

**MSC 2020****International Scientific and Practical Conference «MAN. SOCIETY.  
COMMUNICATION»****ENVIRONMENTAL ACTIVITIES OF THE DON COSSACKS IN  
LIGHTING ARCHIVAL SOURCES**

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**Abstract**

The article presents an analysis of environmental activities in the area of the Don Cossack Host through the prism of retrospective information from archival sources of the 19th – early 20th centuries, presented in the State Archives of the Rostov Region (GARO), as well as in pre-revolutionary statistical reviews, local history almanacs, and monographs. The authors presented a brief overview of modern trends in state policy in the field of ensuring the country's environmental safety, noting the need to consider the pre-revolutionary experience of environmental management. The emphasis is made on the consideration of the features of the traditional use of natural resources of representatives of the Don Cossacks. The main research methods are the analysis and generalization of federal and regional legal acts regulating the environmental activities of the constituent entities of the Russian Federation, historical-comparative, historical-genetic, historical-typological methods, as well as the method of system analysis. The article reflects the impact of the economic activities of the population of the Cossack communities on the environment, taking into account the specific conditions of the region of the Don Cossack Host. Researchers pay attention to the presence of contradictions between the established community norms of environmental management in the pre-revolutionary period (veneration of the river, sacralization of trees, respect for the land) and, at the same time, an aggressive consumer attitude towards the environment. The authors present their own explanation of this contradiction.

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*Keywords:* Archive, cossack, ecology, environmental protection, traditions

## 1. Introduction

Discussion of the consequences of harm to the environment in the context of human activity in recent years can be considered, unfortunately, only as a constant value. Environmental scientists from many countries, such as Kibler et al. (2018) point out that “human activity is fundamentally changing natural systems, threatening the sustainable provision of ecosystem services” (para 1). A number of researchers - Satterfield et al. (2018) argue that it is very important to approach the development of various development projects correctly, taking into account the need to assess the impact of the spheres of human activity on the surrounding world.

The world community develops and organizes the implementation of various development strategies. In 2015, the UN General Assembly adopted the “Agenda for Sustainable Development”, which defined the vector of work aimed at ensuring an environmentally sustainable future for present and future generations around the world, until 2030 (Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, 2015) The document pointed out that the depletion of natural resources, the consequences of the negative state of the environment exacerbate numerous problems that humanity faces, undermining the ability of all countries to achieve sustainable comprehensive development. A number of directions in the environmental field are highlighted in the resolution on the adoption of the “Agenda” together with the economic and social priorities in the development of world states.

In the Russian Federation an attempt was made in 2016 to interpret the 17 UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (formulated in the Millennium Declaration) for Russian reality. Illustrative examples of the implementation of the designated SDGs “on Russian soil” can be security strategies in the environmental, economic and other significant areas of state development (Development Strategy of the Russian Federation until 2020, 2014). These documents “set the horizons for the country's development” until 2020–2030, while at the same time emphasizing the importance of disseminating sustainable development goals at the regional level, the main postulates of which have been reflected in recent studies by regional historians (Dorzhieva et al., 2019)

## 2. Problem Statement

More than 4 million people live in the Don region, and the average population density is 42 people/km<sup>2</sup>. The geographical location of the Rostov region is one of the factors that determine the specifics of regional environmental management. So, the Seversky Donets River, before “carrying its waters” into the water area of the Don River, flows through the industrial regions of Ukraine, absorbing significant pollution from wastewater. As a result, there is transboundary pollution of the main water body of the Don region. In addition, the infrastructure of the Rostov region provides a transit road transport connection from north to south, towards the Black Sea coast. Thus, the atmospheric basin of the Don region is additionally polluted by vehicle exhaust gases. At the same time, the issues of saving, restoring destroyed components of the natural environment and ensuring rational interaction of a person with the environment are not only problems of the modern world.

### **3. Research Questions**

This study is “located” in the plane of studying the experience of environmental protection activities of previous generations, including in the pre-revolutionary period, and includes a number of issues:

1. The process of forming a complex of knowledge about the environment, expressed in the development of well-established norms of land use, as well as environmental traditions of the Cossack community.
2. Formation of the main directions and forms of environmental protection activities of the military authorities, the Cossack community in the conditions of the Don Cossack Host in the second half of the 19th - early 20th centuries.

### **4. Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to study the issues of environmental protection in the area of the Don Cossack Host in the pre-revolutionary period through the prism of largely new archival sources of the 19th century - the beginning of the XX century, which were deposited in the State Archives of the Rostov Region.

### **5. Research Methods**

The source base of the study was made up of both the scientific works of pre-revolutionary historians, which can be considered archival sources and the works of modern researchers. In the articles of pre-revolutionary historians-geographers such as Nomikosov (1884), Sukhorukov (1891) attention was paid to the negative consequences of the activities of the Don Cossack authorities during the construction of railway bridges and dams for forests, floodplains.

Soviet historians of the Don, such as Kozlov (1977), presented an analysis of the state of land resources in the Don Cossack region in the post-reform period in their works; however, these works provide only a few descriptions of the elements of environmental protection during the period under review. Researchers did not consider environmental issues as a separate issue because of this.

Only modern research projects of such historians as Revunov (2018), Anopchenko and Murzin (2012) made it possible to highlight the socio-ecological and economic consequences of unbalanced natural economic activities of man within the framework of the state scale on the example of a separate region, in particular the Rostov region (Abramenko et al., 2019).

It should be noted that the analysis of the traditional use of natural resources by the population of the Don Army region will provide an opportunity to isolate and reconstruct the environmental problems of the past, to highlight the environmental traditions of the Cossack community.

### **6. Findings**

Archival sources indicate the relevance of such issues as the restoration of the natural environment of the Don Cossack region already at the end of the 18th century. The presence of a large volume of free

fertile arable land in the region of the Don Cossack Host determined the long-term dominance of the fallow farming system (Shishkina, 2008). The following crops were mainly planted: rye, wheat, barley, buckwheat, oats and millet.

The Don Cossacks threw lands into the fallow, believing that this would allow the soil to recover for further use. The use of fertilizers (manure) was considered not only unnecessary, but also harmful. Archival materials about the stanitsa of Gundorovskaya, mention that bread grew with a long head without grain in areas fertilized with manure (GARO, n.d. a, p. 28)

At the same time, the Cossacks at the end of the 18th century and the beginning of the 19th century found a way to restore the fertile layer of arable land. They began to regularly use field burning. Several tasks of economic activity were solved at once: the use of fertilization with ash, and disinsection of the earth from harmful insect larvae. However, this method was “aggressive” for animal husbandry, as it caused significant damage to this area. When the old grass was scorched on pastures and hayfields, cattle were deprived of pasture. And in conditions of significant temperature fluctuations in the weather (sometimes constantly cold, sometimes too hot) domestic animals grazing in the steppe could die of hunger. So, the disappearance of the tarpan (wild horse) was due precisely to this option for cleaning arable land. During the winter hunger strikes, unable to find pasture, they ate stocks of hay, for which the Cossacks pursued tarpans and often destroyed them (Grekov, 1905).

At the same time, it should be noted that the Don Cossacks still used organic matter to enrich the soil - green weeds were plowed into the soil (without seeds) for winter sowing.

Of course, in the economic sphere, the Don people did not strive for innovations and kept the vector of their activities aimed at maintaining agricultural traditions, the complex of which had been developed over several centuries. Thus, according to the evidence of the statistical materials of the archive fund No. 304, “grassing” did not become widespread in the Cossack environment. This phenomenon was associated with the prevailing tradition: it is necessary to sow only what can be eaten immediately or sold in order to obtain funds for the worthy performance of the Cossack duty (i.e. military service) (Kharuzin, 1885). However, reducing the area of pastures by the end of the XIX century led to a decrease in the efficiency of the development of animal husbandry and, as a consequence, a lack of feed.

In the Cossack environment, there is a large number of various superstitions associated with agricultural activities. A striking example is the attitude towards locusts. They did not even strive to fight with the main enemies of the crops, believing that the locusts were “already appointed by God where to fly” (GARO n.d a, p. 34). This attitude did not change by the beginning of the XX century.

An analysis of archival materials showed that similar prejudices took place in animal husbandry. During the deaths of livestock, the Don farmers did not take any measures to protect the “domestic animals” from diseases. The Cossacks believed that the reason for this was not the cattle owners themselves, who carried out improper care of the animals, but the punishment of God. As a result, the only remedy against the spread of diseases in animals is the service of prayers in the herd.

The studies of local historians and geographers of the XIX century describe an original way to protect livestock from various misfortunes. The population of a number of stanitsas, such as st. Krivyanskaya, st. Semikarakorskaya collected the skulls of ancient bison, mammoths, deer and hung them on the gate to protect domestic animals “from the evil eye and damage”(GARO, n.d b, p. 17).

The abundance of natural resources in the Don Cossack region made it possible to successfully use natural resources for a long time, even in conditions of an aggressive consumer attitude towards the environment. This led to the emergence of an erroneous opinion about the inexhaustibility of the natural resources of the Don region.

Archival sources contain many examples of the predatory exploitation of natural resources by the Don Cossacks. At the same time, despite the deterioration of the ecological situation, the methods of nature management remained the same, negative for the environment. Despite the fact that the Don people were quite clearly aware of what such activity could lead to.

Already at the beginning of the XX century (1908) a regional congress of the Don foresters was organized. The delegates of the congress read out reports in which the main conclusion was almost identical: “wastelands are formed on the place of massive deforestation, which are used by the Cossacks for vegetable gardens” (Kryukov, 1911, p. 123). The Cossack community was the controlling body for the use of the village lands. At general meetings, corrective actions in the field of forest protection measures were discussed: a ban was introduced on grazing livestock in the forest and deforestation, and the amount of a monetary fine for violating these prohibitions was determined. So, a committee was created for the restoration of the forest area of stanitsa Veshenskaya, who initiated the creation of a “civilian guard” of the forest. The same committees were created in a number of other Don settlements. These measures partially gave a positive result: they began to use materials that were harvested in the forest for the construction of public buildings and churches.

Of course, the instructions and decisions of the stanitsa leadership helped in solving situations with tree plantations, but the initiative of the inhabitants of the Don farms was also supported. So, at the beginning of the XX century the inhabitants of the Ermakov hamlet planted 100 pines, giving rise to the oldest pine forest on the Don. The initiative of local conservationists was rewarded by the military commanders with cash prizes and medals (Schukina & Bylkova, 2019). However, the rules that were introduced by the stanitsa gathering and restricted forest use were violated by the Cossacks themselves. Because of this, they did not bring long-term results. So, for the period from the end of the XIX century until 1914 (the beginning of the First World War) due to irrational deforestation, the area of green spaces was reduced by more than 30% (GARO. Journal of the Regional Government of the Don Army, 1913).

It should be noted that such forms of nature management as gathering and haymaking were traditionally subject to a number of restrictions before 1913. In each Don stanitsa, the collection of fruits from fruit trees that were located in the stanitsa forest was prohibited until a certain period. On the appointed day, residents of the village at the same time began to collect wild fruits. The beginning of the collection of fruits was established in each stanitsa in advance, and the collection of poaching was punishable by a fine. They also collected reeds along the banks of the rivers and also started haymaking simultaneously.

An interesting component in the implementation of nature protection activities is the reverent attitude towards the huge elder trees. Cossacks sacralized such trees. They inserted icons into the trunk, organized religious events in the shade of the crown of a tree, “bowed down” passing by such trees as Veshensky oak, Nikolskaya willow, Nizhne-Chirsky oak. A mystically reverent attitude towards centuries-old trees contributed to their protection and conservation. Residents of the villages cut off the crown of trees, treated “bark diseases”, watered and carried out organic fertilizing in unfavorable periods. Of course,

there were cases of sacrilege in relation to long-lived trees. For example, a 400-year-old Nikolsky elm was stumped (stanitsa Berezovskaya) in the middle of the 19th century). The indignant residents at the meeting of the stanitsa punished the culprit in the destruction of the tree severely - they sent him out of turn to serve on the Georgian border. We meet the memories of a number of Cossacks about their homeland in archival documents of the early XX century. They sign the possibility of preserving forests from deforestation. Forest plantations were “commanded” by a sacred prayer, inviting a priest into the forest. After the end of the reserved rite, such forest spaces were considered reserved - it was considered a sin to even break a twig in them. It remained to protect such forests only from livestock. The commandment began to be actively applied at the beginning of the 20th century, when the dynamics of forest destruction became threatening.

The next component of nature management in the region of the Don Cossack Host was the regular redistribution of communal arable and hayfields. This side of the Cossack communal land use influenced the conduct of soil protection measures negatively, making them meaningless for the Cossack, who could receive a completely new neglected piece of land every year. The Don people treated the plots for personal use in a completely different way. According to numerous archival data, the Don Cossacks treated such lands carefully and rationally – “the plots ... look like a blossoming oasis” (Schukina & Popova, 2020, p. 399).

Of course, one should also pay attention to the special attitude of the Don Cossacks to water resources. Rivers, ponds, springs throughout the stanitsa were cleaned, garbage was removed from the banks of the Don, and it was forbidden to plow land along the banks of the rivers. In general, it was considered a sacrilege to litter the water space.

It should be noted that the place where a person drinks water from a spring must be illuminated with prayer according to the traditions of the Don Cossacks. Thus, there are many recollections of the participants of the First World War that, being in a foreign country, having found a spring with drinking water, they prayed at a spring with water in gratitude for the “gift of water”.

It is believed that the respect for the Don River is in the blood of the donuts. This is due to the fact that fishing was one of the significant sources of income for the Cossack, and fishing for family's consumption was an extremely important part of preserving the budget of the Cossack family. Because of this, it was considered a terrible sin to spit into the river, which was the “breadwinner” of the Cossacks. Environmental activity related to water resources was also manifested in the fact that after finding a river vessel on the water, it was necessarily pulled out of the bank, cleaned, tarred, and dried. It was impossible to bring garbage and infections into the water. Cossacks also protected the biological resources of the river. Archival sources indicated that even “the church bells were silent” during the fish spawning. The inhabitants of the Don villages collected fry and small fish and carried them back into the water during the flood of the river, after the great water descended. In winter, during the period of severe frosts, residents of the villages often went out to cut ice holes on the river in order to prevent “fish kills”. However, unfortunately, such a careful attitude towards water resources began to change by the beginning of the 20th century. The question of the protection of reservoirs from pollution and the protection of biological resources from destruction was raised as a result of unbalanced water use in the early XX century. The problem of pollution of the water basin of the Don region is the most acute in the modern period of time (Fishkin, 2019).

As a result of the research, we came to some conclusions.

#### 1. The use of natural resources by the Don Cossacks had a number of features:

Successful agricultural activity depended both on the correct choice of a site for cultivation of a certain culture, and on the method of restoring soil fertility. If the first condition was met due to the accumulation of practical knowledge that the Cossack acquired for a certain amount of time, then the fulfillment of the second condition was associated with the established tradition of Cossack land use;

a prevailing number of various superstitions can be seen in animal husbandry and agricultural activities of the Don Cossacks, which hampered the introduction of innovations into the economic environment of the Don people to a large extent;

“preservation” of forests was used as the main form of protection of forest plantations from destruction, in conjunction with the actions of the military and stanitsa leadership;

the water area of the Don River was considered "sacred" until the end of the 19th century - it was considered sacrilege to litter it. Fishing as a field of entrepreneurial activity of the Cossacks began to decline at the beginning of the XX century, giving way to a dynamically developing factory, which negatively affected the attitude towards the water resources of the region.

2. Despite the fact that environmental protection measures carried out by the military authorities and the Cossack community as a single complex of protective measures gave a positive response, this did not bring long-term results. This trend was explained by the fact that the Don leadership pursued a policy of environmental protection sporadically, being distracted by attracting Cossacks to participate in all military campaigns of the late 19th - early 20th centuries.

## 7. Conclusion

So, according to archival sources of the pre-revolutionary period, we found out that a certain system of environmental standards was developed in the Don Cossack community of the XIX - early XX centuries, however, the scope of application of the designated resolutions was limited, and the observance of traditions was very conditional.

Modern realities dictate their own requirements for the implementation of the activities of regional authorities. Despite the fact that the influence of the actions of the regional administration of the Don Cossack was often short-lived, this experience must be taken into account when developing a set of administrative, economic and legal measures aimed at organizing rational, careful environmental management in the Don region.

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