

# Global Bioeconomy and Forestry Intensification Discourses in Russia

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*SOBIO DAYS 2020: Discourses and Imaginaries of the Sustainability Pathways in the Transition to a Biobased Society, December 9, 2020*

# 1. Introduction

In social and political science **discourse** is:

*“(...) ideas, concepts, and categorizations that are produced, reproduced, and transformed in (...) practices and through which meaning is given to physical and social realities” (Hajer, 1995: 44)*

- Transition to sustainable development and climate-neutral society → a global economy based on bioresources instead of fossils
- Bioeconomy has become a widespread discourse in both science and policy
- Forests play an essential role in the global bioeconomy discourse

## 2. Russian context

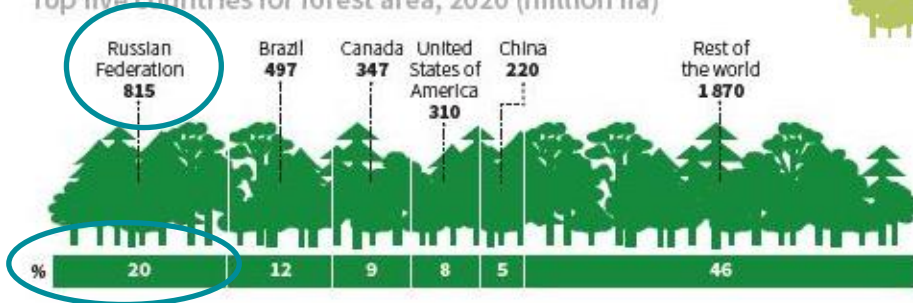
- Russia harbours 20% of the world's forest
- Potential for global forest-based bioeconomy development?

Proportion and distribution of global forest area by climatic domain, 2020



Source: Adapted from United Nations World map, 2020.

Top five countries for forest area, 2020 (million ha)



The Global Forest Resources Assessment 2020 (FAO)

## Obstacles towards bioeconomy development:

- Political restrictions and a poor investment climate
- Inconsistent state policy and fragmented decision-making
- Corruption and lack of transparency
- Complex forest tenure rights
- Forest resource depletion

- Image of a ‘great forest country’, forest “as abundant, if not unlimited, resources” (Ulybina, & Fennell 2013) → no motivation for forest care, ‘wood mining’ (Angelstam et. al.,. 2016) → forest depletion → wood supply crisis and local livelihoods decline

- Unsustainable forestry
- Forest fires
- Economically inaccessible forests



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- Dependence on resources from primary forests
- Dependence on 'eco-sensitive' markets → limitations by non-state forest certification (FSC)



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## FSC requirements on primary forest conservation:

- Conservation of 80%, 50%, 30% of intact forest landscapes (IFLs) in different scenarios
- Ban new FSC certification of forestry in IFLs since 2022



# **3. National forest discourses in the global context**

# Global Meta- and forest discourses

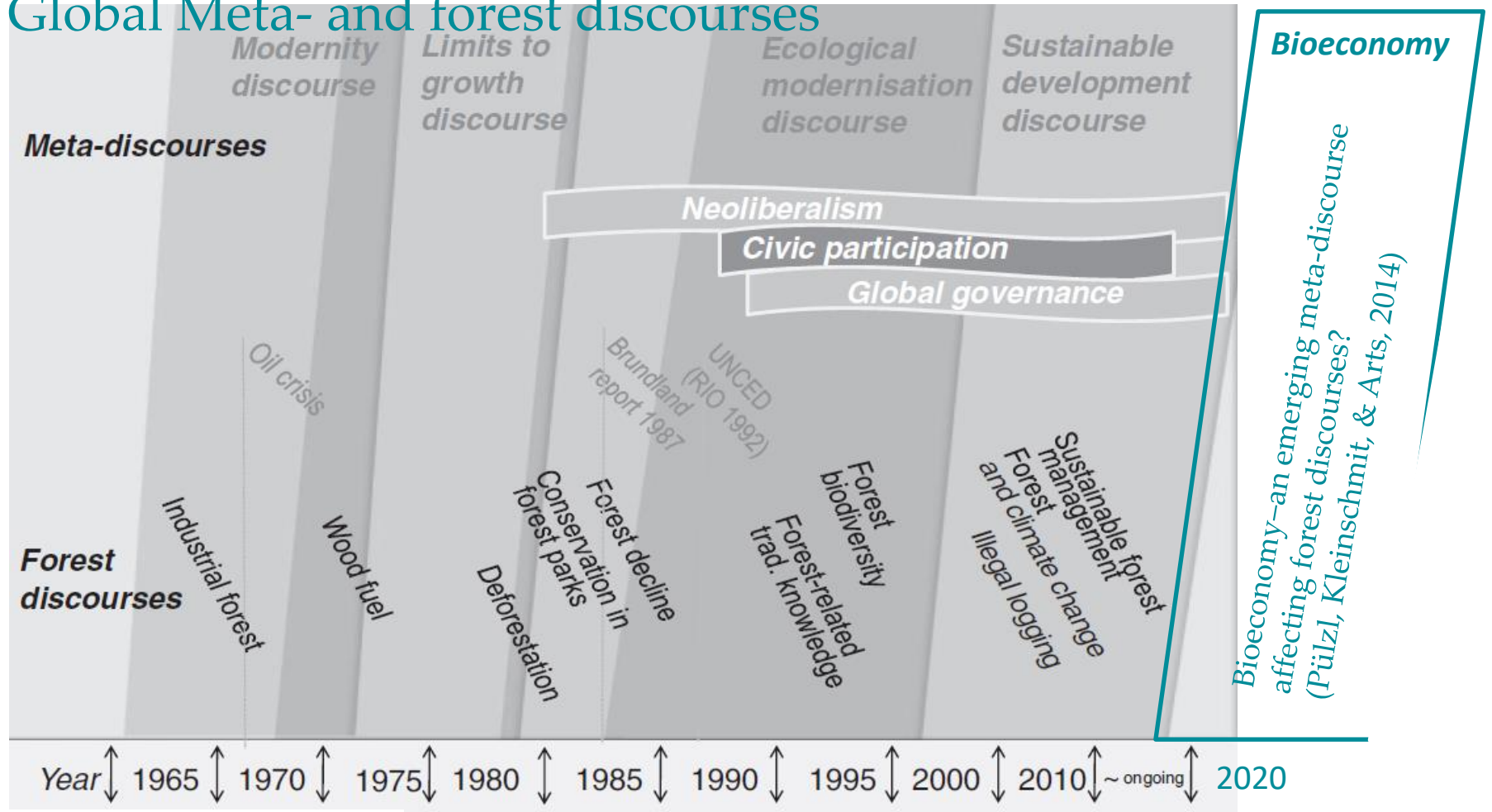


Figure 1. Global meta and forest discourses.  
 Source: Adapted from Arts et al. (2010).

# Russian forest discourses in the global context

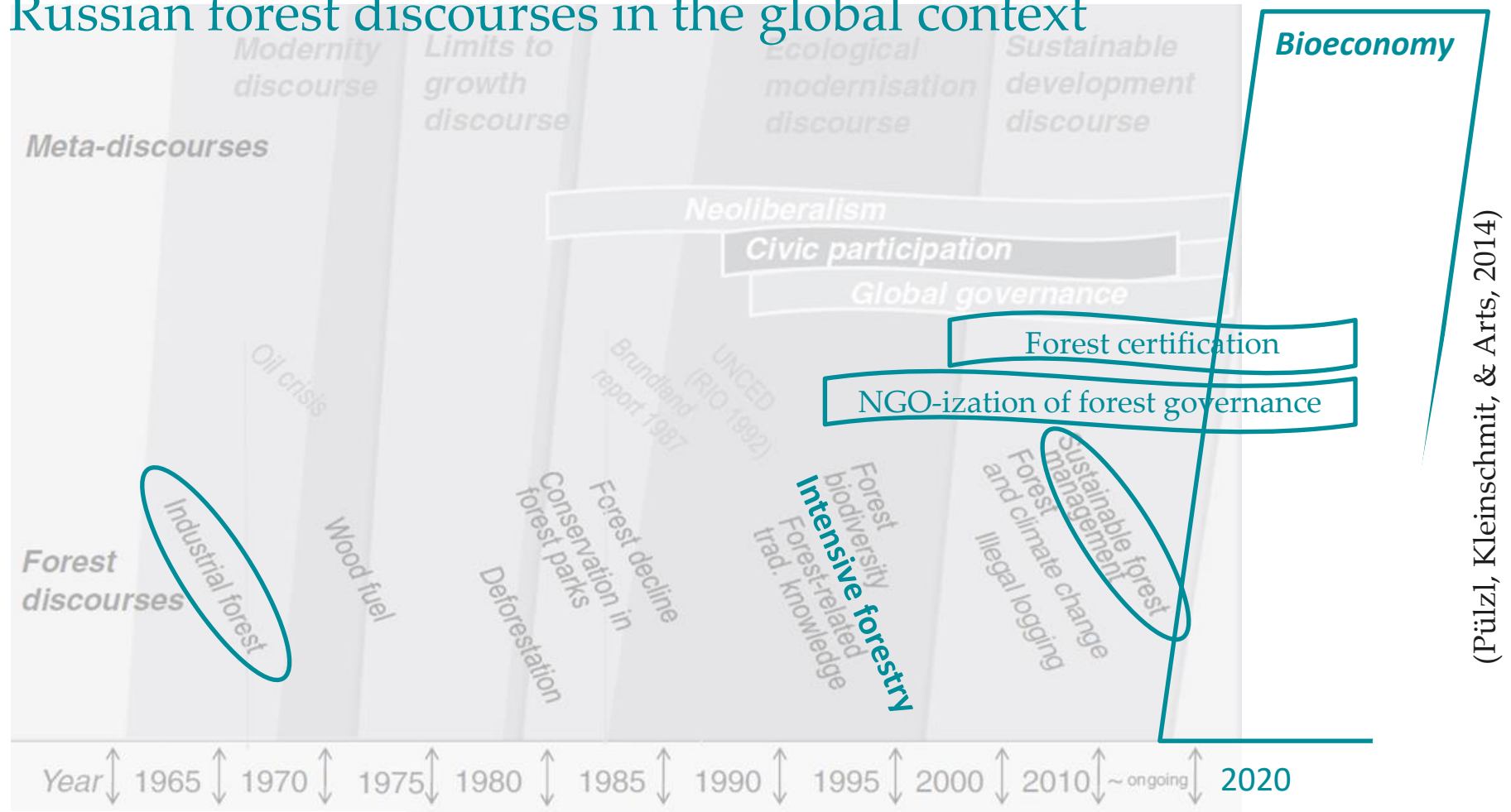


Figure 1. Global meta and forest discourses.  
Source: Adapted from Arts et al. (2010).



# **4. 'Traditional' discourse on forestry intensification in Russia**



Key idea: leaseholders (private companies) should intensify forest management, in the state-owned forest, based on 'Scandinavian' forestry approaches



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## Discourse on intensive forestry ('like in Finland'):

- Lead by NGOs and TNCs since the 1990s (Model forests)
- = SFM ('sustained yield', 'effective silviculture') and primary forest conservation
- Drivers: the recognition of the resource depletion, straightening FSC requirements, global bioeconomy growth (demand for wood)
- The leading discourse in Russian forest policy in 2010-2020 (lobbied by the pulp industry)
- Accepted by government policymakers and institutionalized under the state regulation in the 2010s

## Discourse on intensive forestry ('like in Finland'):

- Criticized as a cover-up for further industry-driven intensification of 'wood mining' rather than SFM
- Forestry intensification: investment of private business (concession holders) in state-owned forest:

*“Tenants’ lack of motivation to make expensive and high-quality repairs in a rented apartment”*

# **5. New discourse on forestry intensification in Russia**

- Private forestry, agroforestry (forest farming), participatory forest management\* models were not applicable to Russia until recently
- Citizens were able neither practice forestry nor own forests
- Forests were either state property\*\* or were not legally recognized as forests until 2020

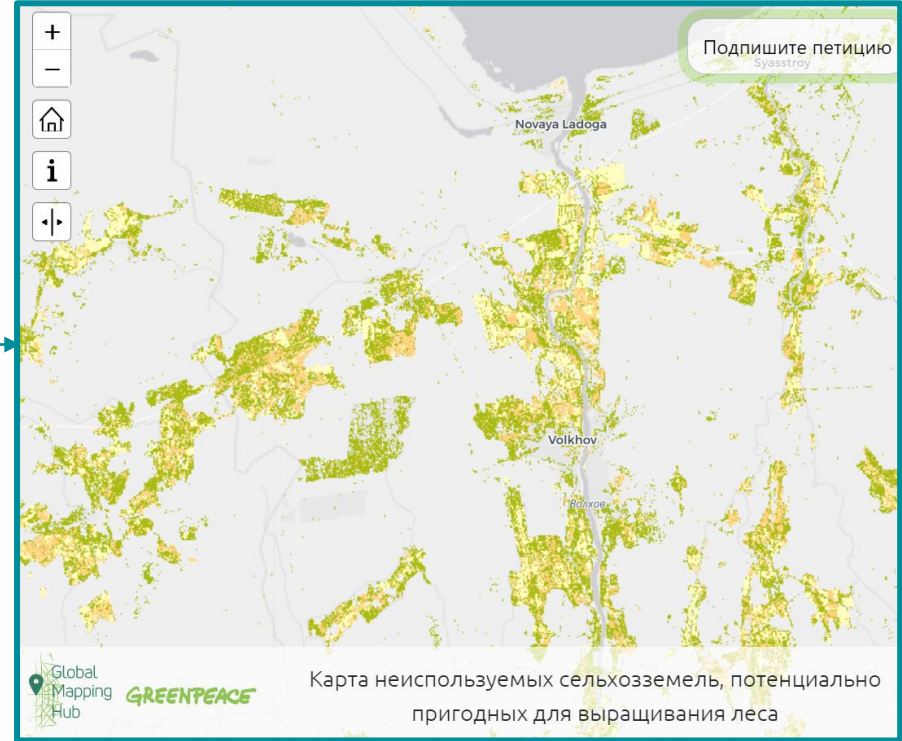
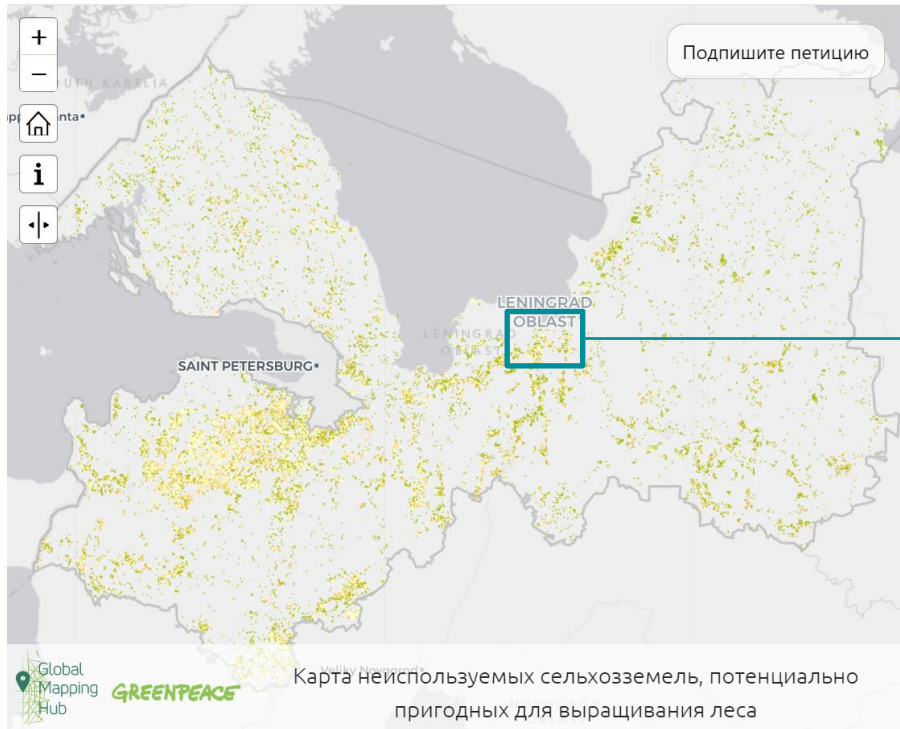


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\* community-based forest management, collaborative forest management, joint forest management, etc. common in Asia, Africa, and Latin America

\*\* where forestry is mainly practiced by private companies as leaseholders

# 'Illegal' forest within private agricultural lands (Greenpeace: approx. 60 million ha, officials: 20 million ha)



<https://maps.greenpeace.org/maps/aal/>

In yellow - cultivated agricultural land

In green - agricultural land abandoned over 20 years ago and covered with forest

- Forestry within the agricultural lands was not allowed until recently (burning forests to avoid fines)
- 2017-2020: the initiative on the development of forestry on abandoned private agricultural lands
- To tackle the wood supply crisis and primary forest loss
- Driven by an alliance of NGOs and FSC
- In 2020, the initiative was accepted and adopted by the national government:
  - forests on agricultural lands were legally recognized
  - citizens gained the right to practice forestry on their lands

The development of forestry on abandoned private agricultural lands:

- **Proponents:** a window of opportunity for citizens, forest sector and natural forests
- **Sceptics:** Illegal logging, uncontrolled forest fires, and fragmented decision-making are obstacles
- **Opponents:** a threat to the agricultural sector and national food security



## The development of forestry on abandoned private agricultural lands in Russia:

- How can it address the recourse depletion, wood supply crisis, and primary forest loss?
- How can it impact inclusive and sustainable bioeconomy development?
- How can it change citizens' (newly emerged forest owners) participation in shaping national forest policy?
- Which types of new conflicts may appear?



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