



# Articulating FPIC through transnational sustainability standards: A comparative analysis of Forest Stewardship Council's standard development processes in Canada, Russia and Sweden

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## ABSTRACT

An increasing number of sustainability standards integrate the principle of free, prior and informed consent (FPIC) as a requirement to ensure respect for the rights of Indigenous peoples. FPIC remains a contested norm, due in part to divergences of interpretation and gaps in implementation. Drawing on a typology based on FPIC conceptions, this paper presents a comparative analysis of the Forest Stewardship Council's (FSC) standard development processes in three countries, Canada, Russia and Sweden. The paper investigates the dynamics of designing FPIC requirements and conceptions of FPIC reflected in national standards. Drawing on semi-structured interviews and analysis of written standards, this study finds similarities in terms of the key debates, such as the scope of Indigenous authority and applicability of FPIC to non-Indigenous communities, however underscored by different stakeholder dynamics and outcomes. Despite the structuring presence of International Generic Indicators, different conceptions of FPIC are reflected in national standards.

## 1. Introduction

Free, prior and informed consent (FPIC) is an emergent human rights principle which recognizes Indigenous decision-making authority on traditional lands, in cases of resource development such as forestry, oil and mining. International instruments such as the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* (UNDRIP) uphold the rights of Indigenous peoples to FPIC, linking it to self-determination, and the rights of Indigenous peoples to govern their own affairs through collective decision-making processes. FPIC has become a key assertion of the Indigenous rights movement in dealings with government and industries in matters of resource development. Indigenous groups are also asserting FPIC through the development of internal laws, procedural guidelines and negotiated agreements (Doyle, 2015; Papillon and Rodon, 2020). While international recognition of FPIC has mostly focused on Indigenous peoples, there is also a movement underway to extend FPIC rights to communities, whom are governed by traditional systems but lack legal protection (Lehr and Smith, 2010). In principle, each component of FPIC confers specific meaning. Free, refers to consent given without coercion, intimidation or manipulation. Prior, means that consent is sought well in

advance of project approval. Informed, refers to the need for sharing of pertinent information regarding the scope and impacts of the project. Finally, consent is conceived as a collective decision made by rights-holders through a community sanctioned decision-making process (Food and Agriculture Organization, 2016; Johnstone, 2020).

There are numerous drivers and pathways for the implementation of FPIC worldwide, including national laws, corporate social responsibility initiatives, and Indigenous-led actions. While the visibility and diversity of FPIC initiatives is growing, there is also increasing recognition of challenges to implementation, especially in countries lacking conducive conditions, such as support for human rights, Indigenous capacity and effective socio-political organization (Owen and Kemp, 2014). The literature on FPIC describes a type of "implementation gap", which links insufficiencies in FPIC application to procedural failures (lack of community input, engagement with unrepresentative groups, coercion) and structural conditions (marginalized and poorly resourced communities, imbalances in financial and technical resources) (Colchester and Ferrari, 2007; Cariño and Colchester, 2010; O'Faircheallaigh, 2015). Indeed, there is growing concern expressed amongst scholars, practitioners and Indigenous peoples that in application, the underlying principles of FPIC

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are being eroded as a result of the design and application of institutional arrangements which do not sufficiently reflect the spirit and intent of FPIC. Proponents of FPIC must also contend with a reactionary discourse, from some corporate and governmental actors, whom associate FPIC with a type of unilateral Indigenous “veto”<sup>1</sup> over resource development, which could be used indiscriminately by Indigenous groups to block or stall resource development projects (Joffe, 2015; Imai, 2016).

This issue of conceptual differences with regards to the meaning of FPIC conveyed both in design and implementation is the central topic of this paper. Indeed, some describe FPIC as a contested norm due to the lack of a shared definition of the concept and the fundamental parameters for its implementation (Fontana and Grugel, 2016; Papillon and Rodon, 2020). Although the foundations of FPIC, based in a human rights discourse (and articulated in documents such as UNDRIP), are clear and widely supported, in the sphere of application, conceptions and approaches diverge. Particularly contentious is the question of what constitutes legitimate forms of “consent” and the extent to which this confers substantive decision-making authority to Indigenous peoples. Several scholars note a tendency within the field of corporate social responsibility for FPIC processes to rely on bureaucratic or procedural approaches, which either downplay or obfuscate the obligation to seek consent through representative institutions and with meaningful community process (Szablowski, 2010; Yaffe, 2018). That being said, there is also growing recognition that FPIC is not a one-size-fits all approach. FPIC processes are strongly situated, and deeply influenced by the socio-cultural, political and environmental contexts in which they are embedded. FPIC processes are often built on a foundation of existing institutional arrangements between Indigenous peoples, corporations and the state, and as such they reflect the complex histories of these relationships (Fontana and Grugel, 2016).

In this paper, we seek to provide new empirical evidence regarding FPIC and the way its meaning is debated and articulated within the field of sustainability standards. Initiatives within this field provide market incentives for extractive industries based on their voluntary adherence to a set of norms, encompassing social, cultural, environmental and/or economic dimensions (Meadows et al., 2019). The Forest Stewardship Council (FSC), the focus of this study, is an organization that has developed a sustainability standard through a multi-stakeholder process. It was also one of the first to integrate consent requirements into its international standard. FSC presents a particularly interesting case study regarding articulations of FPIC because of its institutional structure which is based on an international standard (a generic set of principles and criteria), which is supplemented by specific sets of indicators developed by each national FSC initiative through a participatory process. Although indicators are designed to account for the specificities of socio-political and environmental contexts at the national level, FSC’s overarching aim is to ensure consistent application of its norms across the globe. FSC therefore provides an interesting opportunity to retrace the process by which a single internationally codified version of FPIC is ‘translated’ in national standard development processes, the tensions which emerge around interpretation, and the final articulations of FPIC which are agreed upon. Specifically, this paper undertakes an analysis of recent FSC standard development processes in three countries, Canada, Russia and Sweden, in order to: (a) examine stakeholder dynamics related to FPIC to identify key issues and debates related to interpretation (b) to link these to textual versions of FPIC articulated in each national standard and analyse implications regarding approaches to implementation.

We begin by setting out a conceptual framework, which draws on the

<sup>1</sup> Joffe (2015) explains that opponents of FPIC have tended to interpret the notion of “veto” to imply a “complete and arbitrary power, with no balancing of rights”. The term “veto” is not used in aspirational documents such as the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

academic literature in order to present a typology based on conceptions of FPIC. This is followed by a description of FSC and its approach to FPIC in standard development. The methods section is next, which includes a brief description of contextual conditions in each country. This is followed by research results, organized on a country-by-country basis and separated according to process (dynamics and key challenges) and written outcomes. We end with a discussion, where we look at the implications of these conceptual differences regarding FPIC and point towards factors which help explain these differences, relating both to process dynamics, as well as broader socio-cultural and political contexts.

## 2. Conceptual framework - unpacking conceptions of free, prior and informed consent

Conceptions of FPIC are diverse and continue to evolve as the result of ongoing experiences and critical reflection. In the past few decades, FPIC has generated an impressive academic literature, which points to a variety of conceptions of FPIC, reflecting different viewpoints on the goals of FPIC processes as well as the scope and strength of Indigenous authority in decision-making. We have developed a typology based on three conceptions: ‘human rights’, ‘relational’ and ‘procedural’. While these categories are fluid and are certainly not mutually exclusive, the differences between them can help to clarify the divergences of opinion and critiques which have been articulated regarding interpretation and implementation.

An influential conception of FPIC is articulated in the sphere of international human rights, including instruments and policies such as UNDRIP (see Table 1). We call this the ‘human rights’ conception. It links FPIC to wider goals of Indigenous self-determination, and the recognition that Indigenous peoples have been and continue to be adversely impacted by colonialism, assimilation and appropriation of lands and resources (UNDRIP, 2007). FPIC is conceived as a way to redress injustices and ensure that Indigenous peoples have a meaningful say over decisions impacting their lands and resources and ensure culturally appropriate development (Tomlinson, 2019). As such, FPIC is an expression of the collective will of the community to determine its own economic, social and cultural development. The legitimacy of an FPIC process is based in engagement with Indigenous communities, whom are empowered to make a decision, either positive or negative, through their own representative institutions. Thus, under a human rights conception of FPIC, the act of giving or withholding consent is fundamental and is a non-negotiable aspect of the process (Colchester and Ferrari, 2007; Ward, 2011). Furthermore, the autonomy of

**Table 1**  
Conceptions of FPIC described in the academic literature.

	Driving organizations	Underlying aims	Conception of decision-making
Rights-based	international organizations, human rights organizations, Indigenous organizations	recognizing and protecting fundamental rights and self-determination	substantive, iterative, self-chosen representatives, based on customary systems of decision-making
Relational	civil society organizations, Indigenous organizations, human rights organizations academics	negotiating mutually agreeable arrangements, mitigating impacts on Indigenous rights, reducing inequality	substantive, negotiation-based, recurrent
Procedural	financial organizations, corporate sector, government, civil society organizations	enhancing participation, building social acceptability, mitigating corporate risk	limited, often based in consultation

Indigenous nations to determine their own political approach to reaching a decision is also implied. According to James Anaya, Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, this is most feasible under an alternative economic development scenario, where Indigenous peoples are active partners or initiators of resource extraction on their territories, according to their own development priorities. Under conventional scenarios, meaning those where industry and government promote resource extraction projects and Indigenous peoples do not have a direct stake in project development, the human rights approach places particular emphasis on the need for structured process and meaningful decision-making authority (Anaya, 2013).

There is also a 'relational' conception of FPIC, which frames it as the expression of a collaborative dynamic between project proponents and Indigenous peoples, based on an ethic of respect, trust and the pursuit of mutually agreeable outcomes. This view, which has been espoused by some civil society groups, Indigenous organizations and academics, emphasizes dialog and partnership, but also respect for Indigenous worldviews and cultural knowledge (Mitchell et al., 2019). Value is placed on developing meaningful processes which are tailored to each community's needs and interests. The ability for an Indigenous community to collectively choose to reject or accept a resource development proposal remains on the table, however a negotiated compromise is emphasized as well as the virtues of ongoing discussion and mediation (Papillon and Rodon, 2017; Tomlinson, 2019). Under the relational conception, consent is not a one-time decision, but may happen on ongoing basis, especially under circumstances where project conditions change, or new information emerges which might impact Indigenous rights and interests. This may also be true of the human rights conception. Leydet (2019) speaks to the importance of ensuring explicit Indigenous consent at three different stages: before a permit or license or title has been issued; after resource mapping and evaluation of project impacts for Indigenous peoples; and after an agreement has been negotiated between parties. Capacity-building for Indigenous communities may be emphasized in the relational FPIC conception, in order to reduce power imbalances through access to resources, technical assistance and legal advice (Mitchell, 2019).

Finally, the academic literature also points to a tendency, especially amongst the corporate sector, to adopt a discourse which realigns FPIC with notions of 'participation' or 'community engagement', and which minimizes the obligation of ensuring a substantive role for Indigenous peoples in decision-making. This conception, has been called 'procedural' (Papillon and Rodon, 2020), because it shifts the underlying purpose of FPIC to one of ensuring a sufficient level of community input and/or support for a project (similar to a social license), often using technical or administrative means, rather than ensuring broad community acceptance based on a deliberative collective and politically autonomous decision-making process. Yaffe (2018) argues that 'procedural' conceptions of FPIC are driven by corporate agendas and considerations, such as mitigating corporate risk, managing impacts and ensuring community buy-in. The literature provides many illustrations. Mitchell et al. (2019) points to the use of ambiguous vocabularies, such as formulations which replace clear language around consent with expressions such as 'demonstrating satisfactory progress towards consent' or an obligation to 'seek rather than obtain consent'. Szablowski (2010) observes a tendency to conflate expectations regarding the need to achieve community consent with the need for community consultation. Other scholars describe initiatives where the language of consent or FPIC is never evoked, but rather is replaced with formulations regarding "approvals", "agreements" or the negotiation of benefit packages, often under clauses of confidentiality (Mahanty and McDermott, 2013; Yaffe, 2018; Vickers, 2019). Rodhouse and Vanclay (2016) express it well: "The threat is that, with the discourse of business and management being more influential in constructing corporate worldviews, the concept of FPIC will become redefined with its rights-based perceptions being replaced by corporate notions of community engagement, leaving FPIC marginalized and weakened in meaning and scope" (p.790). There

is some evidence from research looking at the implementation of free and informed consent in the context of the FSC certification of low levels of compliance and weak interpretation of Indigenous decision-making authority, although tangible improvements to the status quo have also been documented (Sandstrom and Widmark, 2007; Teitelbaum and Wyatt, 2013; Colchester, 2016).

### 3. Background - Forest Stewardship Council standard development and free, prior and informed consent

The Forest Stewardship Council is widely recognized for its commitment to the inclusion of Indigenous peoples in governance, policy and implementation of standards (Tikina et al., 2010; Mahanty and McDermott, 2013). FSC has a unique governance structure, which provides equal voting power to social, economic and environmental members, through a chamber-based approach, representing a variety of interest groups from a cross-section of society. Indigenous peoples are included in the Social Chamber, except in Canada, where a fourth Aboriginal Chamber was created. In 2013, a Permanent Indigenous Peoples Committee was formed as an advisory committee to the international board.

The foundation of the FSC system are forest management standards, which set out the requirements which forest operations must adhere to before receiving FSC forest management certification. At the international level, these are based on principles and criteria, and at the national level these are combined with indicators designed to account for specific ecological and socio-economic characteristics of each country (FSC, 2016). The most recent international FSC standard was approved in 2012 (FSC, 2015a). Since then, national initiatives have been charged with revising national standards, within the guidelines set out by FSC International, whom also approves the final standard. Development of national standards is spearheaded by national initiatives through the creation of a chamber-balanced Standard Development Group (SDG). The standard development process is designed to be participatory through ongoing consultations, field testing and revision. For this most recent standard revision process, FSC International introduced a new element, the International Generic Indicators (IGIs), which constitute a set of baseline indicators for each criteria (FSC, 2015b). The IGIs were designed to streamline the development of national indicators and improve consistency of indicators across all countries. The SDGs are given the latitude to adopt, adapt or drop each indicator with sufficient justification. Global consistency or 'equivalence' between the international and national standards is fundamental to the legitimacy of the FSC system, which is based on the claim that all FSC-certified products meet the same level of rigour, regardless of country of origin. This is a considerable challenge given the diverse socio-political and environmental contexts in which FSC-certified territories are situated.

FSC was one of the first certification schemes to include consent requirements within its standards. Requirements using the language of "free and informed consent" were first introduced to the FSC standard in 1994 under Principle 3 - Indigenous peoples' rights. The most recent version of the FSC International Standard added the word 'prior' and took a more expansive position on FPIC with inclusion in two principles and five criteria (FSC, 2015a). For the first time, consent requirements were also included in Principle 4 - Community relations and worker's rights, through a focus on the customary rights of non-Indigenous communities. The IGIs on FPIC set out specific provisions such as the need for Indigenous peoples and local communities to be sufficiently informed concerning their rights, the value of the resource, the impacts of management activities and their right to withhold or modify consent. Table 2 provides two examples of IGIs specific to FPIC from Principle 3 which illustrate the type of language adopted.

In this paper, we examine and compare the standard development processes in Canada, Russia and Sweden, specific to FPIC requirements. For the standard development group in each country, this involved working with the IGIs in order to come up with a set of FPIC indicators

**Table 2**  
Examples of International Generic Indicators related to FPIC (FSC, 2015b).

3.2.4 Free, prior and informed consent* is granted by Indigenous Peoples* prior to management activities that affect their identified rights through a process that includes:
1) Ensuring Indigenous Peoples* know their rights and obligations regarding the resource; 2) Informing the Indigenous Peoples* of the value, in economic, social and environmental terms, of the resource over which they are considering delegation of control; 3) Informing the Indigenous Peoples* of their right to withhold or modify consent to the proposed management activities to the extent necessary to protect their rights, resources, lands and territories*; and 4) Informing the Indigenous Peoples* of the current and future planned forest* management activities.
3.3.1 Where control over management activities has been granted through Free Prior and Informed Consent* based on culturally appropriate* engagement*, the binding agreement* contains the duration, provisions for renegotiation, renewal, termination, economic conditions and other terms and conditions.

commensurate with the national context but also sufficiently coherent with the IGIs to ensure global consistency.

#### 4. Methods and case study context

The research is based on a combination of semi-structured interviews and comparative analysis of FSC standards. The data collection proceeded at two levels. The first focused on dynamics within standard development processes in Canada, Russia and Sweden. In total, 49 semi-structured interviews were conducted with participants in standard development processes between 2018 and 2019 (see Table 3). In each country, this included official members of the standard development groups (SDG), consultants to SDGs, FSC board members, and members of FSC who participated in formal or informal public review processes. Table 3 provides a breakdown of participants by Chamber. In this paper, when we refer to “Participants”, we are referring not only to members of the SDG, but also the aforementioned people who participated in the process.

Interview questions revolved around the following issues: process approach and dynamics, priority issues brought forward regarding FPIC, forms of engagement, level of satisfaction with the process and with final indicators. All interviews were recorded, transcribed and coded. An iterative process was used to identify and organize data around key themes such as: definitions and meanings ascribed to FPIC, perceptions of FPIC, qualities of negotiation processes, key challenges to a shared articulation of FPIC, satisfaction with final indicators.;

The second part was a comparison of national standards with regards to the wording of FPIC indicators. Specifically, we looked at the FSC (2018a), the FSC (2020a), and FSC (2018b) (in this paper we shorten to Canadian, Russian and Swedish national standards). We did this by systematically comparing the IGIs within Principle 3 and 4 which specifically reference FPIC with related indicators in Canadian, Russian and Swedish national standards.<sup>2</sup> This also included review of all intent boxes, guidance and appendices related to these indicators. This was done by constructing a country-by-country table which highlighted all textual differences (with the exception of very minor and insignificant changes). These differences were compared with the conceptual approaches described in the theoretical framework, looking at specific qualities such as aims, language, conceptions of decision-making based in Table 1. Interview data regarding perceptions of FPIC and satisfaction with negotiated versions of FPIC in standards was used to deepen our understanding of written versions of FPIC indicators.

The three countries in this study were selected for a number of

reasons. All have a sizeable forest sector and are amongst the top five countries in the world in terms of forest area certified to the FSC standard (see Table 4). They share similar forest types (boreal and deciduous/broadleaf). All have significant Indigenous populations, whom live in forest regions and rely on forests as part of their livelihoods, through a combination of subsistence and commercial activities.

In Canada, the vast majority of forests are publicly owned. Forest management is under provincial jurisdiction, with a long-standing tradition of allocating timber harvesting and management responsibilities to the forest industry under long-term licenses (Luckert et al., 2011). FSC is also well established in Canada, with more than 48 million hectares certified (FSC, 2020b). There are many communities which depend on the forest in a variety of ways, including for employment, recreation and non-timber forest products. This includes Indigenous communities, whose traditional territories, extend over vast parts of Canada. The rights of Indigenous peoples are protected under the Constitution Act (1982). With regards to forest governance, the Supreme Court of Canada has determined governments must consult and potentially accommodate Indigenous communities whose rights are or could be affected by forestry operations. Thus provincial governments have important responsibilities in the area of forest consultation, which are shared with the forest industry (Newman, 2009). At a societal level, the profile of FPIC is growing rapidly. Canada publicly supported UNDRIP in 2016, and various levels of government including the federal government and province of British Columbia have since made commitments, albeit preliminary, to implement UNDRIP through legislation.

In Russia, all forests are publicly owned, and since the early 1990s, timber harvesting rights are allocated to forestry companies through lease agreements. However, the principles of sustainable forest management, including public participation requirements, have been driven mainly by non-state actors, including NGOs and corporations seeking access to international markets (Tysiachniouk, 2012; Dobrynin et al., 2020). Historically, the state has provided little protection for the rights of Indigenous peoples, despite the presence of a large number of ethnically distinct groups whose livelihood remains connected to subsistence-based forest activities (International Working Group for Indigenous Affairs, 2014). Russian law recognizes some groups as Indigenous, e.g. the small-numbered populations of the North, living mostly in the Arctic and forested areas in the North Siberia and Far East. Russian governments have refused to support international instruments such as UNDRIP, or ILO Convention 169 (International Working Group for Indigenous Affairs, 2014). By contrast, FSC has applied a more expansive definition of Indigenous peoples under Principle 3, based on criteria of self-identification as well as the elements of traditional land-based lifestyles and some socio-political organization at the group level (Dobrynin et al., 2020). According to several studies, FSC has brought improvements in terms of consideration of social values in forest management, however there is not a strong tradition of community engagement in forest sector (Tysiachniouk and Henry, 2015; Dobrynin et al., 2020).

In Sweden, the majority of forests are privately owned, based largely on a combination of non-industrial forest owners (48%), private companies (24%) and one state owned company (13%) (Skogsstyrelsen, 2015). Many families hold farms and forestland collectively and forestry cooperatives play an important role in service provision and marketing of timber. There are approximately 20,000 Sami peoples in Sweden, most living in northern boreal regions. Members of Sami villages hold usufructuary rights to herd and graze reindeer on certain geographically defined areas, a right which is protected in the Constitution. However, the specific areas on which Sami hold rights is contested, and has been the subject of court challenges (Sandstrom and Widmark, 2007). In order to better conciliate reindeer husbandry and forestry operations and reduce land use conflict, consultation procedures were introduced by the Swedish parliament in 1979 for year-round grazing areas. The introduction of FSC in the 1990s helped extend consultations processes to winter grazing areas, and introduced a conflict resolution process,

<sup>2</sup> This comparison of FSC standards, focused exclusively on large landowners (Sweden) and large tenures (Canada, Russia). This decision stems from the fact that large landowners/tenure holders represent the majority of certified territories in these countries, and furthermore small and low-intensity managed forests are treated separately in Canadian and Swedish standards.



**Table 3**  
Interviews with the FSC members and stakeholders.

	Environmental chamber	Economic chamber	Aboriginal chamber	Social chamber	FSC staff/board	FSC non-member stakeholder
Canada	3	2	3	2	3	1
Russia	11	5	NA	4	2	1
Sweden	3	5	NA	1	1	2

**Table 4**  
Country characteristics.

	Forest ownership regime	Total area certified FSC (ha) <sup>c</sup>	Forest sector contribution to GDP <sup>d</sup>
Canada	93.2% public, 6.8% private <sup>a</sup>	50,569,757	1.2
Russia	100% public <sup>a</sup>	48,641,596	0.8
Sweden	7% state owned, 13% state-owned companies, 78% private, 2% other public owners <sup>b</sup>	11,472,526	2.9

Sources: <sup>a</sup>Forest Trends (2002), <sup>b</sup>Skogsstyrelsen (2015), <sup>c</sup>FSC, (2019), <sup>d</sup>Food and Agriculture Organization (2014)

administered by FSC. Sweden voted in favor of UNDRIP in 2007, however under the qualifications that consent be regarded as a right to consultation, not as a veto right, and that it only applies to lands formally owned by Indigenous peoples (Doyle, 2015).

## 5. Results - examining standard development processes in Canada, Russia and Sweden

### 5.1. Canada - dynamics and key challenges

From the outset, FPIC was flagged by FSC Canada as a significant challenge in standard development, due to the expanded scope of FPIC and the higher number of FPIC-related indicators within the IGI compared with the previous standard (FSC, 2013). FSC Canada took a relatively pro-active stance. A technical expert panel was formed, comprised of people with expertise in Indigenous rights and auditing, who played an active role in the early development of the standard. A facilitator was also hired, who provided direction and expertise to the SDG and took a leadership role in developing a Canada-specific guidance document for certificate holders. Extensive public consultation was done with stakeholders and a number of field tests were done on public and private forests.

There were, nonetheless, concerns raised by members of the Economic Chamber, such as uncertainty regarding the scope of Indigenous authority, and the potential for FPIC to be viewed by Indigenous peoples as a veto right. Some thought FPIC would lead to unrealistic expectations amongst Indigenous communities and conflictual negotiations between certificate holders and Indigenous communities, for example in discussions towards a binding FPIC agreement. Concerns were also expressed that Indigenous communities could leverage the certification process towards achieving gains in other areas, such as political negotiations with government related to unsettled land claims or revenue sharing. According to one respondent, discourses around veto were omni-present, particularly in the early phases: *“It was the one four-letter word that we had to deal with for about a year straight, when we first started working on the revision of the standard. Because every time we made a presentation to members, certificate holders, even within the working group, there would always be people who would raise the question “Aren’t you saying? – the way you’ve explained this seems like a veto to me”. In the Canadian context, the word veto has such power, and it’s such a fear-based word, because of course the Canadian government used veto as a way to refute or to defend its position not to support UNDRIP”*.

Another set of concerns revolved around the logistical challenges of obtaining consent in a context where forestry companies are often

involved with multiple Indigenous communities with overlapping claims to the same territory and where these communities have differing levels of readiness to participate in FPIC processes. The material and human resource challenges faced by Indigenous communities in the context of excessive consultative requests across resource sectors are well known in Canada (Newman, 2009; Boyd and Lorefice, 2018). Thus, questions were raised regarding situations where Indigenous communities were preoccupied with other processes, had insufficient capacity or refused to participate due to ongoing political dossiers. These issues were also raised by members of the Aboriginal Chamber, who felt it was important that the costs of implementing FPIC not be downloaded to Indigenous communities, and that sufficient time be allowed for meaningful engagement without undue pressure.

There was also strong reaction from members of all chambers concerning the decision of FSC International to incorporate FPIC into Principle 4 at the criteria level, aimed at local communities with either legal or customary rights on the forest. The Aboriginal Chamber was firm in the position that FPIC should not be extended to non-Indigenous communities in Canada, which was supported by the Social Chamber. Although participants recognized that an inclusive approach to FPIC might be appropriate in some countries, in Canada it was felt that FPIC must be reserved for Indigenous communities, who are covered under UNDRIP and have distinct rights as set out in the Canadian Constitution. After extensive research, the Social Chamber identified no documented examples of customary rights applying to non-Indigenous communities in Canada.

Despite these challenges, participants within the SDG described the dynamic around FPIC as constructive. According to one participant, this stemmed from the fact that most members of the SDG came to the table with some understanding of Indigenous rights and/or had long-term relationships working with Indigenous peoples. Others pointed to the ongoing participation of the Aboriginal Chamber, who helped adapt IGI articulations of FPIC to a Canadian rights-based perspective, and maintain a level of stringency around the interpretation of consent. According to interviews, a key to forging consensus between participants was building a shared relational perspective on FPIC, viewing it as an ongoing process, which should proceed at an appropriate pace to each community, and which might include an investment in capacity-building in order to ensure meaningful engagement. As described by one staff member: *“As long as it’s based on trust, relationship building, and that there is a genuine effort to respect the FPIC process and all it encompasses. So the FPIC guidance is trying to do that. So therefore, it’s about changing a direction in terms of the relationship and providing capacity to local Indigenous communities to live the principle of FPIC, as described in UNDRIP, and build up on successes, aiming at the fulsome of the whole consent and agreements”*.

### 5.2. Canada – differences between IGIs and FPIC indicators in the Canadian standard

Overall, the FPIC indicators in the Canadian standard remain relatively close to the IGIs, mirroring the human rights language adopted there. However, there are also some notable differences, which reflect efforts by the SDG to integrate a relational approach to FPIC (see Table 5).

The Canadian standard adopts more active language than the IGIs when describing the relationship between forestry companies and Indigenous peoples. For example, one of the main indicators regarding

**Table 5**

Summary of dynamics, key changes from IGIs to Canadian FPIC indicators in national standard and conception of FPIC.

FPIC dynamics in standard development process	Key differences between IGI and Canadian standard	Conception of FPIC
-Concerns over veto power -Social/Aboriginal Chamber support for relational conception	-Use of more active language when describing relationships between proponents and Indigenous peoples (inform vs. engage) (3.2.1)-Obligation to engage Indigenous peoples at operational and strategic level in planning (3.2.1)- Addition of capacity-building indicator (3.2.2, 3.2.5)-Flexible timelines accepted when FPIC not achieved but process advancing in good faith (3.2.5)-“Best efforts” accepted when FPIC not achieved for reasons outside sphere of influence (ex: lack of response or cooperation from Indigenous groups)- Removal of FPIC indicators from Principle 4 in favor of language around engagement (4.21, 4.2.2, 4.2.3)	Based in strong relational conception. Flexible approach to implementation.

FPIC (3.2.1) of the Canadian standard replaces the IGI language of “Indigenous Peoples are informed when where and how they can comment on and request modification to management activities...” with “...it is determined when, where and how Indigenous Peoples can participate in management planning, both strategic and/or operational...”<sup>3</sup> This focus on strategic influence is particularly revealing as it reflects a spirit of mutual collaboration rather than information sharing. Another aspect was the addition of a new indicator (3.2.2) which requires forestry companies to support Indigenous capacity-building. This issue of Indigenous capacity was frequently raised as essential to meaningful engagement by both Aboriginal and Economic Chamber members.

Another important change is a number of stipulations around “best efforts”, which will allow applicants more time in order to achieve FPIC. This decision was a response to concerns around differing levels of readiness by Indigenous communities, and an awareness that relationship building is a long-term process which will not necessarily subscribe to certification timelines. Under indicator 3.2.5, wording is included which allows for conformance even when FPIC has not been achieved under circumstances where the process is advancing “in good faith”. A motion was passed at the FSC General Assembly in 2017, to add this at the level of the IGIs. Under the intent box for this same indicator it says that “best efforts” will also be considered when “for reasons outside the sphere of influence” of the FSC applicant, there is a lack of response or cooperation from Indigenous groups. This is likely a reflection of ongoing concerns expressed by the Economic Chamber that FPIC process would become embroiled in broader political disputes.

Finally, a significant change to the Canadian standard is the outright removal of FPIC from Principle 4 at the indicator level in favor of indicators using language of engagement, thereby eliminating the possibility that non-Indigenous rights-holders have access to FPIC.

<sup>3</sup> All excerpts are from [The FSC National Forest Stewardship Standard of Canada \(2018a\)](#).

### 5.3. Russia - dynamics and key challenges

For members of the SDG, the introduction of FPIC was considered a significant departure from current approaches. Adherence to Principle 3 and 4 had been based mainly on the designation of socially-valuable forests, known as High Conservation Values and public consultations, which, while limited mainly to hearings for the purposes of information-sharing, had nonetheless required companies to engage with a wide range of local and Indigenous communities a (Tysiachniouk, 2012). Ensuring even this relatively basic level of consultation was the result of long-standing efforts on the part of FSC Russia’s Social Chamber, in a context where communities had little legal recourse with regards to forestry operations, and were often situated in geographically remote regions without strong political institutions or social organization at the community level (Tysiachniouk and McDermott, 2016). For the Social Chamber, the introduction of stronger and more prescriptive FPIC requirements in the form of IGIs was received favorably, as it represented an opportunity to further solidify the recognition of Indigenous peoples in Russia and protect the rights of non-indigenous communities. FPIC was seen as an opportunity to redress weaknesses in the system, demand greater accountability from forestry companies and potentially strengthen the position of local and Indigenous communities in negotiations with the forestry industry.

For members of the Economic Chamber, the new FPIC requirements were met with a combination of skepticism and frustration. For some, FPIC was seen as a foreign concept, developed elsewhere using a top-down approach which did not sufficiently reflect the realities of the Russian situation. Some felt that FPIC would disrupt what was perceived as a careful social consensus amongst FSC stakeholders regarding an acceptable set of social practices with communities, and pose an unfair administrative and financial burden on companies. Thus, for members of the Economic Chamber, applying FPIC raised many new issues, which became the focus of heated and sometimes protracted discussions amongst members of the SDG. “Another aspect of FPIC, so to speak, is that we all understand it was invented, in quotation marks, in Canada, based on North American realities, where the Indigenous population is more institutionalized. There, it would be clear there is a leader of the Indigenous population - who to sign with. When we speak with our Indigenous people, with our local people, it’s very difficult to say that everywhere it’s really clear who is the leader, even the informal leader. Because even the Indigenous population is so fragmented”. From a practical perspective, concerns were also voiced that, given the low level of social organization within some communities, and the overlap levels of political administration, identifying legitimate representative organizations with whom to engage in FPIC processes could be difficult.

At the center of these debates was the question of identifying rights and rights-holders eligible for an FPIC process under FSC’s Principle 3 and Principle 4. Given the fluid and often-times contested definitions of Indigenous versus non-Indigenous, operationalizing these categories was considered difficult, made more so by the lack of clear direction provided by FSC International. Neither the FSC International Standard, IGIs, nor supportive documents such as the International FPIC guidance provided sufficient clarification, and communications between the SDG, the Russian Board and FSC-International failed to provide the necessary answers. Questions were also raised about the definition of customary rights, how to identify these and what to do in situations where identified rights contradicted Russian law. Furthermore, like in Canada, some members of the Economic Chamber mobilized arguments around veto, voicing the opinion that FPIC would be used to obstruct or halt forestry operations, causing new conflicts and disagreements. “It is frightening [for companies] that the local population can give consent to logging, or can quickly withdraw it. For some reason, they do not trust that agreements that can be reached in this respect. It is frightening that this may be the subject of blackmail by the population, some extortion”.

Members of the SDG grappled with these issues throughout the process of developing the Russian standard, with increasing tensions and

conflict between the Social and Economic Chambers. The Environmental Chamber remained divided on FPIC. Throughout the process, the Social Chamber maintained its position of support for a strong interpretation of FPIC as outlined in the FSC International Standard and IGIs. The Economic Chamber also developed a unified position, which sought to either remove FPIC or significantly reduce its scope and/or applicability in Russia. The Economic Chamber became increasingly organized, adopting a variety of arguments and strategies. In the case of Principle 3, this included demands by the Economic Chamber to revisit the definition used by FSC for the identification of Indigenous peoples, which relied on a combination on self-identification, some social organization, and dependence on natural resources for subsistence. The existing standard includes a list of Indigenous peoples, and a well-developed practice for implementing Principle 3. However, from 2017 onward, the Economic Chamber pushed for a more restrictive definition, which would create stronger alignment between FSC's approach and Russian legislation.

With the potential for FPIC debates to derail the standard development process, the SDG agreed to develop an explanatory note, known as Annex B4, to clarify the scope and applicability of FPIC in Russia, especially the question of eligibility for FPIC. The proposals for the Annex varied widely between chambers, with the Economic Chamber reiterating the need to remove FPIC from the overall standard or from non-Indigenous rights holders while the Social Chamber maintained its position of inclusion. A compromise was reached and the Annex was approved in 2018, which places considerable restrictions on the application of FPIC. Even after approval, however, pressure from the Economic Chamber continued, as it became apparent that other countries, such as FSC Canada and FSC Sweden had excluded FPIC from Principle 4. They sought to have FPIC removed from Principle 4, based on the argument that most customary rights (access, berries, medicinal plants, mushrooms) were already protected under Russian law and those that were not could be illegal, thus causing a direct contradiction between FSC rules and Russian law.

#### 5.4. Russia - differences between IGIs and FPIC indicators in the Russian standard

The final standard, including Annex B3 and B4, approved in 2020, shows traces of these debates. As shown in Table 6, although FPIC indicators follow the general language of the IGIs, there are some notable restrictions placed on the application of FPIC indicators, which puts considerable limits on scope and applicability. For example, two of the main FPIC indicators in Principles 3 and 4 (3.2.3 and 4.2.3), which set out requirements for an FPIC process, limit this requirement to customary rights developed “over a long period of time within a specific area” and that are “not governed by law, however, not conflicting with it”, thereby excluding both legally protected and “unlawful” activities from FPIC.<sup>4</sup> It also clarifies that FPIC is limited to “particular activities” rather than “for all the activities of the Organization”. The annexes also stipulate that FPIC is a mechanism which should be adopted only *after* existing mechanisms of engagement have failed. It reads: “The FPIC is to be used in cases when other mechanisms, such as dispute resolution or damage reparation procedures, or mapping of social HCVs, etc., are not sufficient to protect the rights of Indigenous Peoples and local communities. FPIC shall not be used as a substitute for such mechanisms”.

An effort is also made in the Russian standard to link FPIC to the traditional lifestyles and livelihoods of both Indigenous and local communities. For example, unlike FSC International's definition of customary rights, Annex B3 adds the stipulation that holders of customary rights “maintain a lifestyle which makes them dependent (economically or culturally) on the use of the site, resource or object for

**Table 6**

Summary of dynamics, key changes from IGIs to Russian FPIC indicators in national standard and conception of FPIC.

FPIC dynamics in standard development process	Key differences between IGI and Russian standard	Conception of FPIC
-Strong concerns over veto power -Evidence of procedural conception based in risk mitigation -Social Chamber support for strong language based in IGIs	-FPIC restricted to customary right not governed by law and not in conflict with it (3.2.3, 4.2.3)-Guidance stipulates that FPIC required only for particular activities within areas affected by legal and/or customary rights-Guidance states a number of exceptions to requirement for FPIC: when FPIC conflicts with other requirements in the standard (ex: leads to significant cuts of jobs or other adverse social consequences) when obtaining FPIC leads to conflict between the Organization and other FPIC right holders, or between different FPIC right holders if there are more than one community claiming rights to the same territory-Guidance states FPIC not normally applied on whole managed area, zoning required-Guidance states it is only possible for the community to withhold or modify arrangements under FPIC before it expires in case the agreement is violated by the Organization	Founded on a relational conception (IGIs) but with clear shift towards a procedural conception. Flexible approach to implementation.

which they claim their rights”.

Finally, Annex B4 outlines a number of circumstances where FPIC should not apply. This includes situations where the requirement to obtain FPIC from Indigenous or local communities is in conflict with other requirements of the standard (the example of significant job cuts or social liabilities is used) or when obtaining FPIC will lead to a conflict between the forestry company and other FPIC rights holders, or between different groups of rights holders. Indeed, even a conflict between different rights holders on the same territory can excuse a forestry company from meeting FPIC requirements.

Taken together, this list of caveats and exceptions raises many questions regarding the integrity of FPIC implementation in Russia, leading us to describe Russia's approach as tending towards “procedural” (see Table 6). It also raises questions regarding the potential for inconsistencies with the FPIC approaches described in other standards, like Canada, for which these types of “exceptions” do not exist.

#### 5.5. Sweden - dynamics and key challenges

Interviews with participants revealed that while FPIC requirements proved challenging to negotiate, they were not the focus of overt conflict. After early attempts to develop indicators for Principle 3 using a large working group proved unsuccessful, a separate smaller working group was created including three members each from the Economic Chamber and Social Chamber, however not all were members of the SDG. The approach taken by the working group was to rely on the IGIs but also to develop indicators which would be in step with the

<sup>4</sup> All excerpts are from [The FSC Forest Stewardship Standard for the Russian Federation \(2020a\)](#).



consultation process used in the previous standard (also in the Swedish Forest Code). This was a relatively prescriptive and standardized approach applied across all large forest holdings. The new process, termed the Participatory Planning Process (PPP) aimed to enhance information-sharing on both sides, as well as mechanisms for mediation and dispute resolution. According to interview respondents, the biggest challenge faced by the working group was agreeing on the parameters for granting or withholding consent, due to differences in interpretation between the Social Chamber and Economic Chamber.

Indigenous members of the Social Chamber argued that the Sami should have strong decision-making influence under FPIC, in line with conceptions in the IGIs. For them, FPIC was viewed as an important mechanism to redress what was seen as a legacy of imbalanced power dynamics within existing consultation processes. One member described the position of the Sami: *“In Sweden it’s the outcome of the process that is important. Because today, a lot of our members don’t really feel listened to, and actually feel that it is not necessary for us to participate, because they don’t listen to us. And they will continue with their forest management activities, even if we say, “can you please stop”. So for us, it’s not the process, because we have quite good processes, it’s the outcome. Is it going to give us more than we had before?”*. Indeed, Sami peoples’ dissatisfaction with consultation processes has been well documented, including perceptions that input from Sami is not given sufficient weight and that this is resulting in ongoing degradation of reindeer habitat (Widmark, 2006; Johansson, 2014). During discussions, Indigenous representatives within the Social Chamber also sought to revisit the boundaries of Sami reindeer grazing areas (traditional territories) for each community, potentially extending the territories covered by the Participatory Planning Process. Previously, the boundaries were established by a governmental map established in 1974, however the Sami argued these boundaries were not mutually agreed upon and did not reflect current land use nor consider recent court rulings.

For members of the Economic Chamber, the pre-existing process was described as quite effective and appropriate, thus the main concern was regarding the changing dynamic around consent under the new standard and the potential impact of increasing territories under consultation. There were concerns for a shifting balance of power, a veto right, and implications for management planning and corporate stability. A member of the Economic Chamber explains: *“How can we plan something, when someone can come in and say that we can’t do our harvesting there. What is that going to mean for us? How can we do planning? And on what basis can they misuse this?”*. Given the ownership structure in Sweden, based mostly on private land, there were questions raised about the scope of consent processes and applicability in Sweden. Members of the Economic Chamber sought clarity on the parameters surrounding consent. What rights should be covered under FPIC and what constitutes an infringement upon the rights of the Sami? What should the threshold be for the violation of a legal or customary right? Under what conditions should the Sami be able to withdraw consent for management activities? And for how long? As in Canada and Russia, members of the Economic Chamber expressed concerns that FPIC would create heightened expectations amongst the Sami.

As in Canada, there was clear consensus amongst the SDG that FPIC rights should not be extended to local communities under Principle 4. This was based on a similar rationale to Canada, that local communities in Sweden do not have customary rights, either on an individual or collective basis beyond the *‘Allemansrätt’*, which provides free movement of all people on public or private lands in Sweden, already covered under Swedish law.

According to participants, discussions around FPIC were very long and sometimes difficult, but there was agreement both within the working group and the SDG, that what was needed was a clear process, which would clarify the respective responsibilities of companies and reindeer herders, as well as the steps to follow under situations of disagreement or where Sami said “no” to forestry operations.

## 5.6. Sweden - differences between IGIs and FPIC indicators in the Swedish standard

Principle 3 and indicators on FPIC reflect the tenor of discussions within the Swedish SDG. While at the indicator level, there are many similarities to the language of the IGIs, the accompanying Directives set out the details of the PPP, which are more prescriptive and operationally-focused than either Russia or Canada. For example, the Directive sets out the specific management activities that are covered under the PPP (ex: regeneration felling, continuous cover forestry, soil scarification, fertilization, road construction). It also obliges both parties to provide certain information, to follow a sequence of standardized steps and to abide by specific timelines.

The specific issue of consent is treated under indicator 3.2.4. Consent, or withholding of it, is part of the PPP. Under a scenario where reindeer herding is threatened in a way “that disables reindeer herding after the participatory planning process has been conducted”, three pathways are proposed, either suspending activities for 5–7 years while mitigation measures are applied, (2) agreeing to revisit the management activity in the next planning period or (3) under a situation where there is not agreement about the severity of the impact, mediation can be requested.<sup>5</sup> If a solution is still not reached, a review from a dispute resolution committee can be called for, which reviews the process and ensures that all steps have been fulfilled. A forest company is not obligated to accept the withdrawal of consent in cases where it affects the long-term forest management. Finally, the Directive outlines scenarios if the forestry company still decides to proceed with forestry operations despite the absence of Sami consent. It appears that this can be justified if the company demonstrates that the absence of consent will substantially affect the long-term management or that consent is being withheld for a type of activity in general, without sufficient demonstration by the Sami that it disables reindeer herding in the area. Thus, while FPIC is based in a negotiative and relational dynamic, there are also indications that the scope of Sami authority to either provide or withhold consent is limited by a number of conditions (see Table 7).

## 6. Discussion and conclusions

This research adds empirical evidence to what are a small number of studies looking specifically at FSC and the implementation of consent. As mentioned previously, ‘free and informed consent’ has been part of the FSC standard since its inception in 1994. The research that does exist, mainly focused on Canada and Sweden, provides indications that, thus far, when applied on the ground consent requirements have rarely been treated as forms of substantive decision-making for Indigenous peoples, but rather as stipulations for bilateral consultation and agreement-making, which can take a variety of forms, from economic agreements to protocols for consultation (Widmark, 2006; Sandstrom and Widmark, 2007; Teitelbaum and Wyatt, 2013). There is also preliminary evidence that Indigenous peoples are not fully satisfied with outcomes of these consultation strategies, and observe ongoing degradation to natural resources and livelihoods (Sandstrom and Widmark, 2007; Johansson, 2014).

Given this legacy, it is not surprising that FSC’s more expansive approach to FPIC provoked strong reactions. FSC’s revised international standard brings requirements in line with the discourse of international human rights, which has rapidly become the “gold standard” of corporate social responsibility, however its language also sets a very high bar. As our research shows, building consensus around a common interpretation of FPIC at the national level, where considerations around feasibility, risks and transaction costs are considerable, was not straightforward. All three standard development processes experienced

<sup>5</sup> All excerpts are from *The FSC National Forest Stewardship Standard of Sweden (2018b)*.



**Table 7**

Summary of dynamics, key changes from IGIs to Swedish FPIC indicators in national standard and conception of FPIC.

FPIC dynamics in standard development process	Key differences between IGI and Swedish standard	Conception of FPIC
-concerns over veto power-desired alignment with existing consultation process- Social Chamber support for strong language based in IGIs	-Requirements to follow detailed Participatory Planning Process which lays out activities covered, information requirements, timelines -Consent only allowed for specific activities not territorial-Specific scenarios laid out if consent is withheld. Includes mediation and dispute resolution committee.-A forest company is not obligated to accept the withdrawal of consent in cases where it affects long-term forest management.-Removal of FPIC indicators from Principle 4 in favor of language around engagement (4.2.1, 4.2.2, 4.2.3)	Founded on a relational conception (IGIs) but with moderate shift towards a procedural conception. Prescriptive approach to implementation.

a significant value rift between Social/Aboriginal Chambers and the Economic Chamber in attitudes and conceptions surrounding FPIC. Members of the Social/Aboriginal Chamber were mostly favourable to the language put forward in the FSC International Standard and IGIs, which reflects a human rights discourse through its commitment to strong authority for Indigenous institutions and substantive interpretation of consent. Several expressed hopes that the new FPIC requirements would help overcome problems associated with ineffective consultation processes. Members of the Economic Chamber, across the three countries, expressed reservations, in some cases outright opposition to FPIC. While some of these issues related to difficulties in deciphering the rights-based language of the international standard and IGIs and applying these from an operational perspective, others reflected risk-based concerns, regarding the implications of shifting decision-making authority towards Indigenous peoples. The most visible manifestations were expressions concerning the risk of an Indigenous veto and the view that FPIC requirements would lead to ‘unrealistic expectations’, and the potential for unsubstantiated or unjustified withdrawal of consent and economic disruption for the forest industry.

While key issues and chamber-based positions were similar, negotiations processes played out differently in the three countries, with variable outcomes in terms of FPIC approach. As such, there is evidence that IGIs underwent a translation process in each country, founded on the need to find consensus amongst disparate interests within the SDG. Indeed, much like the literature on ‘institutional fit’, which raises the question of policy compatibility across scales and the reshaping that occurs as a result of cultural, social and environmental factors, our study points towards the contributing influence of both process dynamics and the broader institutional context regarding Indigenous rights (Young et al., 2008; Epstein et al., 2015; McDermott and Ituarte-Lima, 2016). In Canada, a conciliatory dynamic was maintained within the SDG and consensus was reached through emphasis on a relational approach to FPIC, based in information-sharing, capacity-building, negotiation and dispute resolution, when necessary. The SDG had the advantage of organizational support, an experienced membership and strong participation from the Aboriginal Chamber, who along with the Social Chamber, had considerable influence and voting power. Other research has recognized the beneficial impact of the Aboriginal Chamber and

associated engagement of regional and national Indigenous organizations in FSC processes (Collier et al., 2002; Mahanty and McDermott, 2013; Colchester, 2016). We also observe that when compared with the Russian and Swedish standards, the Canadian standard takes the least prescriptive approach to FPIC, leaving significant latitude to forestry companies and Indigenous peoples to define FPIC arrangements according to their own conditions and priorities. While this may be connected to the relational approach adopted by the SDG, it may also speak to broader socio-cultural context in Canada, with significant diversity in terms of patterns of Indigenous land use, cultural traditions and political relationships to government, which precludes a one-size-fits-all approach. The Canadian standard is also relatively unrestrictive with regards to its conception of the act of giving or withholding consent. There are no temporal or spatial restrictions placed on consent-giving as is the case in Russia and Sweden. The one notable exception is the stipulation that forestry companies not be held accountable to situations where Indigenous groups withhold consent for reasons “outside their sphere of influence”. While this may be related to the often-times politicized and/or conflictual relationship between Indigenous peoples and government (sometimes involving forestry companies) over land rights, it may also have the effect of justifying the orientation of FPIC processes away from broad interpretations of Indigenous rights towards narrower and operationally-focused perspectives. This may, in turn have the effect of reducing process legitimacy amongst some Indigenous communities. Previous research from Canada has shown that Indigenous groups do not necessarily view certification as disassociated from their wider political aspirations (Teitelbaum et al., 2019), and that past practices associated with FSC certification have not necessarily met the expectations of Indigenous communities (Kant and Brubacher, 2008; Tikina et al., 2010; Teitelbaum and Wyatt, 2013).

The standard development process in Russia stands out both in terms of its internal dynamics and outcomes. Divisions between the Social and Economic Chamber were most pronounced and dynamics were adversarial, with repeated attempts by the Economic Chamber to sideline or remove FPIC from the Russian standard, both under Principles 3 and 4. Negotiations around consent had some unanticipated consequences, such as efforts by the Economic Chamber to limit the applicability of FPIC through proposals to reduce the criteria by which FSC Russia defines Indigenous peoples. Other studies have also observed similar attempts to restrain the application of FPIC through a narrow interpretation of Indigenous rights and/or politicization of FPIC processes due to conflicts over claims to indigeneity (Mahanty and McDermott, 2013; Fontana and Grugel, 2016; Tomlinson, 2019; Tysiachniouk et al., 2021). With regards to the final standard, the parameters surrounding FPIC are more restrictive than either Canada or Sweden. Unlike Canada, which views FPIC as an integrated process of engagement, in the Russian standard, FPIC is presented as a mechanism to be used only *after* existing engagement mechanisms (HCVs, consultations) have failed and only for those customary rights not covered by nor conflicting with the law. The annexes outline a further series of exceptions, such as conflicts with other requirements or competing claims to rights, providing some evidence that the Russian standard has internalized a certain procedural discourse, with cost and risk management influencing the framing of FPIC, resulting in a more restrictive approach to implementation.

The reduced ‘institutional fit’ observed in the Russian standard development process can in part be explained through Chamber dynamics, including what was a unified, well-organized and connected Economic Chamber. However, there were broader factors at play, related both to socio-cultural and political contexts. Previous research has shown that institutionalized practices around community and Indigenous consultation are not well developed in Russia, due in part to vast distances, absence of sufficient communication technologies and low levels of knowledge regarding forest management. Some communities also have reduced levels of formal political organization and fewer resources and capacity to participate in these processes (Wilson, 2016;

Dobrynin et al., 2020). Although FSC has helped to improve consultation practices, there appears to be wider gap between FPIC and existing consultation practices than either Canada or Sweden. Furthermore, unlike Canada where FPIC benefits from growing societal and legal recognition, in Russia it is neither well known, nor accepted by government, who rejects FPIC on the basis that it undermines state sovereignty over publicly-owned lands (Lerner et al., 2017). As such, the Economic Chamber was able to leverage a number of arguments regarding the absence of favourable conditions for the implementation of FPIC and the potential for higher transaction costs.

In Sweden, negotiations around consent were conciliatory, but unlike Canada and Russia's processes, it focused on developing a singular operationally-focused approach to FPIC. Drawing on the experience of the existing consultation process, the challenge became, how to agree on an approach to consent which could be applied consistently across all Sami reindeer grazing territories. The result is significantly more prescriptive, as the Swedish standard (through directives) provides a more detailed and operational approach than either Canada or Russia, which targets specific details such as activities, types of engagement, timelines and dispute resolution. While this may be related to what are more uniform patterns of land use amongst Sami, there is also a tradition of taking a more prescriptive approach to consultations between forestry companies and Sami within the FSC standard. In terms of interpretations of consent, the Swedish standard is relational but decision-making authority is potentially more restrictive than Canada's, for example through stipulations that FPIC only apply in situations where forestry activities "disable reindeer herding" and that it only apply to "certain activities" within a medium time frame, however it is arguably less restrictive than the Russian standard. What explains the presence of this more procedural influence in the conception of FPIC? At the level of process, like in Russia, the Economic Chamber was well organized, in this case represented by a number of influential forestry companies. There was only one Indigenous representative on the standard development group. Other socio-cultural and political factors may also have been at play. Sweden's forests are, for the most part, privately-owned, assigning strong property rights to landowners. The Swedish government has been criticized for providing insufficient protection of Sami rights in land use planning and development, and for failing to develop procedures which provide the Sami with meaningful influence over resource development decisions (Larsen and Raitio, 2019).

The broader question remains, will FSC's revised national standards permit substantive articulations of FPIC or will it fall prey to the technical or symbolic approaches described in the literature? It will take time and ongoing research to begin to answer this question, and it will require systematic research looking at on-the-ground implementation. The assessment process and decisions taken by third-party auditors will be a key interface in terms of judging the legitimacy of corporate practices in the area of FPIC. However, our research does provide some early insights. At the level of FSC's international standard and IGIs, the interpretation of consent is substantive, lining up with UNDRIP and operationalized through processes which adopt explicit language around the right to withhold or modify consent. The international standard also takes an inclusive approach through the extension of FPIC to local communities with legal and customary rights. However, as demonstrated in this study, this language was not easy to reconcile with national and localized interests. In all three countries, the negotiation process between chambers involved compromise and reinterpretation, in some cases towards stronger formulations of FPIC, but more often towards more restrictive ones. This was particularly evident in Russia, and to a lesser extent Sweden and Canada. A common thread between countries, however, was a tendency to orient FPIC approaches towards operational issues based in forest management, for example by placing limitations on the spatial and temporal applicability of FPIC or through the exclusion of political scenarios. While this may come as no surprise given FSC's market-based regulatory approach and the strong presence of corporate actors in the standard development process, these

operational formulations nonetheless represent a shift from the language of the IGIs. While further research will be required in order to understand the full implications of this operational tendency, it appears to open the door to more technical approaches to FPIC, which run counter to conceptions described by Indigenous peoples based in holistic views of land and resources and substantive decision-making authority.

### CRedit authorship contribution statement

**Teitelbaum:** Conceptualization, Methodology, Formal analysis, Writing - original draft, Funding acquisition **Tysiachniouk:** Conceptualization, Methodology, Formal analysis, Writing - review & editing **McDermott:** Conceptualization, Methodology, Formal analysis, Writing - review & editing. **Elbakidze:** Conceptualization, Methodology, Formal analysis, Project administration, Funding acquisition.

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