

# Dissertation Abstract

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The title of my dissertation is “Linkages between Income Inequality and Environmental Degradation: An Inter-regional Perspective”. The goal was to contribute to the literature that seeks to move beyond income-centered approaches to environmental degradation by examining the socio-economic factors that influence environmental quality. This was accomplished by focusing, in particular, on two questions: 1) Do income and power inequalities matter for environmental quality? 2) What role does pollution shifting play in the relationship between economic development and environment?

The first chapter, titled “Income Distribution and the Environment: Reassessing Evidence for the Environmental Kuznets Curve”, utilizes the Russian Statistical Agency’s data on air pollution and deforestation in Russia to answer the question of what relationship, if any, exists between the income, income and power inequalities and environmental degradation. The major finding here is that, holding income constant, greater inequalities in income and provision of public goods are associated with a greater level of environmental degradation. It was also found that average income and expenditures on air protection per unit of Gross Regional Product have an inverted U-shaped relationship, which runs counter to what one might expect under the Environmental Kuznets Curve hypothesis. The turning point for this relationship is consistently found below the turning point for uncontrolled pollution, suggesting that expenditures on air pollution control per unit of GRP begin to decrease before uncontrolled pollution reaches a turning point.

Given the findings presented in the first chapter, it appeared warranted to further investigate the relationship between inequality and environmental quality by focusing, in particular, on how inequalities *between* regions of the Russian Federation contribute to environmental degradation at the regional level. For this reason, the second chapter, “A New Perspective on Inter-Regional Inequalities in Russia”, was dedicated to the empirical analysis of inter-regional inequalities in Russia in the post-Soviet period. The analysis found that economic differences among Russia’s regions are substantial, and

that their presences cannot be ascribed to the temporary restructuring of the economy. Differences in the provision of public goods are also significant, and increasing.

The third chapter, “Horizontal (between-group) Inequalities and Environmental Degradation: Understanding the Political Economy of Pollution Shifting”, is my job market paper. By developing two methods for distinguishing between changes in the absolute level of income and changes in the relative level of income and controlling for the former, it was found that regions with lower *relative* incomes have more uncontrolled pollution and more net deforestation than regions whose incomes are high in *relative* terms. Moreover, these differences cannot be attributed to differences in spending. However, no evidence exists in support of the claim that the relationship between the the absolute level of income and environmental quality depends on the region’s relative status.