

Russia's Recipe for Sustaining Innovation

By [Ross Nicholson](#)

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When considering those nations that are showing real vision and leadership in the low-carbon revolution, Russia might not be the first country that springs to mind. After all, Russia has some of the largest oil and gas reserves in the world. In addition, the Russian political leadership has a reputation for lack of commitment and changing policy on the sustainability agenda. Earlier this year, Russia and other former Soviet-bloc countries confirmed that they would take action against a controversial Kyoto clause that would effectively force them to reduce emissions.

We are entering an exciting point in Russia's economic history. This year, Russia will hold the presidency of the Group of 20 summit and will be responsible for leading efforts to develop a set of measures aimed at boosting sustainable balanced growth. Reforming energy and commodity markets, promoting energy efficiency and green growth, and regulating energy infrastructure have all been identified as priorities under President Vladimir Putin.

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As Russia becomes more integrated into the global economy, the significant boost to the country's private sector comes with new challenges. Growth will need to go hand in hand with updated infrastructure, increased energy efficiency and a more balanced energy mix. Meeting these challenges will create incredible opportunities for businesses from Russia and beyond to work together in this emerging sector.

The Skolkovo innovation center in Moscow now houses major international companies like Siemens and GE, which are using the center to build a presence in the region. The strategic goal of Skolkovo is to concentrate international intellectual capital, thereby stimulating the development of breakthrough projects and technologies. Vasily Belov, executive director of the Cluster of Energy Efficient Technologies at the Skolkovo Foundation believes that they have commitments from industry to locate more than 2,500 research and development people in Skolkovo, and he expects to increase this number to 6,000 people by 2015.

Exploiting these opportunities will require a shift in trend, particularly when it comes to finding the right kind of people to help companies develop and deliver market strategies for the region. Companies need business leaders who offer both on-the-ground and global experience, as well as an in-depth understanding of the low-carbon landscape. Finding those people in Russia can be a challenge. With the sustainability sector on the sidelines, many of the best people have followed greater career opportunities away from their home country. But this is changing, too. Within the international business community, there is a new and growing acceptance of the considerable opportunity that sustainable innovation in Russia could bring.

Just as big business is awakening to the opportunity for innovation and market making in the region, leading sustainability professionals are starting to see a career in Russia as an option that will have more of an impact. Many Russians are ready to return, excited by the challenge of applying their expertise in their home country as a global expert. For foreign nationals, Russia is a chance to make a real difference at the point of greatest impact. Changing the course of a country this size will take some time, but companies at the forefront of sustainable innovation are watching closely. For visionary businesses and business leaders alike, Russia offers an incredible opportunity to deliver meaningful change and transform how it does business.

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