

# The problem of environmental justice and its social consequences for the population of cross-border regions of Russia

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**Abstract.** The article addresses issues related to the actual problem of arranging environmentally fair relations. In particular, the article examines the importance of such relations for the functioning of the cross-border regions of Russia, whose special position obliges them to responsibly and competently defend national interests with the border states within their regional borders. From the perspective of the socio-ecological methods analyzing this problem, the key issues related to the social consequences of the unsolved problems in the field of environmental justice at the federal and regional levels, the consequences of losing sustainable development by social entities of cross-border areas are considered. More than that, various problems as a result of conflicts of interest between the federal and local authorities and the majority of border and adjacent regions of Russia are rising.

**Keywords:** environmental justice, international corporations, social consequences, cross-border regions

## 1. Introduction

The problem of environmental justice has always existed. In practice, it accompanied human society at all stages of its environmental impact. However, a rising level of awareness regarding the various social formations of this society at a fairly mature level should be attributed only to the middle of the past century. This is explained by the fact that this problem has gone beyond its local manifestation, becoming a huge problem at the global level, which have questioned the very possibility of human existence as a species on Earth.

In terms of its manifestation at the global level, the following is characteristic: 1) the overconsumption of natural resources by the developed countries and their under-consumption by the peoples of developing countries, whose resources are exported at reduced prices; 2) purchasing fresh water by international corporations worldwide and forcing the population of these countries to purchase their own water from these corporations; 3) monopolizing the global food market, destroying natural food cultures and health of many peoples; 4) transferring environmentally hazardous industries (or production waste) from the developed countries to other countries, and the shifting of environmental risks to the population of these countries and their nature.

As one can see, the global manifestation of this problem reflects in a mirror all the main contradictions of the modern era, where the main player in the global market is the corporations of a

small group of developed countries. It is their perceptions of social and environmental justice that set the tone for other countries in building their policies on the issue of environmental justice in their countries. At the same time, the governments of one or another state are practically forced to maneuver between the interests of these international corporations and their nationally oriented companies, some of which also begin to worry about the priorities of expanding their capital due to reaching the international level. Thus, we can argue that the stated research topic is relevant.

## **2. Materials and Methods**

The authors consider the problem of environmental justice from the perspective of sociology, taking into account the development in it of a specific, namely the socio-ecological direction of research at the theoretical and empirical levels. This direction deals with the study of this problem at the local (regional) level, taking into account its manifestation within the framework of certain settlement communities (differentiated according to their internal social structure and coordinated with the structure of the whole society), the biosocial essence of which implies their continuous interaction with fragments external environment. In sociology, there are three as such environments – natural, artificial, and social. In the framework of the socio-ecological method of analyzing the problem being studied, attention is drawn to the following things: subject-object ecological relations and interactions, values and ideas about environmental justice, the principles of social and ecological structure of society, as well as the attitudes of different groups of the population towards the policy of environmental justice and the norms of social and environmental law existing in their regions and in the country [1].

## **3. Results**

A socio-ecological analysis of this problem in modern Russia shows that its rejection of socialist development and the choice of the path to capitalism have the most detrimental effect on all its territories and puts its cross-border regions in an ambiguous position. This can be demonstrated by the example of a sharp change in the direction vector of the policy of solving the problem of environmental justice, which originated under Soviet power, but was solved by the latter with broad support from below, as exemplified by the Nature Guard Movement and the creation of a unique state body – the State Committee for Nature all over the world. Moreover, such a problem in the past was the result of the rapid development of industrial production, ensuring high employment of the population. Then at present, the main manifestation of this problem occurs against the background of permanent economic and social crises, unemployment and protests of various groups of the population defending their right on the arrangement of its habitat (Article 42 of the Constitution of the Russian Federation). Today, the main indicators of this problem are the following:

1. Implementation of resource-based economic policies that would enrich a narrow circle of people who have privatized the main wealth of Russia, and four times blocked in parliament the adoption of the law on natural rent [2], [3], [4], [5];
2. The increasing distance between a small number of donor regions and the majority of subsidized regions, much of which in the recent past was self-sufficient; forcing more and more Russians to poverty;
3. Liberalization and commercialization of environmental and social legislation, including in matters of education, health care, and nutrition, damaging the natural environment and the health of Russians, impeding the savings of the people;
4. The implementation (despite the protests) of the policy of importing nuclear waste from other countries (according to opinion polls, 84% of those willing to take part in the referendum oppose their importation [6]).

## **4. Discussion**

The lack of mechanisms to solve this problem (unlike in the European countries and the USA) at the international level in legal terms puts Russia, which has innumerable wealth and provides other nations, in an unequal position of a second-class country. It should be concerned about the search for foreign

investors for developing its regions, and this provision does not allow this country to defend national interests in equal positions. This position of Russia affects the dignity of all Russians and creates prerequisites for them to be in a situation of constant stress. However, the population living in the cross-border regions, which due to their geographic position find themselves in a more difficult position, turn out to be most sensitive to this position of Russia. This is due to their responsibility to the society and the state for cooperation on behalf of Russia with the neighboring states, taking into account their compliance with its national interests within the borders of this region. This responsibility is assigned to them by the Government of the Russian Federation within the framework of the Concept of Cross-Border Cooperation in the Russian Federation and the National Project "Ecology" [7], [8], [9]. It is also reflected in the implementation of various programs of cross-border cooperation [10], [11], [12], [13] conducted by the cross-border regions with specific countries in Europe and Southeast Asia. These documents explain in detail the goals, objectives, mechanisms, and main directions of state policy in the field of this cooperation, taking into account the sustainable development of cross-border regions. The latter, in a differentiated form, includes almost all areas of the economic, social, environmental and cultural life of these regions, their information security, preventing a drop in the standard of living of the population, possible environmental risks, deterioration of their health and reduction of life expectancy.

There are forty-eight such regions in our country. Half of them have interstate borders that are old, i.e. inherited from the Soviet period, and the other half has new ones that appeared due to the collapse of the USSR. Objectively assessing the state of their development, we can characterize it as sustainable only with a certain degree of acceptability. This is indicated by the following indicators:

1. Poverty and social disadvantage of these regions (high level of unemployment in them), as well as reducing population [14];
2. Daily struggles for their social groups to improve the economic situation of the region and the material condition of its inhabitants (statistics, sociological surveys, and rallies of representatives of the most diverse groups of these regions, as well as the tense situation during election campaigns testify to this [15]);
3. Rallies in defense of natural, specially protected areas from their use for economic purposes, from building up elite cottages; monuments of history and culture of the peoples living here. It is enough to refer to the example of the protection of Lake Baikal [16, 17] (the sacred monument of Nature for all Russians and personifying the Fatherland-Russia, which is also a monument of world importance), which was supported in most regions of Russia and abroad. It is characteristic that at meetings, their participants recited poems, sang songs about Baikal. The Irkutsk region is not a transboundary region, but it is in close contact with the latter, and everything that worries peoples living in Irkutsk influences Buryatia, the Altai Region, and other adjacent territories);
4. Speaking against trade in Russian forest and water with the Chinese "comrades." This trade was supported by regional and federal authorities. This is a screaming problem for the Irkutsk, Altai, Buryat territory. Meanwhile, deforestation and climate change are restructuring all the processes of circulation of substances in this region. Consequently, water resources may be much less than it seems today. Why did the government of Canada (possessing 7% of the world's freshwater resources) propose a ban on its transportation due to possible environmental damage back in 1999? [18] Because Canada thinks about perspective! In contrast, we do not solve our environmental problems, including in the cross-border regions, effectively [17], [19], [20], [21], [22];
5. In our opinion, the "privileged" donor regions take on the rights of peripheral and transboundary regions in matters of environmental quality. The struggle of the population living in the Arkhangelsk region and the adjacent Komi Republic against the importation of garbage from Moscow is a vivid example of this [23].

## 5. Conclusion

In general, a sociological analysis of the problem of environmental justice and its social consequences for the cross-border regions of Russia shows that the lack of attention of federal and regional authorities to solving problems that are so urgent for the population of Russia and its cross-border territories makes it impossible for them to pursue Russian policy in cross-border territories. But also, it deprives them of hope for environmentally sustainable and socially safe and equitable development both today and in the near and distant future.

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