

Humanitarian Context of Modern Environmental Risks (Theoretical and Methodological Aspects)

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Abstract. The purpose of the study is a comparative analysis and assessment of the current environmental situation against the background of the global environmental crisis and constantly growing turbulence, uncertainty and environmental risks. The article reveals the humanitarian context of modern environmental risks caused by extensive industrial production, the cult of consumption and wastefulness that has lasted for many decades. The resulting “consumer society” brought the situation to a global environmental crisis and transferred itself into a “risk society.” In this regard, the article raises questions about the purposeful formation of environmental culture and improvement of the regulatory framework of environmental legislation, the development of environmental consciousness and environmental psychology. It is noted that economic or technical and technological tools alone were clearly not enough to overcome negative processes in the environment. The main condition for the implementation of the author's proposals is the rejection of wastefulness and so-called false needs in favor of frugality and moderation in the consumption of natural resources.

1 Introduction

In the context of the modern geopolitical and economic crises, turbulence is growing in almost all spheres of human activity, both in public and private space. The modern environmental crisis, which has become a natural result of the era of industrialism, takes a special place in these processes. The global nature of the modern environmental crisis can be judged by many indicators: the growing shortage of natural resources; serious deterioration of environmental quality; climate change; extremely difficult sanitary and epidemiological situation, etc. And, of course, the environmental crisis carries its own special environmental threats and risks.

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2 Materials and methods

The article uses dialectical, structural-functional, program-target, historical-retrospective and hermeneutic research methods. The subject of the study is the humanitarian context of modern environmental risks; the object of the research is the modern environmental crisis and associated environmental risks.

3 Results and Discussion

Currently, science has developed several theoretical and methodological approaches to the study of environmental risks: empirical, sociological, institutional. There are also three main groups of environmental risks: risks to human health and life; risks to natural resources; risks for the structural and functional characteristics of landscapes [1, p. 100]. In accordance with the Federal Law of the Russian Federation “On Environmental Protection,” environmental risk is “the probability of an event occurring that has adverse consequences for the natural environment and is caused by the negative impact of economic and other activities, natural and man-made emergencies” [2]. It is generally accepted that special environmental costs are necessary to prevent risks. This concept has been recently introduced and still does not have a generally accepted (unified) interpretation [3]. Some foreign authors (A. Bell, V. Gupta, B. Martin, etc.), as well as Russian researchers (A. S. Asankanov, S. N. Bobylev, A. I. Borodin, A. K. Vasiliev, V.V. Gavrilova, E.G. Gusakovskaya, E.D. Davtyan, T.A. Demina, V.N. Erokhina, E.P. Lobanova, K. V. Morozova, E.K. Murueva, K.S. Saenko, O.V. Shurygina) devoted their works to the analysis of environmental costs. Several definitions of environmental costs can be distinguished: as costs of all types of resources necessary for environmental protection activities [4]; as expenses for the reproduction of renewable resources and payment for negative impacts on the environment [5]; as costs associated with the development, extraction and use of natural resources [6], etc. The structure of environmental costs includes payments for the right to use natural resources; payments for the reproduction and protection of natural resources carried out by the state and specialized enterprises; compensation payments for disposal of natural resources from their intended use or deterioration in their quality; payments for emissions, discharges, and placement of pollutants in the natural environment [7, p. 117], etc.

At the same time, such a purely economic approach to the issue of environmental risks does not give the expected results and represents reductionism, i.e., reducing a more general and complex problem to its particular format. It is a fair opinion that “it is impossible to cope with the environmental crisis using technical and economic means alone” [8, p. 197]. This approach is opposed to a holistic approach, within which the issue of environmental risks is considered more broadly and systematically. But the weakness of the holistic approach to environmental risks is the fact that some specific, especially humanitarian, aspects of this problem are still poorly studied and covered. This applies, in particular, to issues of the formation of environmental culture, the state of environmental psychology and environmental consciousness of people, and their environmental behaviour.

The concept of “ecological consciousness” has appeared relatively recently and is defined as a complex of theories, views and emotions that mediate the problems of interaction between man (individual and society) and nature in the context of their optimal (best, harmonious) combination [9–10]. However, half a century after its scientific representation, environmental consciousness has still not become universal, so the conclusion is that it is “inherent in every individual” [11, p. 135] seems premature. Despite the relatively large volume of scientific publications on issues of environmental consciousness, there is still no generally accepted understanding and definition of it.

Ecological consciousness is interpreted: as the process of formation of ecological culture [12]; as a product of environmental education [13]; as a set of opinions, ideas and judgments about relationships in the “man – nature” system [14], as a regulator of human environmental behaviour [15]; as “a deep, automatic understanding of the inextricable connection between man and humanity with nature” [16]; as a phenomenon of morality (moral consciousness) [17]; as “one of the forms of human consciousness, including a set of ideas, theories, views and motivations that reflect the practice of relations between man and nature” [18]. Despite the similarity of different definitions, within the framework of which environmental consciousness is presented as the most important element of environmental culture, significant differences and certain shortcomings are also obvious. It seems that it is not entirely correct to consider environmental consciousness as a set of ideas, views, theories reflecting the practice of relations between man and nature, since such practice sometimes indicates just the opposite, namely the lack of environmental consciousness and a thoughtless, thriftless, and sometimes simply barbaric attitude of people to nature. In addition, the concept of “totality” is by no means identical to the concept of “systematicity”; so, spontaneous consciousness, the phenomenon of which is known to science [19], can hardly be considered as ecological consciousness.

In addition, environmental consciousness also presupposes a certain attribution, correlation with other types and types of consciousness, which is not evident in the currently available definitions of environmental consciousness. Since people consider and use nature primarily to satisfy their objective interests and do this through economic practice, it seems promising to consider environmental consciousness in the context of the development and improvement of economic consciousness, and environmental culture in the context of the development and improvement of economic culture. This does not mean that environmental consciousness turns out to be determined by economic consciousness. Since a person perceives the natural environment not only as an object of management, but also as an object of contemplation and spiritual communication, environmental consciousness is also mediated by the spiritual life of people. In this regard, it is appropriate to recall the formation of the concept of biophilia [20], according to which “human dependence on nature goes far beyond simple issues of material and physical support and also covers a person’s desire for aesthetic, intellectual, emotional and even spiritual comprehension of the natural world” [21 , With. 20]. The relationship between the spiritual and the material in the structure of ecological consciousness presupposes their objectively correct correlation in accordance with the ontological characteristics of human life itself and the real state of the natural environment. The absence of such an objectively correct (correct) correlation is precisely one of the sources of environmental risks.

If we talk about the very concept of environmental culture, it should be noted that there is also no generally accepted definition. Ecological culture is interpreted as an integral and non-scale characteristic, “the method and nature of human (society) interaction with the environment, including the specific level and nature of environmental knowledge, environmental values and practices (technologies and principles) of environmental management” [22, p. 182]; as “the level of people’s perception of nature, the surrounding world and assessment of their position in the universe, a person’s attitude to the world” [23]; as the basis for harmonizing relations between society and nature [24, p. 143], etc. We emphasize that in the current Federal Law No. 7 “On Environmental Protection” dated January 10, 2002, the concept of “ecological culture” is absent; it is not among the basic concepts defined in Article 1 of this law. And the special Federal Law “On Ecological Culture”, as well as the “Ecological Code”, have not yet been adopted in the Russian Federation.

The insufficiency of the institutional (regulatory and legal) framework in the field of modern environmental policy determines the negative aspects of the spontaneous nature of

the formation and development of environmental culture [25]. This is due to the fact that modern society is, at the same time, both a “risk society” (W. Beck) and a “consumer society” (J. Baudrillard). And all the signs of this society, including negative ones, have an impact on the phenomenon of ecological culture. The new social reality, which is currently taking shape, is associated with many factors. This is the colossal depreciation of fixed assets of enterprises and the entire economic infrastructure in general; the threat of a food crisis, which is openly declared at the UN; growing socio-economic inequality and poverty in society; the crisis in the field of education; the threat of a third world war; the complex process of formation of a multipolar world, and a number of other factors of modern development. The threat of a food crisis deserves special attention. It is not only about the shortage of food in some regions of the planet, but also the need to ensure the quality of food products on the Russian market, reducing their toxicity and the presence of harmful chemicals in them [26].

Mentally, the “risk society” - “consumer society” is associated with the development of the phenomena of individualization of people’s consciousness and behaviour, cosmopolitanism, nationalism and even ultranationalism, the emergence of the so-called “leisure class” and its transformation into the bureaucratic class or “risk class”, etc. In economic terms, “social risk” - “consumer society” has become a natural result of the development of the cult of consumption, which has developed in the industrialized countries of the world over the past half century.

Discussing the cult of consumption, the famous German sociologist and cultural scientist G. Marcuse (1898 - 1979) wrote in the middle of the last century that in society, along with natural needs, false needs are artificially formed and cultivated. He, in particular, noted that “most of the prevailing needs (to relax, have fun, consume and behave in accordance with advertising models) belong to the category of false needs” [26, p. 7]. The cult of consumption objectively contributed not only to the emergence and satisfaction of false needs, but also to the growth of wastefulness and the deterioration of the ecological state of the environment. Wastefulness as a system and hype as a way to implement the cult of steel consumption in the global world is the “red line” that determined the point of singularity (no return) in matters of environmental safety of society. Today there is no longer any need to talk about the protection of the natural environment or its sustainability, since, by and large, there is either nothing left to preserve, or the state of what is proposed to be preserved is so unsatisfactory that it is necessary to raise the question of reclamation, reproduction of the natural environment, restoration of lost biogeocenoses and natural diversity.

The author of the theory of the “risk society,” German sociologist Ulrich Beck (1944 – 2015), especially emphasized the idea that risks or threats in modern society cease for the most part to be external (exogenous) and become increasingly the result of internal (endogenous) causes [27]. This thesis seems quite controversial, since endogenous reasons stimulate risks, but in the conditions of the “world-economy” and globalism, these risks directly affect other countries, societies, and ethnic groups, i.e., they become exogenous in relation to them. Historically, little has changed in the risk generation process. The Covid pandemic clearly shows at what speed and to what spaces, masses of people and time periods such risks can spread in the world. The impact of the pandemic on the economy objectively leads to significant changes that will also affect the education sector [28, p. 12]. Experts predict a transition in the field of electronic distance education to students’ independent and more active use of digital educational resources [29, p. 63].

The world and Russian history has numerous examples of the maturation of the active role of exogenous factors. Environmental risks are no exception in this regard. Climate change, the level of man-made pollution and an ineffective system of environmental regulators have become the reasons for the maximum environmental risks over the past

hundred years. As a result of anthropogenic impact on the natural environment, it was ultimately no longer able to carry out the necessary self-regulation and self-reproduction. And this is the main (global) environmental risk.

One of the most important sources of modern environmental risks is incompetence, unprofessionalism and amateurism, which are especially dangerous in management and control systems. But the nature of environmental risks has a much deeper basis than it seems at first glance. Namely, it is associated, first of all, with the growing lack of spirituality, cynicism, consumerism and other moral deformations of man. It is no coincidence that at one time T. Roosevelt declared: "To educate a person intellectually without educating him morally means to raise a threat to society" [28, p. 682]. The pursuit of profit "at any cost" characteristic of large corporations and affiliated lobbyists is the same paradigm of "maximizing profits and minimizing costs", which was characteristic of industrial society and which was inherited by modern post-industrial society, turning it into what it is now.

The processes of maximizing profit and greening the environment are not parallel processes, they are multidirectional. It follows that wastefulness and consumerism should be replaced in the minds and psychology of people by the ideas of thrift. In the 70s XX century, the thesis "the economy must be economical" was formulated. However, it was never implemented: the rejection of macroeconomic planning and the policy of reducing production costs led to an unrestrained increase in this cost and, as a result, the growing consumption of natural resources per unit of final product. Currently, the share of so-called added value in the national economy is significantly lower than the share of the cost of raw materials. It is no secret that despite some successes in high-tech sectors of the Russian economy, it is still characterized by a resource orientation. The share of oil in the structure of the Russian Federation's GDP, according to Rosstat calculations, amounted to 15.2% in 2020 (107 trillion rub.), while the share of added value in this sum is only 16.3 trillion rub. [29].

In his book "Risk Society" (1986), U. Beck proposed to understand risks as the uncertainty created by modern civilization. In fact, we are facing the clash of civilizations, as S. Huntington once wrote about [30]. And they collide, mainly, not because of different spiritual values or aesthetic preferences, but because of the growing shortage, extreme limitation of the natural resources remaining on the planet and the rapidly deteriorating environmental situation in the world. Hence, there is growth of social and economic inequality, aggression, trade and price wars, border conflicts, and militarism. Few people now doubt that the global world is divided by inequality in the distribution of wealth. The following argument is given: the rich world seeks to protect itself, and the poor (beggar) world has nothing to lose [31, p. 579].

Actually, it was the "rich world" - the countries of the "golden billion" - that became the "initiators" of the global clash of civilizations. And although they certainly "have something to lose," this prosperity does not stop them. And the risk that this collision has already generated, exactly in the terminology of U. Beck, is called "expectation of a catastrophe" [15, p. 12]. At the basis of such expectations and ideas about modern risks, U. Beck sees "staging" (public representation of risk), "organized irresponsibility" (shifting responsibility from the culprit to the victim) and "emancipatory catastrophism" (positive consequences of disasters and risks) [32].

Such a theoretical and methodological reconstruction of the anatomy of modern risks in general, and environmental risks in particular, is of particular interest because U. Beck, in fact, was the first to raise this issue. And the connection between environmental risks and modern militaristic state policies is obvious. Few people thought about why the United States repeatedly invaded different countries in the post-war period, changed governments there, destroyed the economy, and caused chaos. And it was all about material resources: in

Vietnam and Laos - iron ore and rare earth metal ores, in Afghanistan - lithium reserves, and also opium, in Libya and Iraq - oil, in Syria - gas fields, in Panama - gold, and also the Panama Canal, etc. Characterizing the modern “consumer society,” the French philosopher J. Baudrillard wrote, “It is known that the system traditionally and powerfully helps itself through war in order to survive and recover. Today, the mechanisms and functions of war are integrated into the economic system and into the mechanisms of everyday life” [7, p. 67].

3.1 Social alienation in the context of environmental risks

At the current moment, “consumer society” has become the culprit of global alienation. This is no longer just the social alienation between labour and capital, traditional for capitalism with its market economy, this is a new format of alienation, when some get a favourable ecological environment, comfortable natural space, and others get garbage dumps, mountains of industrial waste, poisoned water bodies, etc. Therefore, no matter how enormous the technological leap forward was in the post-war period, “it managed to push back the boundaries of inequality only a little,” and “there is still a very significant disparity between the global North and the global South...” [33, p. 33].

The meaning of social alienation today is no longer “who has more and who has less,” but “who will have whom.” Previous colonial empires collapsed not only under the pressure of national liberation movements. They disappeared because of satiety and formation of a cult of consumption, when the former colonialists plundered such resources on which, it seemed, they could live forever, and turned into rentiers. But the accumulated resources ran out, and those that remained ended up in the former, but no longer colonial countries, which had their own sovereignty. Then, instead of another global “hot war” for a new redistribution of the world, which turned out to be unsuitable in the conditions of possessing nuclear weapons, the Bretton Woods monetary system was launched (1944) with the American dollar (since 1971, which became, in fact, an empty piece of paper without a solid gold coating) as the only world currency, and everything became as before: you give us oil, gas, ore, gold, uranium, and we give you candy wrappers with portraits of presidents. But this “equivalent” exchange gradually also reached a dead end. The United States, due to its wasteful consumption, has accumulated an external debt that already exceeds the astronomical amount of 31 trillion dollars and which they will never repay. And in this situation, globalism turned out to be unworkable. “It can therefore be argued that the era of consumption, being the historical completion of the entire process of accelerated production under the sign of capital, is also an era of deep alienation” [34, p. 362].

But the issue is not closed yet. It is important to find and name the very bearer of the ideology of consumerism. It turns out that this is the so-called “leisure class”. It brought into public consciousness the idea that “the deliberate consumption of goods is a *prima facie* visual evidence of monetary success, and therefore proof of dignity in the eyes of society” [35, p. 178]. The author of this conclusion, as well as the theory of the “leisure class,” the American sociologist and economist T. Veblen (1857 – 1929), drew attention to the uncivilized, militaristic and predatory mentality of the “consumer society,” and specifically of the “leisure class.” He wrote: “During the transition to the predatory stage, the nature of the struggle for existence changed to some extent: previously the group fought against the natural environment, and then the struggle with the human environment began” [35, p. 230].

If they previously fought against poverty, now they are creating it; before they fought for peace, now they fight for war and forceful redistribution of resources. When Western politicians declare that the vast natural wealth of the Russian Federation or the Northern

Sea Route, which it owns, are too important resources for the world, and therefore they cannot be the property of one country, they reveal their consumer greed and desire for the sake of preserving the leisure class take risky measures to unleash more and more military conflicts.

Thus, consumerism, hypertrophied in conditions of limited resources and environmental deterioration (climate change, withdrawal of large territories from economic circulation, growing shortage of fresh water, etc.) has become a catalyst for the clash of civilizations of the global West and the global East. The only way out of this situation is the revival and preservation of human ecological culture. This idea was very accurately expressed by the well-known formula “to have or to be?” by the German philosopher E. Fromm (1900 – 1980). Because “to have” is by no means synonymous with “true being”. “To be”, he wrote, “one must give up the desire to possess as much property and wealth as possible, and free one’s soul from “wealth” and “vanity.” But the author admitted that “most people find it very difficult to cope with the possessive orientation of their personality” [36, p. 139]. It is where the “fault line” between civilizations, which S. Huntington wrote about, runs. Mercantile, consumerist, fetishistic and technogenic Western civilization, reducing the entire meaning of existence to the accumulation and consumption of material goods, “drives itself into a corner” when a shortage of these goods begins and the question of their forced redistribution arises. The cultural-genetic civilizations of Eurasia, in which spiritual values come first, on the contrary, turn out to be self-sufficient and capable of self-development. Therefore, it becomes clear why “cultural communities are replacing the blocs of the Cold War, and fault lines between civilizations are becoming central lines of conflict in global politics” [30, p. 185].

4 Conclusion

Industrialism and consumerism, with their wastefulness, have posed three problems for people: degradation of the natural environment; growing lawlessness; lack of social will to ensure people's well-being. And “the common cause of all three problems is wastefulness” [37, p. 93 – 94]. It was this that caused the modern environmental crisis, which some authors are trying to pass off as a myth, something positive, or a pseudo-problem [38; 39]. And as long as such ideas persist, research into the humanitarian context of environmental risks will remain relevant and useful.

2. In the context of modern geopolitical, environmental and macroeconomic crises, a new social reality is being formed, a fundamental transformation of value systems, world outlook and perception of the world is taking place. In this regard, it seems necessary to have a meaningful, purposeful and systematic formation of environmental culture and environmental consciousness in modern society. Successfully addressing this challenge is a key precondition for dealing with environmental risks and managing their potential consequences. Thus, environmental culture and environmental awareness turn out to be the most important factors in ensuring not only the reproduction of the environment, but also the environmental safety of the individual and society.

3. In connection with the axiological transformation determined by the new reality and the challenges faced by modern society, institutional modification of the existing environmental regulatory framework is also necessary. In particular, it is necessary to adopt the Environmental Code of the Russian Federation and the Federal Law “On Ecological Culture,” the idea of which has long been discussed. Environmental legislation must fully reflect the current situation in the “man-nature” system and fill the humanitarian and legal gaps that currently exist.

4. It is necessary to restructure environmental education and upbringing in preschool institutions, in secondary and higher schools, to develop and disseminate the practice of

environmental training, to turn the subject “Ecology” into a core one rather than an elective one. In particular, it seems advisable to bridge the gap in the study of the subject “Ecology” that exists between primary school and complete secondary education (high school), to prepare and adopt a unified federal textbook on ecology, which would reflect not only the basic environmental laws, but also humanitarian content related to economic culture and economic consciousness. In the higher education system, it would be useful to introduce into the curriculum so-called environmental workshops related to the practical participation of students in environmental and educational work. So far, such workshops are of an initiative nature and are not mandatory.

5. The humanitarian context of modern environmental risks involves teaching people the techniques and practices with which these risks can be eliminated or minimized. Accordingly, a significant revision and modernization of the ways and methods of such risk-oriented environmental education (methods of environmental labilization, artistic representation, environmental identification, environmental empathy, environmental awareness, etc.) is necessary, as well as a substantive revision of some educational subjects and courses (conflict studies, cultural studies, psychology, sociology, etc.) and filling them with cultural and environmental content.

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