

### Look to the East

My first exposure to Russian environmental history came with reading Douglas Weiner's *Models of Nature: Ecology, Conservation and Cultural Revolution in Soviet Russia* (2000) as a student. At the time, it was one of the few works available in English in the field. Over the intervening fifteen years, the accessibility of Russian environmental history has really blossomed with works like David Moon's *The Plough that Broke the Steppes* (2013), Paul Josephson, Nicolai Dronin and Ruben Mnatsakanian's *An Environmental History of Russia* (2013) and Jenny Leigh Smith's *Works in Progress: Plans and Realities on Soviet Farms, 1930-1963* (2014). Much of this work has been led by international academics looking to Russia as an object of study. But what about what is happening within the country itself?

The workshop highlighted in this Notepad explored the field of Russian environmental history with the stated aim of building connections among scholars. As a large country with different regional and institutional contexts, this kind of networking is vitally important to facilitating the further development of environmental history in Russia.

This recent event follows other notable attempts to consolidate environmental history as a discipline in Eastern Europe. For example, in April 2014, ESEH sponsored a regional workshop 'Why is there so little green in Czech and Slovak history?' which discussed the barriers and opportunities for environmental history in the Czech Republic and Slovakia. Even though the ESEH meeting in 2001 was held in Prague, fragmentation of research interests and disciplinary boundaries have limited the growth of the field there. These kinds of workshops are a positive sign of progress – they show a willingness to identify challenges to environmental history's institutionalisation in the East and hopefully develop strategies to bolster the field.

I am greatly encouraged by the developments of scholarly environmental history communities in Eastern Europe. I believe the region will be a hotbed of environmental history activity over the next decade. I hope that scholars from Eastern Europe will strive to share their findings with global peers both through international publications and by participating in conferences like our 2015 ESEH biennial meeting in Versailles, France. While political situations may encourage isolationist thinking, the scholarly community needs actively to strive to make connections and bridge differences.

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## **Environmental History in Russia: Stages of Development and Promising Research Directions**

On 13–15 November 2014, the Elabuga Institute of Kazan Federal University hosted a conference dedicated to the development of environmental history in Russia – a new direction for Russian historians studying the interaction between man and nature in the earlier epochs of history. Since this discipline is relatively young, its development in Russia has taken place in the framework of a limited number of separate research centres that worked independently from one another and from world science. In this regard, one of the main objectives of the event was to promote the establishment and strengthening of contacts between Russian regional and foreign researchers and the inclusion of Russian scientists' studies into the global context.

The conference was organised by Kazan Federal University, with the support of the European Society for Environmental History (ESEH). The increasing interest of the scientific community in the proposed issues and ESEH support allowed participation in the event of a wide range of experts from the UK, France, Germany, USA, Ukraine and a number of Russian cities – Moscow, St. Petersburg, Novosibirsk, Surgut and others. The key international speakers were Professor David Moon, York University (UK) and Head of the International Network for Environmental History of Russia, and Professor Stephen Brain, University of Mississippi (USA).

A key strand of the conference was devoted to placing the domestic Russian experience of studying environmental history alongside international scholarship. Prof. Eugeny Gololobov of Surgut Pedagogical University proposed several key features in the development of a historical-ecological approach in Russia. First, the nature of the study of the environmental history of Russia is determined by its vast territory, which suggests a slow, gradual expansion of the scope of research from regional history to all-Russian generalisations. Past experience shows that regional historical and environmental studies in Russia are at the moment the most reliable and effective. Second, at the same time, environmental history in its development in Russia has to overcome many obstacles associated with the outdated notion that nature is beyond the scope of historical research.

Prof. Aidar Kalimullin, the founder of the historical-ecological school in Kazan Federal University, argued that it is only natural that the history of technology, industry and natural resource development are among leaders in the Russian historical and environmental studies: Russia's seemingly inexhaustible natural resources have formed 'a national tradition of consumer attitude towards nature'. At the same time, Russia's view on its own environmental history is not only specific but also more profound, although the studies of foreign scientists undoubtedly remain the benchmark for Russian environmental historians. Brain supported this viewpoint, stating in his speech that

twenty-first century Russian environmental history is primarily an opportunity for the Russians to ask questions about the past, e.g. 'where does Russia fit into global culture, and what makes Russia Russian?'

Moon and Julia Lajus (University of St. Petersburg and ESEH Vice President) discussed the coverage of Russian environmental history in foreign researchers' works. Lajus highlighted the fact that the environmental history *in* Russia and *of* Russia are two different 'histories' which for a long time have been developing in parallel with each other. She also admitted that, due to foreign scientists' great interest in Russia, they have studied many aspects of the environmental history of the country in more detail than domestic specialists have.

Moon also presented the journal *Environment and History* with the support of the publisher, The White Horse Press. As a member of the editorial board of the journal, he invited Russian scientists to submit their work to the journal. He noted that one of the main requirements for the proposed study is its inclusion in the global context, which does not prevent the research from being based on regional Russian material. Cooperation with leading foreign publications is, among other things, an important stimulus to shift regional historical and ecological research in Russia onto the international level.

Further work of the conference consisted of four sections devoted to different periods of Russian history. The first of these on the environmental history of the USSR was the most intense. There were reports by Brain, scientists of Surgut Pedagogical and Kazan Federal University and members of the international research project EcoGlobReg. Prof. Nafisa Mingazova's (Kazan Federal University) and Brain's reports were devoted to the success of environmental activities of the Soviet period, while Alexander Ananyev, Laurent Coumel (EcoGlobReg), Maxim Mostovenko and Julia Prikhodko (Surgut State Pedagogical University) showed that environmental crisis situations had a significant impact on the socio-political and socio-economic development of the Soviet Union.

In the section devoted to methodological principles of environmental history and its emergence in Russian scholarship, the contribution of Prof. Valerii Durnovtsev (Russian State Humanitarian University, Moscow) must be noted. He raised the issue of 'pre-environmental' history, noting that the most important environmental-historical problems began to attract the attention of researchers in the second half of the twentieth century, in the period when environmental problems were worsening. He argued that it would be incorrect 'to deprive environmental history of its origins, its sources, its childhood' and to imply that the origins of Russian environmental history came exclusively from abroad.

A considerable number of reports at the conference were devoted to the environmental history of the Russian Empire. Anna Agafonova spoke about environmental policy of urban public management in the last third of the

nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in Vologda. An important obstacle to efficient environmental activities in the Russian Empire was Russian traditional environmental consciousness, which was based on stereotypes about inexhaustible natural resources. The processes of transformation of traditional environmental consciousness were considered in reports by Galina Lyubimova (Novosibirsk University), Stanislav Petryashin (Russian Ethnographic Museum) and Andrei Vinogradov.

After the workshop sessions, the participants summed up the conference. According to Aidar Kalimullin, it was most important that the event had contributed to the formation of the professional community of Russian environmental historians. Earlier in the conference, Elena Merzon, Director of the Elabuga Institute of Kazan Federal University, had announced the establishment of a Center for Environmental History at the Institute, a first step toward institutionalising environmental history in Russia. The importance of Russian environmental history work was noted by Moon, who stressed that Russian studies should be published in international journals that would involve them into the international scene, and allow using a wider historiography. Lajus summed up the event, quoting John McNeill's words, that environmental history is 'many things for many people'. Many young and established scholars from various fields of scientific knowledge find promising research areas in environmental history, which gives us hope for the subsequent dynamic development of this discipline in Russia.

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