

HISTORIOGRAPHY AND THEORETICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL ISSUES OF ENVIRONMENTAL PROBLEMS

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ABSTRACT

This article discusses the theoretical and methodological issues of the environmental problem in the second half of the 20th century, as well as the reflection of the problem in world historiography in the second half of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century.

The article emphasizes the fact that the study of the consequences of the impact of human economic activity on the environment in the conditions of the ecological crisis has become one of the main tasks of historical science. The aggravation of the planet's environmental problems in the second half of the 20th century was the reason for the strengthening of the relationship between historical and natural sciences since the 1960s. This kind of collaboration has been reflected in the emergence of a number of scientific organizations and environmental history communities (American Society for Environmental History, 1977; European Society for Environmental History, 1999).

The paper considers the processes of strengthening the integration of nature conservation and the socio-economic development of the world in the second half of the 20th century in the context of the beginning of awareness of the global nature of environmental problems in the 1960s; the emergence of a new stage in solving environmental problems in the 1970s; definitions of the concept of "sustainable progress" in the 1980s; the development of processes along the "path of sustainable development" in the 1990s and the inclusion of these tasks in the "21st century agenda" in the 2000s.

Keywords: *nature, history, historiography, ecology, environmental protection, sustainable development.*

INTRODUCTION

At the present stage of human development, one of the most urgent tasks is the elimination of global environmental problems. Therefore, environmental protection has become one of the ultimate objectives of the international community in contemporary international relations. In particular, the melting of glaciers in

Antarctica and the Arctic Ocean, shortages of drinking water, the crisis of the Aral Sea, and other issues demand stronger international integration in their resolution.

Environmental protection is studied at the national, regional, and global levels. Specifically, researchers analyze the problems of internal and external policies of newly independent states, contemporary international relations under globalization, the elimination of national and transboundary environmental issues, and integration aimed at ensuring global ecological security. Increasingly relevant are such issues as the rise in global sea levels, the growing scarcity of drinking water and food caused by ecological imbalance, as well as land desertification and degradation.

In the search for ways out of this situation, the concept of sustainable development was formulated at the turn of the 21st century. It is directed not only at solving current problems but also at preventing future challenges. Most scholars view this concept both as a modern worldview and as a set of practical guidelines for a new way of life on Earth—for all nations, states, and peoples in their interaction with nature. The core idea of sustainable development lies in the need to harmonize the relationship between nature, society, and the economy.

According to scholars, sustainable development in this sense integrates environmental, economic, social, and cultural dimensions into a single system. The concept is generalized to such an extent that it essentially claims the role of a theory of historical development, reflecting both social and natural realities in their unity and evolution [1].

On September 25, 2015, during the 70th session of the UN General Assembly, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were adopted, replacing the Millennium Development Goals (2000–2015) and setting the global agenda for the next fifteen years [2]. This demonstrates that the issue of environmental protection remains at the center of attention for international organizations and the global community.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study of the consequences of human economic activity on the environment in conditions of ecological crisis has become one of the main tasks of historical science. The aggravation of global ecological problems in the second half of the 20th century led to stronger interaction between historical and natural sciences, beginning in the 1960s. This collaboration found its expression in the emergence of a number of scientific organizations and communities dedicated to the history of the environment. In 2005, at the 20th World Congress of Historians in Sydney, the issue of “The Interaction of Humans and Nature in History” was included among the most urgent problems of historical research [3].

The study of the origins of environmental problems required historians to conduct a comprehensive analysis of various facts and phenomena that had previously been the subject of different scientific disciplines. In this process, diverse approaches to the environment, its subject matter, methods, and the objectives of environmental history emerged. According to John McNeill, President of the American Society for Environmental History, the goal of environmental history at the present stage is to “serve humanity by providing it with knowledge of the past that can be used to help build the future” [4].

Turning to the history of the peoples of Central Asia, one can observe that traditions of careful and respectful treatment of nature are as ancient as human history itself. Truly invaluable is the respectful attitude toward nature, deeply rooted in the spiritual and cultural heritage of the region, and reflected in the values developed by its peoples over the centuries. Undoubtedly, the effective use today of ancestral traditions, experiences, and knowledge regarding environmental protection and the careful use of natural resources can serve as guidance in addressing pressing ecological challenges, while preserving the region’s unique natural wealth, biodiversity of flora and fauna [5].

The sustainable development of society depends to a great extent on the moral upbringing of people. In this regard, the study of history makes it possible to better understand the interconnection and interdependence of nature, society, and the economy, to assess the influence of political decisions on state development, and to consider the ecological consequences of political choices.

Within the framework of methodological approaches, the main methods applied include structural-systemic analysis, integrated statistical comparison, problem-chronological and retrospective-historical approaches, geographical determinism, and sociological surveys.

In the course of studying environmental protection, special attention is given to examining it from the perspective of the concept of new historical thinking, and to analyzing it on the basis of the actual content and character of historical events within the requirements of modern environmental science. At the turn of the 21st century, scholars of environmental history such as G.K. Herrera, A.R. Main, M. Rangarajan, S. Ravi Rajan, M. Redclift, D. Worster, W. Cronon, A.W. Crosby, D.J. Hughes, B. Leybur, C.H. Lewis, among others, elaborated the methodological foundations of this new direction in historical research [6]. According to foreign scholars, the following functions may serve as a theoretical and methodological foundation for the independent development of environmental history: the function of information collection (identification and placement of facts, collection of empirical data); the

systematizing function (initial grouping of facts and their arrangement in chronological order); the explanatory function (establishing cause-and-effect relationships); and the informational function (optimizing the presentation of research findings).

An important condition characterizing the degree of professionalism in conducting research on the history of environmental protection is ensuring close interaction and cooperation between historians and representatives of other scientific fields and disciplines.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

At present, environmental protection is one of humanity's most pressing tasks and serves as the foundation for the emergence of a number of theories reflecting the content and significance of ecological awareness and worldview. In the 1960s–1970s, in response to the worsening disruption of the natural balance, the **Concept of the Limits to Growth and Organic Development** was formulated. The concept concluded that *“if current trends in population growth, industrialization, and environmental pollution continue, then within the next 100 years our planet will reach the so-called ‘limits to growth’”* [7].

The **concept of global governance** is based on the idea of an “inseparable link among the interacting components of the environment within a unified system.” At the same time, proponents of the **concept of protection and development** argue for aligning environmental requirements with the socio-economic development needs of society. Such worldviews are widely spread in the countries of the “Group of Eight.”

At the beginning of the 21st century, a new **UN concept on environmental protection and sustainable development** emerged, which emphasized that solutions to ecological problems can only be found through the comprehensive study of socio-economic issues at local, national, regional, and global levels.

On **5 June 1972**, at the First United Nations Conference on the Human Environment in Stockholm, five important decisions and documents were adopted. On the initiative of the UN Secretary-General, in 1983 the **World Commission on Environment and Development** was established, which later prepared and presented the 1987 report *Our Common Future* [8]. This document emphasized that environmental problems cannot be solved in isolation from economic, social, and political issues.

From **3–14 June 1992**, the UN Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro adopted the **Rio Declaration**, a **Protocol on the Principles of Sustainable Forest Management**, and **Agenda 21**. Later, from **6–8 September 2000**, the **Millennium Summit** in New York adopted the *Millennium Declaration*.

Since the 1970s, scholars have increasingly focused on the socio-political and economic dimensions of ecology. For instance, K. Hooker stressed that under conditions of intensifying contradictions in the economic, social, and cultural development of market-oriented societies, the problem of the environment inevitably arises [9]. However, P. Elder and J. Beseker opposed this view, suggesting instead that a society of “free competition” is capable of restoring the natural balance, provided that universal human interests prevail in the struggle of ideas [10]. At the same time, F. Sandbach highlighted the limitations of neoclassical political-economic methods in effectively controlling environmental pollution.

B. Commoner, addressing issues of natural balance disruption and environmental recovery, particularly emphasized that *“the environmental crisis is not only an ecological problem but also a serious socio-political problem”* [11]. Similarly, W. Ophuls argued that *“...this problem is a fundamental challenge for political philosophy, and it is precisely political institutions that must compel people to change themselves”* [12].

According to T. Roszak, the root cause of the problem lies in the urbanized industrial society, and the solution can be found only through the development of a household-based economy centered on the growth of small towns [13].

The study of the origins of environmental problems has required historians to conduct comprehensive analyses of diverse facts and phenomena that were previously the subject of other scientific fields. In the course of this process, various approaches have emerged regarding the subject, methods, and objectives of environmental history [14].

Thus, historiographical research on the theory and practice of environmental protection continues to evolve.

CONCLUSION

The intensification of global environmental problems in the second half of the 20th century became a driving factor in strengthening the interaction between historical and natural sciences. Research conducted in this field has made it possible, alongside the study of ecological crises, to enrich historical science with knowledge about the root causes and evolution of contradictions between humanity and nature. Thus, by the efforts of Western scholars, a substantial historiographical foundation for environmental history was established at the threshold of the 21st century.

For the purposes of sustainable development, envisioned by humanity for the period up to 2030, environmental protection and the rational use of natural resources are of particular importance. The sustainable development of society largely depends on the moral education of people. In this respect, the study of history provides an

opportunity to explore the interconnection and interdependence of nature, society, and the economy.

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