem convincing.

The situation was different in Kazan, where plans for the construction of a waste incineration plant in the village of Osinovo, near Kazan, sparked protests by the general public and environmentalists, as well as numerous rallies and an angry crowd (see, for example, Business-Online 2018 August 18). The residents were primarily showing concern about the air pollution.

The Supreme Court of the Republic of Tatarstan obligated the Cabinet to conduct public hearings devoted to the subject (Shafieva 2018).

Mass media did not represent the factors of persistent atmospheric pollution in Russian cities, as a long-term problem was not viewed as ‘urgent’ and of interest to the general public. The attention to long-term air pollution was initiated by Greenpeace which claimed there was a need for independent monitoring; Greenpeace, together with volunteers, started independent monitoring in eight Russia cities including Kazan and Moscow. The official media of Moscow criticised this initiative, pointing out that the official information of the Moscow Department for Environmental Management and Protection is available to the public (RIAMO, 2017). Only Novaya Gazeta (Torop, 2018) and two sources in Tatarstan released detailed overviews of reports from independent monitoring (Yukhnovskaya 2018a; Business-Online 2018, October 16). Vedomosti published an interview with the director of the Greenpeace programme for research and expertise, Ivan Blokov, on the worsening of the environmental conditions and air quality and the liberalisation of harmful substances norms. Blokov suggested some measures which could improve the situation with air quality, therefore there were elements of a prognostic frame (Ruvinsky, 2018). Some of the publications in local mass media in Kazan talked about the role of the activists in measuring air pollution which could be part of a motivation frame.

The problem of air pollution caused by waste incineration plants shifted the focus of the media to the non-existent or poorly developed systems of waste management. Independent air checks indicated high air pollution around highways. Nevertheless, complex air pollution factors and the means of overcoming the growing levels of air pollution are not regularly covered in the media.

### ***Green zones***

The key discourses include the urban beautification programmes and greening as the achievements of the city management, mostly in a diagnostic and prognostic framing manner. In general, media articles are purely informational; they list conducted and planned events (similar to progress reports) and conflicting aspects of the matter are seldom brought up. The Moscow greening agenda is covered in the municipal and federal media, while the Kazan agenda is mostly present in the local media. In Moscow, improvement and regeneration are proposed under the Beautification programme called ‘My Street’, and this subject was extensively discussed in the city media. In Kazan, there were municipal projects starting with the Year of Parks in 2015, and later on a federal programme on ‘The Formation of a Comfortable Urban Environment in 2019–2024’ (Gorodsreda, 2019). Since 2015, urban parks and green zones have been under the special patronage of Tatarstan’s President who hired a special Presidents’ advisor on parks, Ms Natalya Fishman. After several years, under Fishmans’ leadership, several abandoned green zones became popular parks in Kazan. Mass media considers Tatarstan’s success in receiving federal funding for green zones is largely due to Fishmans’ actions. In 2018, the republic won several bids amounting to 920 million rubles overtaking Moscow oblast (250 million) (Business-Online 2018, July 3).

Moscow media contains separate sections (or tags) devoted to the issues of urban beautification; for example, the website of Moskovskaya Pravda can be navigated by the tags of #Greening, #My\_Street, #Urban\_Beautification; the website of Moscow 24 uses the same tags, and in addition #Parks, #Ecology, and #Renovation. All of these sections cover the achievements of the city management (V Mosckve..., 2017). RBK is the only media group to publish several critical notes as a part of diagnostic framing associated with the high cost and lengthiness of the programme, as well as the losses incurred by the catering businesses located on the streets that are included in the beautification system. The importance of having a more sensible approach to work and coordinating it with the citizens has also been a point of contention, as not all Muscovites like

the way the urban beautification is conducted, and some consider the work associated with the project to be too expensive (Raskhody na «Moyu ulicu»..., 2018).

The Kazan greening and beautification agenda is mostly covered by the local media and regional branches of the federal media. News items covered different subject matter from free Wi-Fi outside apartment buildings, expenses for beautification of parks and water bodies, and the city master plan to levy fines for parking in the green zones. Despite the government persuading citizens that park areas in Kazan had increased by one and a half, mass media was not so optimistic, and provided news coverage of academics' views that green zones in Tatarstan's capital are decreasing every year, with no park over 100 hectares (Yukhnovskaya, 2018b).

In Moscow media agenda the main claim-makers are the Mayor of Moscow, Sergey Sobyanin, and the city administration. Municipal councils and regional deputies are seldom mentioned as the mediators between the population and the authorities. The role of the citizens in the handling of urban greening is poorly covered, or, rather, they are allotted a passive role. As a rule, it is mentioned in the media that the citizens can take part in online voting when choosing a beautification project for individual territories or accept the mayor's invitation to take part in the citywide 'subbotniks' where the authorities provide the volunteers with the planting stock and the equipment necessary for tree planting.

In Kazan media agenda, the authorities are also the key claim-makers (Kazan City Government, Kazan City Council), even though it is reported that the citizens take part in the planning of the city space and the decisions of the authorities are disputed more frequently than in the media of Moscow. Nevertheless, the citizens are also allotted a passive role, for the most part, even though there are several articles covering the initiatives of the environmental activists, only in them could motivational frames be recognised.

### ***Sustainable transport and mobility***

The general rhetoric of the media is focused on the transition towards more sustainable transport through the adoption of more ecologically friendly and cost-effective technologies, the implementation and development of electric and gas engine transport, the development of automated vehicles, car sharing, bicycling, a system of light rails, introducing free of charge parking spaces and lowering the taxes on the environmentally friendly transport. Such discourses arise from the representatives of municipal officials, independent journalists and bloggers, business communities and Greenpeace; a large portion of the articles are related to the city of Moscow.

The dominating discourses are presented through diagnostic and prognostic frames: the major difficulties that Moscow and Kazan had to face when transitioning to sustainable transportation systems are identified as well as solutions suggested. Most of the issues presented or framed in this way are articulated by governmental officials with only a few by the environmental activists, and these are mainly in the Moscow press. An example of the latter is the Greenpeace statement that Moscow was investing in the expansion of the metro, which increases the accessibility of public transportation (Kommersant 2019, October 10). Motivational frames are used only in a couple of articles by Greenpeace and governmental officials.

The most popular topic is the development of alternative energy transport in Russian cities, such as electric transport (electric buses and cars) and gas engine transport. Electric buses were first introduced in Moscow on 1st of September 2018; and appeared in Kazan in November 2018. The media discourse covers the advantages of electric buses, their disadvantages, and test drives performed by journalists and bloggers. The prognostic frames are articulated by the municipal government and emphasise that ‘unlike trolleybuses, electric buses consume less electricity; they are noiseless, suitable for people with reduced capabilities (low floor level, ramps available), equipped with Wi-Fi, smoke and temperature sensors, panic buttons, and video surveillance

systems'(TASS 2019, October 10). On the other hand, the counter-discourse introduced by independent journalists and bloggers in a form of diagnostic framing states that electric buses often break down, do not come on time, and their air conditioning does not work, etc (Business-gazeta 2019, October 10).

The diagnostic framing is articulated by independent journalists who are concerned that the charging infrastructure for the electric transport can be obstructed by the large distances and the cold climate of Russia (Izvestya 2019, October 10). The prognostic framing is articulated by the business industries stating that since the beginning of 2018, over 20 charging stations for electric transport have appeared in the Moscow region (Izvestya 2019, October 10). The motivational framing of offering free of charge parking spaces and lowering the taxes on the environmentally friendly transport were extensively discussed in the media by governmental officials, mostly for the city of Moscow (Vedomosty 2019, October 10).

Within the context of the poor air quality in large Russian cities, environmental journalists and Greenpeace paid a lot of attention to the development of cycling and infrastructure, and call for the government to introduce the cycling infrastructure in big cities, including Moscow and Kazan. Motivational framing elaborated by Greenpeace is reinforced by the instruments that could resonate well with the governmental officials' interests, such as positive social-economic benefits for the cities ('The introduction of 10–15 kilometer bicycle roads would allow a reduction in road traffic, an increase in the accessibility of territories, and even lower the expenses for public health services'(Vedomosty 2019, October 10). Municipality funded the organisation of the cyclists' parade in Moscow, and have been criticized by Greenpeace via mass-media that should have been better invested into the development of the bicycle infrastructure, as well as the road safety systems in Moscow instead.



## ***Energy efficiency and energy preservation***

Discourse on energy focuses mostly on prognostic and motivational framing and it deals with developments in the field of energy saving and energy efficiency. Prognostic framing highlights the opportunity and power of Russia in both carbon and renewable markets, as achievements of the raw-export model of economy. Motivational framing is based on politicised export of oil and gas orientation and the establishment of new economic relations, both in the traditional sector and in the renewable energy sector (hereinafter referred to as renewable energy sources), discussing conflicts between the United States and Russia in their climate energy position. One part of media publications covers the gas industry, and the other part covers energy saving and energy efficiency under the ‘smart city’ concept.

In creating discourse, national and local media prefer to focus on the latest reports from the head of state, local governments, and departments that are associated with the formation of energy policy. In an interview with President V. Putin and Herman Gref, representatives of the Ministry of Energy presented the expected forecasts for the development of the energy sector. It is expected that by 2040 gas and oil production will decrease slightly, according to estimates, by about 10%–15%. This niche will be occupied by renewable energy sources. The RBC portal provides the most comprehensive information on the various possibilities of using all types of renewable energy sources. It was indicated that urban areas that have already formed an energy structure cannot switch to renewables.

Both in Moscow and Kazan, the prognoses discourse are optimistic in terms of energy policy development and include specific figures for improving energy efficiency and energy saving in the housing sector. Previously, all news material provided analytical statements and data. A positive prognostic report claims that Moscow will be the first region in Russia to switch to the full

digitalisation of the electric grid complex, that shows in references (Moscoscowskii Komsomolec 2019, March 20). In Kazan, the local energy discourse includes information on the transformation of the industrial sector, new methods of oil production, and the problems of expanding the electricity network and modernising the boiler rooms. In Moscow the reorganisation of the transport sector is more relevant as a topic for discussion in the mass media. One optimistic claim was that Moscow may reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 25% as ‘due to the new energy-efficient model, Moscow managed to reduce harmful emissions into the atmosphere by 33%, reduce gas consumption by 20%, and heat – by 6.2%, despite large volumes of construction’, that applied in news (Moscoscowskii Komsomolec 2019, March 20). The motivational framing seeks to strengthen the role of associations of homeowners in the maintenance (overhaul, modernisation) of residential buildings, for which the state would create a set of support measures – budget grants for energy-efficient modernisation and loan guarantees (Kommersant 2018, March 21).

Renewable energy sources are considered by heads of government as an additional development industry, and energy saving is the main promising topic for urban programmes. Some articles justify the ‘normal’ orientation of the export of raw materials model of the economy, implicitly indicating that the industry saves jobs. It was reported that the Russian President also called for expanding cooperation between the Russian Federation and OPEC (Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries). The media presents prognostic framing of measures for the development of renewable energy by state departments of the Ministry of Energy, the Ministry of Economic Development, the Ministry of Industry and Trade and the Federal Antimonopoly Service (FAS) to support operations on the basis of renewable energy after 2024. The main figure that keeps the development of renewable energy in the media is German Gref (RIA 2019, March 20).

Finally, the strategy known as ‘copenhagenisation’ for the development of modern Russian cities has been discussed in the media in a prognostic manner. This implies the development of

alternative modes of transport, as well as encouraging the authorities in ‘cycling around the city’, car-sharing networks, bike sharing, and joint travel services to provide a post-carbon city.

### ***Food products and environmentally friendly consumption***

The main discourse on food problems in Russia is diagnostic. Independent media focuses on the availability of food, depending on the price categories, and the abundance of food waste. The most popular discourse is around the description and explanation of laws and news about the organic market, and one of the key problems is the search for agreement between different stakeholders: green business, the industrial sector and customer interests (Ria news 2019, March 20). The media try to popularise and explain how organic products differ from ordinary ones. In the center of discourse is sanitary-epidemiological standards: ‘Russia is a country with a severely damaged trust. There should be requirements for the preparation and execution of certificates, as well as to ensure that ignorant people do not come to this area’(Kommersant 2019, March 20). Prognostic framing includes highlighting the benefits of sustainable agriculture and drawing on the limits of industry and pointing out the real opportunity for business and farmers who ‘need finance support from government’.

The governmental officials are the main claim-makers. They discuss ‘big plans’ for reorganising the organic sector, then the local media draw attention to successful enterprises, shops, and farms. Current trends in media coverage include the growth of the ethical and religious halal products in Kazan and growth of the biomarkets in Moscow. However, there are no responsible persons who are directly involved in the sustainable food programme in the media agenda.

The major problem under discussion in the media is the certification of bio and organic products, eco-consumption and green products. The media presents only new rules and laws without any analytical arguments of sustainable principles. RIA, Moskovskii and Komsomolec press paid attention to the ‘shock theme’ of discarded food, ‘ugly’ products, products that are not far from the end of shelf life and have expired, and the community of freegans. The media mentions that the networks of retailers and manufacturers are concerned about this problem, which is contrary to the interests of representatives of sanitary-epidemiological standards and industrial technologists. (RBK 2018, February 20; RIA news, 2017, May 15)

## **Discussion**

This study focused on the comprehensive analysis of the Russian mass media coverage and framing of the environmental messages across cities (taking Moscow and Kazan as case studies) and environmental issues such as air and water pollution, waste, sustainable transport, energy, environmental civic engagement, and (organic) food. The concept of framing (Benford, & Snow 1992, 2000) has been employed to illuminate how key media claim-makers define problems (diagnostic framing), devise solutions to them (prognostic framing), and mobilise readers for actions (motivational framing).

The rhetoric of discussion on water problems is built by means of diagnostic framing and also partly by motivational framing of information. The central issues here are the local problems of water supply and water quality, which are presented somewhat differently in Moscow and Kazan media outlets. In Moscow these problems are the responsibility of the local authorities, which

implement a large amount of consistent work in this area, while in Kazan the problems are the object of discussions between the authorities, the population and experts. The mass media is actively engaged with the topic of air pollution. It included the reaction to the technological accidents in waste stations near Moscow and following air pollution, the conflict around the construction of the waste incineration plant near Kazan, and the alternative measurements of air quality by the Greenpeace activists in Moscow and Kazan. In all of these cases, citizens were the main claim-makers though official mass media preferred not to provide them with much voice. However, especially in Kazan, activists appeared a lot in mass media, and though they were not able to directly call for citizens' action, their example of dedication and struggle for clean air could create a motivation frame.

The results showed that the eco-transport discourse focuses around the transition towards more sustainable transport through the adoption of more ecologically friendly and cost-effective technologies, and the implementation and development of electric and gas engine transport. Such discourses arise from the representatives of municipal officials, independent journalists and bloggers, business communities and Greenpeace; a large portion of the articles are related to the city of Moscow.

Media rhetoric around green zones includes the urban beautification programmes and greening as the achievements of the city management, mostly presented in a diagnostic and prognostic framing manner. The discourse in both cities is predominantly consensual; the subject matter of using and improving the green zones is discussed within the scope of the urban strategies of territory development; critical notes rarely appear and only in some independent media. The Moscow greening agenda is covered in the municipal and federal media, while the Kazan agenda is mostly present in the local media.

The discussion of sustainable consumption is dominated by a diagnostic discourse, where most of the content is created by independent analysts and has an educational and news content, trying to find common ground between the interests of different stakeholders of the process. However, the representation and participation of stakeholders in the media is very fragmented and does not allow for a single picture for the reader, while the assessment of the industry (prognostic discourse) focuses on comparing the possibilities of traditional and green agricultural sectors. At the same time, a different conceptual direction can be traced in terms of providing cities with sustainable food: for Kazan, the religious aspect is imprinted, for Moscow the focus is on reducing consumption. For both cities, it is important to maintain the quality of food around which the media are polemicising.

The energy discourse includes a positive diagnostic assessment of the industry, which is presented by featuring energy efficiency projects that have already been implemented in cities: for Kazan in the industrial and housing sector, and for Moscow in the housing and transport sector. The analysis presents the functions of state stakeholders, well-presented news rhetoric and analytics in a regional context, based on official plans for the development of energy. There is a clear separation between proponents of sustainable energy and traditional energy sources. The final positive forecast and motivational discourse for providing energy to cities is left to traditional energy, as the media retell the views of state experts and assert renewable resources can only be used for suitable climatic zones. However, each side reinforces the motivational and positive prognostic elements equally, leaving the opportunity for the development of a particular energy branch in the overall programme of energy saving.

The findings showed that media coverage of environmental issues differs across the environmental issues and geographical cases. The commonalities include the distribution of diagnostic and prognostic framing over motivational; informational articles over analytical; the

domination of discourses of ‘sustainable innovations’ and ‘modernisation’ (e.g. covering the green technologies, new waste policies, green infrastructures, etc.); ‘environmental alarmism’ (e.g. covering the prominence of the air pollution, waste conflicts, etc.); and ‘environmental conflicts’ (e.g. covering the conflict between public and government while building the waste burning plants, etc.). The latter reinforce the extended literature that the environmental media discourse is mostly structured under the journalistic norms that make the messages newsworthy; they include timeless elements, conflict, prominence, significance and human interest (Major, & Atwood, 2004b). This is especially true in connection with such ‘hot topics’ in Russian media landscape as massive conflicts around building the waste incinerators, air and water pollution and related health problems, and the introduction of electrobuses in Russian cities, among others. The geographical differences in media coverage show that environmental issues are extensively covered in both Moscow and Kazan regional press; however, in the national media discourse most of the environmental messages represent Moscow rather than Kazan.

Another difference is in the types of claim-makers presented across cases. Our research showed that pro-governmental journalists were quoted by mass media in national press (mostly in Moscow’s cases) much more than environmental groups and academics, while in local media (mostly, in Kazan cases) the voices of latest were presented equally as well as those in a position of authority.

## **Conclusion**

These findings are consistent with the recent literature on the subject stating that there are a variety of challenges confronting all those who engage in framing activities. Such challenges include ‘macro factors’ such as political opportunity and cultural context (Benford and Snow,

2000). Political opportunity depends on the institutional structure and decision-making system where the framing takes place. Cultural context includes the beliefs, ideologies, practices, values, myths and narratives that constitute the cultural resource base from which frames are constructed, as well as the lens through which policy frames are interpreted and evaluated.

These findings are consistent with the studies various environmental issues conducted by other scholars beyond the cities of Moscow and Kazan. For example, Davydova (2013) mentioned that 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 in Russian printed and online media. Poberezhskaya (2016) concluded that most newspapers rely on government officials as information sources. Boussalis et al. (2016) stated that energy issues are portrayed from the position of international security, which often involves discussion of Russian energy interests.

Our research showed that framing of the environmental issues are regulated by and depend on the dominant governmental interests. This correlates well, for example, with the media portrayal of the sustainable transportation issues, air and water quality and parks, which are predominantly discussed in the media by the pro-governmental journalists. They framed them through consensual diagnostic and prognostic manners (by using phrases such as ‘problem-solving’, ‘programmes advancement’, ‘infrastructural modernisation’ with underlying positive notes). The motivational framing in most cases is lacking because with governmental officials as the key claim-makers there is no need to motivate large stakeholder groups for actions – the decisions have been made beforehand without broad public involvement. In cases when environmental pressure groups do appear as the main definers, they usually articulate motivational claims (e.g. in the case of the waste incinerators near Kazan) through public demonstrations or protests. While independent journalists and environmental groups attract the attention of the public to environmental issues,



pro-governmental journalists are the social forces who legitimise this attention and shape this discourse about the environment. Further research is needed to explore how much mass-media and claim-makers in Russia represent environmental issues in a broader frame of urban sustainability and global challenges such as climate change, gender inequality, and health issues. Also, there is much research that needs to be done in eco-media and eco-bloggers in Russia, which number has massively increased in the last few years (see Davydova 2019). In a level of everyday life, it would be beneficial to investigate how much mass-media, including social media in Russia, impacts upon people practices in sustainable transportation, consumption, waste practices, and people's engagement in local independent ecological campaigns.

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