

Proceedings of the Ninth Conference  
of the European Society  
for Central Asian Studies

Edited by

Tomasz Gacek and Jadwiga Pstrusińska

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**P U B L I S H I N G**

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For centuries Central Asia has functioned as a link between various regions, most notably the Middle East, South Asia and China. Developments in Central Asia have not only had their impact on these adjacent regions. Central Asia itself has been exposed to various regional and global influences throughout its history, amongst others leading to shifts in the importance of Central Asia. Following a period where Central Asia represented one of major global centres, the region turned into a periphery during the era of colonialism and imperialism. As a result of recent political and economic reconfigurations and the ruptures associated with transformation processes in the wider region, Central Asia regained its focal position in the political, economic and cultural considerations. This new attention to the region is at the same time closely related to a modern globalizing world, in which rapid transformation processes take place at an increasing speed. These developments, however, have their historical roots, local and regional backgrounds and repercussions. The shifts in the centrality of Central Asia are manifested in various domains of the socio/political and cultural developments and are not new to the region, which in the past was one of the major global continuums.

—From the 1<sup>st</sup> Circular of the ESCAS 9<sup>th</sup> Conference

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## LOCAL NEEDS VERSUS GLOBAL DEMANDS FOR THE WALNUT-FRUIT FORESTS OF KYRGYZSTAN

MATTHIAS SCHMIDT

### Introduction

The relationship between human beings and the environment is one of the major research fields of geography (cf. Ehlers & Leser 2002, Turner 2002). Geographers try to understand how the environment is used, influenced and transformed by human beings and how the human-environment interrelation changes over time. The spatial focus of my paper is on the unique walnut-fruit forests in the Jalalabad Oblast of Kyrgyzstan, and the historical time span in focus is the post-Soviet transformation process. I am asking how interests in these forests and the people who articulate such interests have changed since the collapse of the Soviet Union. What role do the forest and land resources play for the local people today? Are there new actors with new interests in specific forest products or forest functions?

To highlight the human-environment relationship in Kyrgyzstan, I have chosen here to use a political ecology approach (Blaikie 1995, 1999; Bryant 1998; Bryant & Bailey 1997; Scott & Sullivan 2000; Zimmerer & Bassett 2003; Walker 2005) as my conceptual framework. In this approach, environment is regarded as being socially constructed and politicised. Resource identification and utilisation are embedded in a contradictory context of actors and their interests. Such a constructed landscape is shaped by different interests, which in turn are influenced by economic efforts and needs, within the framework of political conditions and specific cultural ideas and values. There is no nature or landscape, *per se*. Natural resources do not have a specific use value, *per se*. Rather, their value and the forms in which they are used are a function of the interest in and demand for them as articulated by people within a specific context, depend-

ent on general political and social conditions, technological feasibility and economic needs. Thus, according to the political ecology concept, the environment and its changes need to be examined in relation to society. Likewise, the different spheres of action – local, regional, national and global – as well as the institutions<sup>1</sup> governing forest usage also need to be looked at in their historical context. Major historical events are often initiators of dramatic changes in resource demand, leading to increased exploitation of a specific resource, or the opposite. The historical landmark relevant for this paper is the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. This event has been connected with far-reaching transformation processes that influenced the relationship between human beings and their environment.

The scheme for my research is shown in Figure 1-1. The main elements of the scheme are the resources in focus, here the walnut-fruit forests, the human players or interest groups and their interests in these resources, and also the governing institutions. Individuals or groups interested in the forests or dealing in a specific way with them are based at various spatial levels – local, regional, national or international. It is not only the local population, the place-based actors (Blaikie 1995: 17), who are actually utilising the forests by cutting trees or collecting fruits but also entities at other levels that influence these actions on the local level, i.e. by establishing rules or paying specific prices for specific resources or forms of utilisation. The group of actors itself can be divided into individual actors, collectives of actors and stakeholders (Werlen 1995: 44). They all show specific interests in the forests – economic, political, socio-cultural or ecological issues. However, the actual utilisation of the forests and thus the human impact on them is governed by institutions, although regulations can also be avoided. The different forms of forest utilisation and their impact on the forests which will be shown in detail in the following chapters influence the distribution, structure and state of the forests, resulting in the extension or diminishing of forest cover, in forest degradation or in a significant change in forest structure. This web of structures and actions, the interrelationship between actors, institutions and resources has changed dramatically over the last few years and can itself be seen as being part of the post-Soviet transformation processes.

<sup>1</sup> The term institutions includes both a bundle of norms, rights and behaviour patterns which follow a common goal as well as the organisations which create and control these regulations (cf. North 1990).

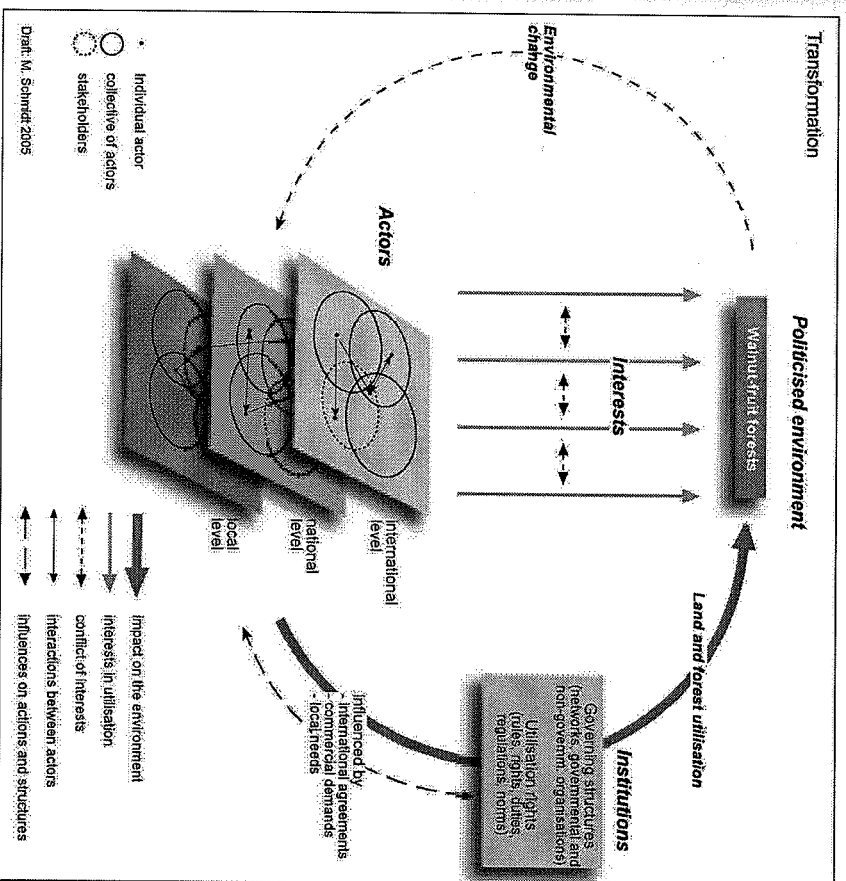
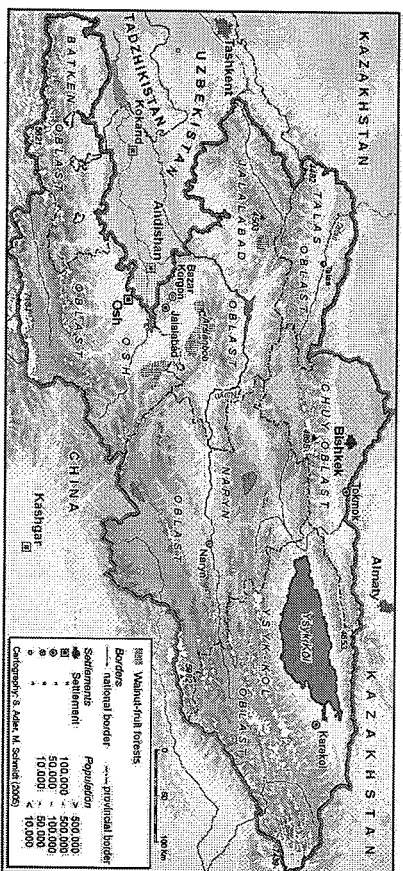


Fig. 29-1. Actors, institutions, interests and politicised environment

Research site and methods

Kyrgyzstan's walnut-fruit forests are located at altitudes between 1,500 and 2,000 metres on the south-facing slopes of the Fergana Range of the Tian Shan Mountains (Figure 2-1). The forests display a high diversity of trees and shrubs, including around 180 woody species (Sorg et al. 2003). Major tree species are walnut (*Juglans regia*), maple (*Acer turkestanica*) and various fruit-bearing species in their wild form, such as apple (*Malus sibiriana*), pear (*Pyrus korshinskyi*), plum (*Prunus sogdiana*), barberry (*Berberis oblonga*), rosehip (*Rosa kokanica*) and sea buckthorn (*Hippophae rhamnoides*) (Gottschling et al. 2005).



It has been stated that walnut trees and several other fruit species originated in the mountains of Central Asia and their forests, while the present walnut-fruit forests represent only relicts of a much wider geographical extension (Kolov 1998). Although the walnut forest area in Kyrgyzstan is less than 30,000 ha (Musuratiev 1998), this probably represents the largest area of naturally occurring walnut-fruit forests in the world today (Hemery & Popov 1998).

The economic structure of the region is largely agricultural, with cotton production on irrigated fields in the Fergana Valley being the most important agricultural activity, followed by animal husbandry, fruit growing and grain cultivation. The limited number of industrial plants in the region are specialised in processing agricultural products, such as cotton, fruits and meat. The majority of the population lives in the Fergana Valley plains, of which only a small portion belongs to Kyrgyzstan. However, the walnut-fruit forest area is also relatively densely inhabited, with around 40,000 people living close to the forests.

Various methods of social sciences have been applied in order to understand the political, economic and social changes related to the recent transformation and globalisation processes. Information about actual land and forest use could only be gathered by investigating at the local level of interaction between people and forest, for which I have conducted extensive empirical field work in Kyrgyzstan in the years 2003, 2004 and 2005. Information on historical and present forms of forest management and utilisation practices was gathered by qualitative, reconstructive forms of empirical social research, including participatory observation and focused

interviews. 800 households from the villages of Arslanbob, Gumnana, Kyzyl Unkur (all Bazar Korgon Rayon) and Kara Alma (Suzak Rayon) were surveyed with a standardised questionnaire to gain basic information on the economic situation of the households. I conducted around 70 semi-standardised interviews with residents of the aforementioned villages either in their homes, or at work in the forest or on pasture. The interview partners were selected according to criteria such as age, gender or socio-economic status, to obtain a multifaceted picture of personal views and opinions. Thematically focused interviews with members of the state forest enterprises (*leshozel*), village administrators (*ayl oekmoet*), international merchants and other experts provided more in-depth information about specific aspects, e.g. wood processing, bee keeping or socialist labour organisation. Oral statements from *aksakal* (respected elders) gave a deeper understanding of the historical and current problems of the people concerned, as well as their living reality (oral history). Kyrgyz colleagues and various local persons assisted during the fieldwork as interpreters and contact persons.<sup>2</sup> In order to gain knowledge about the evolution of forest utilisation and management it was necessary to search for and evaluate available historical documents in archives so as to gain a better understanding of what happened in the past, which in turn helps to explain present structures and ways of action. I have found and analysed numerous documents relating to forest policy and forestry as well as administrative proceedings in the archives of Jalalabad, Osh and Bishkek. The state forest enterprises themselves provided recent documents and statistics. Information on actual forest structure and forest cover was gained by personal observation as well as through discussions with project colleagues.

<sup>2</sup> Thanks go to my Kyrgyz colleagues, who carried out the fieldwork with me: Tokmunkbek Asykanulov and Askarali Nishanov (both from the Kyrgyz National University Bishkek), Nurjan Kydyralieva (Bishkek), Aida Omursakova (Bishkek) and Bolotbek Tegaev (Gumnana). I would like to express my gratitude to the people of Arslanbob, Gumnana, Kyzyl Unkur and Kara Alma for their hospitality and readiness to reply to my countless questions. I am indebted to my host families, especially to the female members (who bore the main burden of the work for us) of the households of Ibragim Karimshanov (Arslanbob), Adish Tegaev (Gumnana), Kanjibek Ayitchev (Kara Alma), and Baish Rahmanov (Kyzyl Unkur) who died in August 2005 and to whom this paper is dedicated.

### Utilisation and management during Soviet times

Information on the utilisation of the forests prior to the Russian conquest of Turkkestan is limited. Most likely, the forests served the people from the nearby settlements of the Fergana Valley as a source of timber, firewood, nuts and fruits, and especially charcoal, which they processed and sold in the markets (Lisniewsky 1884). With the defeat of the Khanate of Kokand and the fall of Andishan in 1876, the Fergana area became part of the Russian Empire, falling under the aegis of their General Government of Turkestan (Krahmer 1898). A forest administration was already set up at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the forests were declared state property (Ashimov 2003).

Under Soviet rule new forest institutions were created and the responsibility for the forests changed hands several times (cf. Musuratiev 1998). However, by the end of the 1940s, state forest farms, the so-called *leshozes* had been established. The *leshozes* were responsible for forest management at the local levels under the authority of the Ministry of Forests. The *leshozes'* functions and tasks included forest farming, conservation and protection, organising timber felling and processing, nut and fruit collection. Several scientific expeditions to the area were carried out by the Academy of Sciences of the USSR for research and inventory purposes. They stressed the uniqueness of the walnut-fruit forests. Based on their recommendations, in 1945 the forests were declared a Fruit-Tree Forest Reserve by Decree of the People's Commissariat of the USSR and a strict use regime was imposed. This special status of the forests was confirmed in 1960 and again in 1993 by the Forest Code of the Kyrgyz Republic, in which the forests were defined as nature reserves (Goslesgenstvo & Lestic 1997).

The *leshozes* served as the main acting institutions with regard to the management and utilisation of the walnut-fruit forests. Management and implementation plans for forestry, forest conservation, timber harvest, the collection of walnuts and wild fruits have been in existence since the early 1930s (CAO/F41/O1/d27-1: 53-54; CAO/F41/O1/d24.3). In general, the walnut-fruit forests were highly esteemed due to their valuable forest products, their unique ecological status and important ecological functions as well as for recreation. Several forest products were at the centre of the forestry carried out under the state forest service: timber, nuts, wild fruits, herbs, firewood, and hay.

Woodcutting was conducted on a commercial scale; many trees were felled over the decades, sometimes, clear cutting was even practised with the intention of later rehabilitating the land as forest plantation. After the

forests were subordinated under the Ministry of Forestry and classified as protected, woodcutting was permitted only in the form of sanitary felling – but the tree felling went on. Since 1962, in addition to sanitary and maintenance felling, complex and extensive felling has been conducted on a commercial scale, with the aim of transforming the over-mature walnut stands into more productive forests so as to increase the nut yield (Musuratiev 1998). Most of the timber thus obtained was handled in the wood processing units of the *leshozes* and used to produce furniture.

One of the main tasks of the *leshozes* was organising the walnut harvest. All households were included in the nut harvesting system. Each family was assigned a plan drawn up just before the harvest and based on expected yields, specifying the location and the amount of walnuts to be collected. The households had to deliver all collected nuts to the *leshozes*, and received in return a small compensation according to the weight of the collected nuts. The nuts were dried on special drying racks in the villages. After this process, a specific amount was kept by the *leshozes* for seed, while the rest was exchanged with other state enterprises or exported to cities all over the Soviet Union (e.g. Leshoze Kyzyl Unkur 1984). Local households were not allowed to keep walnuts for their own consumption or to market them privately. Sometimes, if families did not fulfil their plan, their houses were searched for hidden nuts (oral statements by locals from Kara Alma, 2004). Approximately 600–800 tons of walnuts were harvested each year in Kyrgyzstan (Usoin 1984, Venglovsky 1998).

The *leshozes* also completely organised and managed the collection and trading of wild apples, plums and hawthorn berries. The fruits were collected by the local people, and then sold by the *leshozes* to the fruit-processing factories in the area. These processing plants had a total processing capacity of 3,000 tons of apples, 600 tons of plums and 100 tons of hawthorn berries, producing juice, jam and tinned fruit. Around 34 tons of medicinal plants were gathered, processed and supplied to pharmaceutical enterprises (Musuratiev 1998).

Another forest product in high demand was firewood, which was collected solely by *leshoze brigades* and then sold to the local households; private individuals were not allowed to collect firewood by themselves. But firewood was not the only fuel since many households were supplied with coal delivered from the mines of Tash Komur and Kok Jangak for heating purposes, and with gas containers for cooking. Many households, however, used wood for heating, cooking and especially baking bread, and shepherds on the alpine pastures (*yailoo*) used not insignificant amounts of firewood for cooking and processing milk. Due to significant population

growth within the last few decades the demand for firewood has increased drastically. For example, the firewood harvest in Kyzyl Unkur leshoze more than quadrupled from 1952 to 1984 (Reports of Kyzyl Unkur Leshoze 1952, 1984).

Most local households were supplied with a plot of 3 to 5 hectares in the forested area for hay collection, which served as fodder for their private livestock. These plots were allocated by oral arrangement only and the respective landholders were given the right to cut and collect grass on these plots. But livestock was kept by local households in relatively small numbers due to official limitations: each household was only allowed to hold one cow and five sheep privately (NAB/Protocol No.2, 09.02.1979).

From the 1970s onwards, the recreational aspect of the forests became important as well. More than 30 holiday camps (*pionirlager, pensionates*) were constructed in the area. The forest's attractions – landscape, fresh air, natural beauty and coolness in the summer – attracted many people from the Fergana Valley and other regions all over Central Asia to spend some recreational days in the region. The local administrations estimate that almost 100,000 tourists spent their holidays in the walnut-fruit forest area each year. Since the capacity of the government dwellings was not sufficient to house all the visitors, many people found shelter in private houses, providing additional revenue for the local population (cf. Kirchmayer & Schmidt 2005).

To summarize, from their establishment till the end of the Soviet Union all forestry means were officially organised by state forest farms. In a centralistic way, strict rules were developed by the state forest service and implemented by the local *leshozes*. It was mainly the economic value of the forest but also its ecological uniqueness that was responsible for the great interest of the state in the forests.

### Changed interests and utilisation since independence

With the collapse of the Soviet Union and the shift from the socialist economic system to a market economy, all the *kolkhozes* and *sovkhoses* in Kyrgyzstan were shut down and all arable land and livestock privatised (cf. Bloch & Rasmussen 1998). This holds true for the *sovchozes* and *kolkhozes* in the Jalalabad area, but the state forest farms have not been shut down. Thus the *leshozes* still manage the forests, and are responsible for implementing all forest-related measures in their territories: they arrange all aspects of land allocation, lease agreements and forest control. How-

ever, both the financial means of the *leshozes* and the number of their employees have been greatly reduced since independence.

The forest products: walnuts, timber, firewood, wild fruits, hay and herbs are still in high demand today. Although the way of harvesting and collecting these products seems to have changed only marginally, the interest groups and their aims with regard to the forest products have altered significantly due to the transformed institutions but also due to the changed political and economic frame conditions. Today the state still owns all land and forest management is still carried out by the *leshozes*. But forest plots are rented out to local people. They are allowed to harvest forest products in accordance with specific regulations as a way of generating income.

### Local needs

The main field of interrelation between people and the environment is the local sphere. Since people from the villages in the forested area were and are still the main actors in collecting and consuming forest products as well as in using the forest ground for specific tasks, a closer look at the livelihood strategies of the local population and at how they have changed since independence is necessary. The question to ask is what role the forests play within the livelihood strategies of the local people. Although the forests are still state property and managed by the state forest service, the general shift on the macro-level has also influenced the economic situation and everyday life on the micro-level. Where previously virtually everybody worked for the *leshoze*, now most *leshoze* employees have lost their jobs. For example, the Kyzyl Unkur *leshoze* employed 209 people (Leshoze Kyzyl Unkur 1984); today the number has been reduced to only 30 employees (Administration of Forest-Hunting Inventory 2004). During the Soviet era, almost all households had a couple of animals and a small garden, where they grew vegetables, fruits and other crops. These resources played an important role in their livelihood system, while other consumer goods (flour, sugar, meat, tea, etc.) could be purchased with their labour wages in the state shops. Nowadays, since only a small number of people are receiving regular wages, which in any case have only a tiny purchasing power, people are much more dependent on their farming activities and on collecting forest products to make a living. Basic income is gained by agriculture and forestry, for which the households have different land and forest resources at their disposal. Each of these comes under a different institutional regime.

First, the privately owned garden surrounding each house (around 0.2 ha) is used mainly to grow vegetables or potatoes; it is only these gardens that are really owned by the people. Second, most households have only very small arable fields of around 0.3 ha, on which they grow potatoes, sunflowers or maize. These fields belong to the state and are held by the people in a kind of permanent tenure; no formal land allocation has been conducted since independence. Third, most households have access to specific grassland of 3 to 5 hectares within the forested area for hay collection. Such land was allocated by oral arrangement during Soviet times, but landholders today regard these plots as their own, paying a small rent to the *leshoze* and holding them in a kind of permanent tenure; the use rights include the cutting and collection of grass on these plots. Fourth, forest plots or only a couple of walnut trees are leased out to local people. For these the *leshoze* receive the monetary equivalent of 60% of the walnut yield from each tenant. In August, one month before nut collection, the expected yield is assessed and the amount of rent for each household is fixed.<sup>3</sup> Within the various possibilities to gain income from the local forest resources, walnuts are the most important factor. In years with a good harvest, walnuts are the main income for many households. All household members collect walnuts from the end of September to the middle of October and sell them on the market, where they can earn more than 10,000 Som (around 200 euros), which is more than the annual income of a teacher. However, the significant variations in walnut harvest from year to year are leading to major economic problems for the people as no other incomes are available. The different land resources are in many cases dispersed over a large area, which makes the complex organisation of time and labour necessary entailing relatively high transport costs. Apart from that, the distribution of forest plots, meadows and fields is unequal within the villages and between the villages. Many households do not have any access to arable land or a meadow. For instance, around 25% of all the households of the village Kara Alma have neither arable land nor a meadow at their disposal. Especially recently established households, i.e. young families who have split away from their parents' household, lack sufficient land resources since the meadows and arable fields were allocated back in Soviet times. There are almost no valuable land resources

anymore to distribute and disputes about the allocation of arable land happen frequently.

The local demand for firewood is extremely high these days due to the dramatic population growth within the last few decades, and the fact that all subsidised coal and gas supplies broke down after independence. According to my own calculations, there is a need for around 15 m<sup>3</sup> of firewood for each household per year. This means, for example, a demand of around 43,000 m<sup>3</sup> firewood for the 2,913 households of the village Arslanbob, while official permission for firewood collection and cutting was only given for 15,000 m<sup>3</sup> (Information from Arslanbob Leshoze, 2004). It is common for people to take out more wood than allowed and pay extra money to the forester, who should actually control firewood collection (oral information from B. Tagaev, 2004). Today, significant amounts of firewood are also sold illegally at the markets in the Fergana Valley by individual households, to generate additional income. They receive around 2,000 Som per truck load, which makes a profit of around 1,000 Som – in comparison, the average monthly salary of a forester is 600 Som (= 12 euros). Officially, in order to collect firewood people need a permit from the *leshoze*, which specifies the place and amount of wood to be felled. In fact, wood is cut not only in the prescribed areas, but all over the forest territory, with the highest exploitation rates occurring near the settlements.

Another major change in the nature and degree of forest utilisation is connected with the dramatically increased livestock numbers in the villages since Soviet times. According to official figures, the number of cattle kept, for example, in Arslanbob has doubled and the number of sheep has increased slightly (Figure 4-1), while the results of our own survey show an even more dramatic picture: According to these figures, the number of cattle and sheep has almost quadrupled. Additionally, around 1,600 goats are held today by households in Arslanbob, something that was strictly prohibited during Soviet times, since goats harm the forests. All these figures and the fact that most of the animals graze in the forested area in spring and autumn, which was prohibited under the Soviet system, indicate that the pressure on the forests from animal husbandry has increased.

<sup>3</sup> The forestry sector of Kyrgyzstan is currently in the process of reorganisation. A Kyrgyz-Swiss Forestry Support Programme is trying to introduce collaborative forest management measures in the walnut-fruit forests (Carter et al. 2003; Fisher et al. 2004).



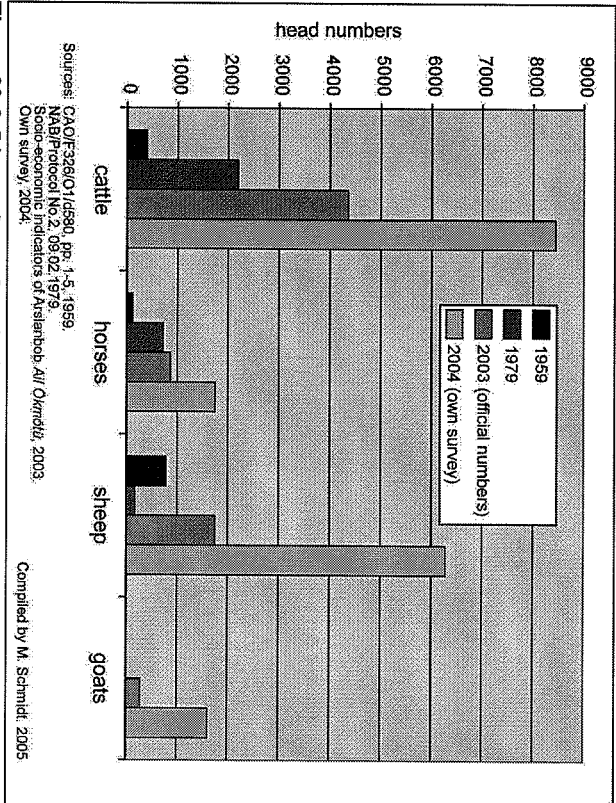


Figure 29-3. Livestock numbers in Arslanbob

To summarise, forest products play an important role today within the livelihood strategies of the local population, as indicated in Figure 4-2. Members of almost all households collect walnuts and firewood to meet subsistence needs and to generate income. A high percentage of households regularly collect fruits and morels from the forests, and not insignificant numbers generate income by collecting and selling herbs. Because it is currently difficult for the local population to make their living mainly from local sources, the land itself is an important resource for different uses. People often transform parts of their rented forest plot into hay meadows or arable land, so as to gain arable crops (cf. Messerli 2002). It is estimated by the *leshoze* director of Arslanbob that around 20% of all rented meadows have already been transformed into arable land. In most cases the land holder converts only a part of the meadow into arable land. The reason is the much higher income that could be generated by cropping than by hay making, which is even more favourable since the land holder only pays the rent for meadows, which is lower than for arable land.

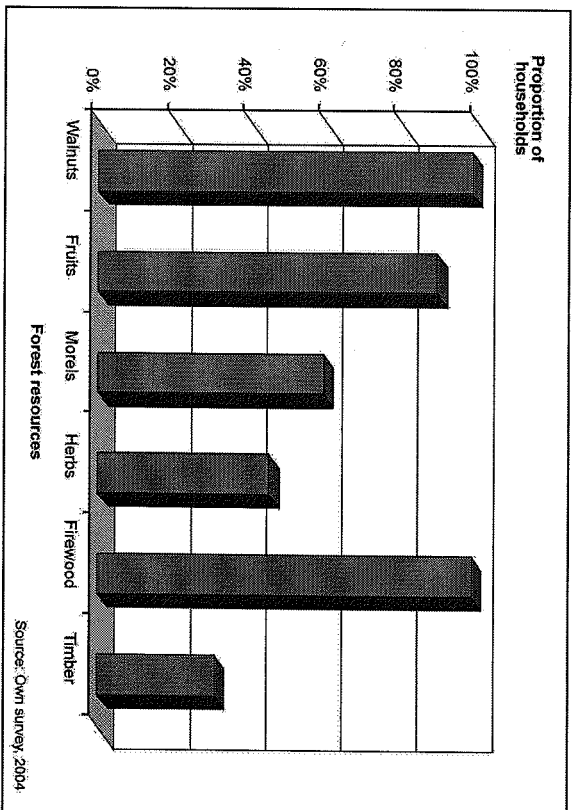


Fig. 29-4. Extraction of resources from walnut-fruit forests by local households

**Global demand**

Apart from the interests of the local people in taking out forest products for income generation and in using the forests as grazing ground, economic interests in various forest products can also be found among players who are not only located at the local level. Wild fruits, walnuts, morels and wood are valuable resources that are in demand and are sold on a national and even international scale. While, during Soviet times, the organisation of the harvesting, processing and sale of these products was carried out by state-run enterprises, today it is partly a field for new private players and companies. In connection with the opening of the Kyrgyz economy to foreign investments, new players arrived in the 1990s to claim an interest in several forest products.

Today, Turkish merchants dominate the walnut trade, primarily organising the sorting, packaging and export of the nuts. Generally, the forest farmers sell the nuts at regional markets, where they are purchased by people from the market towns. These latter crack the nuts by hand and sell the kernels mainly to the aforementioned Turkish merchants, who then export the nuts to Turkey and the Middle East.

Some of the Soviet fruit-processing factories were shut down over the last few years and never reopened, while others were privatised. Additionally, a Chinese joint venture has opened an apple-processing factory in Jalalabad. Members of the company buy wild and garden apples in the villages and produce an apple concentrate, which is then exported to China.

Although the forests are rich in mushrooms, they were not collected in former times. Only at the end of the 1990s, after merchants from France offered good prices for morels, did these mushrooms become resources with a significant market value. From mid-April till May, one can see many women and children collecting morels in the forests. After being dried, the morels are sold in the markets and exported to France and Japan.

The most prominent foreign influence on forest utilisation, however, are the salesmen from American and European wood companies, who came to the area immediately after the collapse of the USSR in search of walnut tree burls. In contrast to Soviet times, when luxury items were neither asked for nor permitted to be shown, nowadays the burls bring extraordinarily high prices. The burls are peeled and processed into veneer, and used for the interior of luxury cars. Many large walnut trees have been cut down over the last decade to yield such burls. The burl trade is conducted, to put it nicely, in a "semi-official" way. Officially, a contract between the local forest administration and the client companies regulates the amount of burls and payment, but a lively trade also seems to exist outside the limits of these contracts. Many people from the respective villages claim that more trees are felled than allowed, and that high officials are receiving extra unofficial payments from the companies, while the local *leshoz*e gets only a small amount of money and the villagers nothing. One agent from a British wood company donated some money for the local nursing station, the nursery school and the primary school of a particular village, which I would interpret as an attempt to pacify the population. According to the official *leshoz*e papers of this village, in 2003 only four walnut trees with burls were felled in the form of sanitary felling (Omoshev 2003); in fact, the number was much higher – as I personally witnessed. Almost all timber is exported nowadays; only small quantities are processed locally into furniture and souvenirs.

Although the recreational function of the forest is still important, the number of tourists spending their holidays in the area has declined significantly. Two developments are responsible for this trend: First, the independence of the former Soviet Republics has created new borders, which have become more difficult to cross; during Soviet times, most of the tour-

ists originated from the Andishan area, which is today part of Uzbekistan. Second, for many people the personal lack of financial means and the reduction of state subsidies make the cost of holidays exorbitant. On the other hand, Kyrgyzstan today is more easily accessible for foreign visitors, and more and more tourists from Western Europe are arriving in the area.

The scientific interest in the forests, which has existed for several decades, is demonstrated today not only by Kyrgyz scientists of the Institute of Forest and Nut-Farming of the National Academy of Sciences, but also by researchers from European countries. Several international research projects have been attracted by the uniqueness of the walnut-fruit forests. These projects are often linked to efforts to preserve the forests. This is justified by the global importance of these forests as a unique gene pool – a world heritage that should be protected (Sorg et al. 2003, Succow 2004).

## Conclusion

Kyrgyzstan's walnut-fruit forests are a valuable feature of the natural environment, but one which is currently subject to a multiplicity of conflicting demands and uses. The forests function as sources of timber, nuts, fruits, hay and medicinal herbs and are important for both their ecological and their recreational roles. Various forest plants became valuable resources solely because of the demand articulated and realised by the people. The value attached to the specific forest products and functions has varied greatly over the course of time. Figure 5-1 shows the multifunctional use of the forests – how the demand for forest products and the valuation of forest functions have changed in the course of the post-Soviet transformation processes.

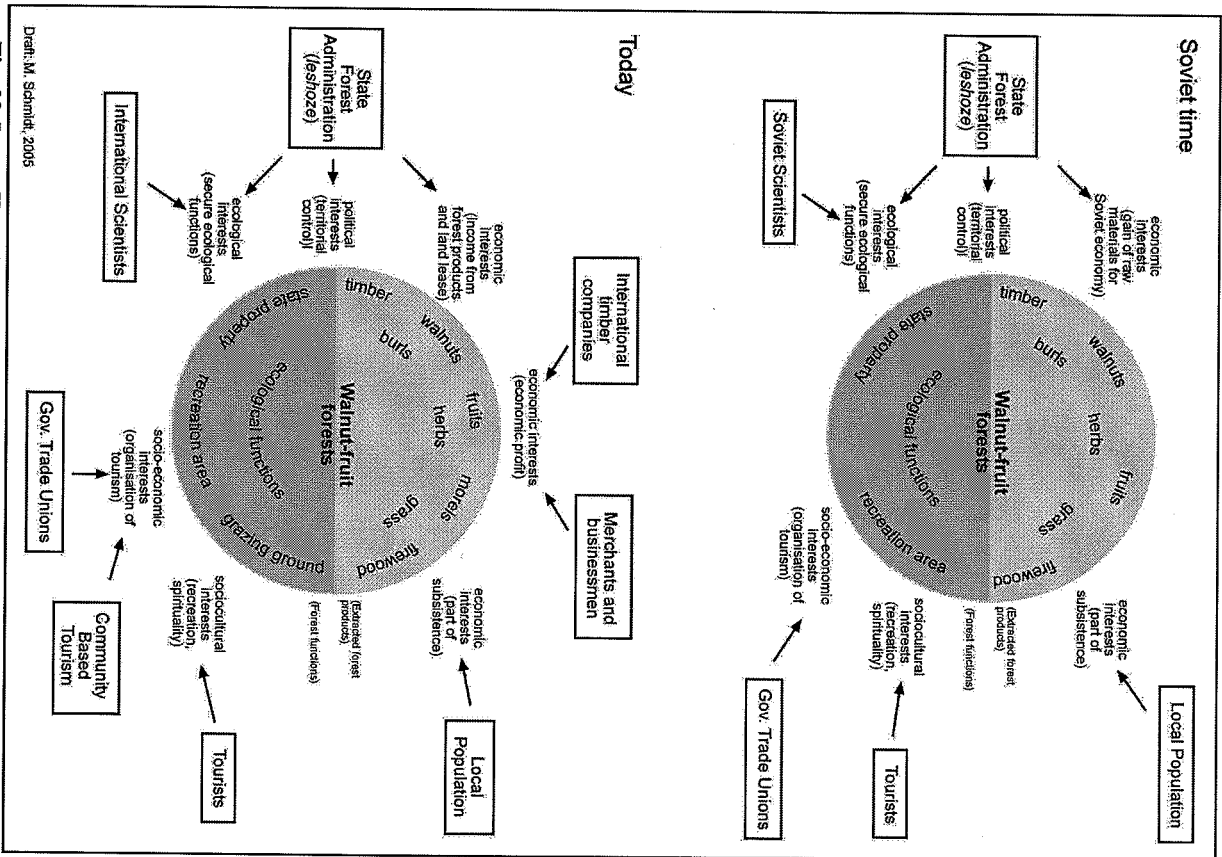


Fig. 29-5. Transformation of interest groups and their interests in the walnut-fruit forests

Diarr: M. Schmidt, 2005

The Soviet forest administration pursued three different goals with their forest policy: First, the forests provided economically valuable products, such as timber, firewood, walnuts and various fruits. These were to be used as intensively and effectively as possible for the welfare of the Soviet economy. They drew up detailed plans and developed procedures for utilising the different forest products, all of which were administered by a forest administration that was structured all the way down to the local level. Second, the forests fulfilled important ecological functions with regard to their influence on hydrology, climate and geomorphology. Thus, several laws were passed to regulate forest use; e.g., livestock was totally banned from most parts of the forests. Third, the forest regions were seen as an ideal recreation area, which led to the establishment of a tourist infrastructure. Since forest policy and management was drawn up and carried out solely by state institutions, there was hardly any potential conflict of interest between the three different aims.

Today, similar economic, ecological and recreational interests still prevail. But now the interests are modified in intensity, directed toward slightly different aims and, most important, they are articulated by multiple players. Firewood and walnuts are important in the livelihood strategies of the local population. They are much more in demand than in former times simply due to the increased numbers living in the forest area, and because of limited alternatives for generating income. New demand for specific products, such as morels and burls, has increased their value significantly. Collecting these products today has not only become an important source of monetary income for almost all households of the region, other players also participate in this business: the *leshozes*, merchants, and both Kyrgyz and international companies. In ecological terms, today the most important factor on a global scale seems to be the forests' gene pool, although scientists also stress the significance of other ecological functions, such as erosion control, influence on climate and water cycle. Tourism is often seen as a pivotal point for the economic development of the region. The values and needs of the tourists have changed, however, and nowadays they are more difficult to satisfy than in the past. This is especially true of the demands expressed by foreign tourists in terms of tourist infrastructure, leisure activities and a clean environment.

The most recent transformation processes initiated by the collapse of the Soviet Union have indeed led to political and economic liberalisation, but also to impoverishment of the local population. As a result of globalisation processes, new players have appeared on the scene, interested in products for which there was previously little demand or in taking over

control of trading processes. At the same time, although national forest policy is striving to keep control over the forests, the local population is using the forest freely to meet the exigencies of their current situation. Due to this articulation of claims by a multiplicity of actors, the interests and aims of the various players are more divergent today than during Soviet times, and conflicts of interest are rife. For example, intensified forestry could increase economic profit in the short run, but may lead to a reduction of bio-diversity and a decline in ecological attractiveness for tourists. Similarly, a new forest protection policy would need to hinder people from collecting firewood and pasturing their animals in the forests – which, of course, would in turn create problems for local subsistence. As demonstrated here, the walnut-fruit forests are highly politicised and concerns are being articulated by players at the local, regional, national and international levels. Today, existential needs and short-term economic interests are leading to the degeneration and even destruction of the forests; especially harmful are the high amount of firewood collected, and the grazing of livestock in the forests in spring and autumn. For this reason, it is necessary to design new and coherent criteria for the protection and utilisation of these unique forests. Claims which are in harmony with forest preservation should thus be satisfied, whilst utilisation practices that harm the forests would have to be inhibited or alternative means of utilisation proposed.

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## NOTES ON CENTRAL-ASIAN AND SUFI SOURCES OF CULT OF SAINTS IN SIBERIAN ISLAM

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The cult of saints as one of the most important components of syncretistic popular Islam in Siberia is discussed in the paper. The research has been conducted within the framework of the special direction in Islamic Studies – the Anthropological and Religious study of popular (folk) Islam i.e. those of its (Islamic) real local forms, which have taken place in the specific historical conditions of the lives of different peoples.

The idea of popular Islam is based on the position that:

Islam not only makes moral and ritual demands upon its believers, but it also has the potential to adapt itself to the living conditions of these believers. The historical result of the interaction of idealism and reality is the religious mosaic of popular Islam. It embraces all of the religious practices and beliefs which are not recognized as valid and normative by the Islamic elites. Characteristically, popular Islam is implicit, unwritten, concrete, without dogmas, and without formal rules (Schilder 1990, 44).

The special urgency of research into the regional, popular forms of Islam is determined by the absence of the official church organization and eccumenical cathedrals of this religion, as well as the well-known freedom of cult and ceremonial practice. These circumstances have determined a wide and multi-coloured palette of regional forms of popular Islamic manifestations. However, there is one more practical aspect of a problem of the local popular forms of world religions. There are reasons to believe, that just these forms are capable of becoming alternative and resist the most aggressive, totalitarian, and sometimes, terrorist manifestations of religious