

THE “AMBER RUSH” IN RIVNE OBLAST, UKRAINE: case study on the natural resource conflicts (from the perspective of artisanal miners)

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This master thesis contributes to the study of the “amber rush” phenomenon in Ukraine. Despite the country having the second largest explored amber deposits in the world, the formal national amber sector shows poor performance due to the fact that commonly the gemstone is extracted illegally and smuggled. The rapid growth of the international amber market amid the instability and serious economic deterioration in Ukraine since the end of 2013 has given rise to the uncontrolled amber mining boom known as “amber rush”. The situation brought many environmental, social, economic problems out and caused various incompatibilities and conflicts in the regions where amber has been extracted. To date the government has not succeeded in management of the amber extractive sector. Moreover, the recent implemented preventive measures have led to the escalation of conflicts over the gemstone mining and clashes between different stakeholders.

This study specifically explored contextual factors of conflicts over amber mining from the perspective of artisanal miners for whom the “amber rush” is not unambiguously negative as it creates employment and plays important role for their livelihoods improvement.

The research was done by conducting a questionnaire survey of artisanal amber miners (n=30) in Volodymyrets district, Rivne oblast, Ukraine along with literature and media review. The obtained data was analyzed through the lens of the adapted Unifying Negotiation Framework within ecological, socio-economic and institutional contexts.

The key factors contributing to conflicts over amber mining from the perspective of the respondents have been found to be mostly within the institutional and socio-economic dimensions, while environmental issues have rather additive effects. The research has confirmed that the main drivers for artisanal amber mining in the survey area are high unemployment and pursuit of welfare. It has been also discovered that the artisanal miners perceive widespread corruption, regulatory uncertainties and weak rule of law as critical causal aspects for the conflicts over amber extraction in the region. The top-

down measures such as governmental preventive campaigns or a new bill design without considering these contextual factors would not be enough for solving conflicts over amber mining. Employment of collaborative approaches and involvement of all stakeholders to development of a formalization strategy together with a fight against crime and corruption are the pathways suggested by the study for conflict transformation and creation conditions for sustainable development of the amber mining sector.

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