

Environmental Threats as a Factor Promoting Environmental Consciousness



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Abstract. The article examines changes in environmental consciousness, which depend on how environmental threats are presented and perceived in public opinion and public discourse in Russia. Using the theory of socio-cultural risks and threats, we consider the formation of the so-called environmental paradigm, which interprets environmental consciousness as part of public consciousness. Analyzing the inclusion of the environmental agenda in the domestic public and political discourse, we show that since the 1990s Russian legislation has been guided by international documents in this area, and the Russian Federation has actively participated in all significant international environmental forums. The attack on the non-profit sector initiated by the state authorities in the 2010s significantly reduced the number of non-governmental organizations in the environmental sphere and affected the content of public discourse. The low level of awareness of the progress and content of the national project “Ecology” indicates insufficient interaction of the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment of

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the Russian Federation with civil society institutions and representatives of local environmental initiatives. As a result, poor involvement of the population in environmental processes can potentially lead to the emergence of occasional environmental protests. The data of sociological studies show that public awareness of environmental threats is growing rather slowly and unevenly. In the overall rating of threats, environmental threats usually rank 3rd–4th, but this has a small effect on environmental behavior and on the formation of nature-saving social practices. We consider promoting environmental consciousness as a process of helping people to become more aware of anthropogenic risks and strive for a healthy ecological environment. The typological group of “responsible” individuals identified on the basis of this approach differs from the group of “indifferent” ones according to a number of socio-demographic and socio-political features and demonstrates weak positive dynamics.

Key words: sustainable development, ecology, environmental consciousness, ecological crisis, national projects, social practices, ecological modernization.

Introduction

Ecological wellbeing and sustainable development actively entered the scientific and public discourse in the second half of the 20th century, when the ecological crisis was recognized as a global problem of human civilization and began to be substantively addressed by the international community, where international organizations and associations played the leading role. The ideas of modern environmentalism were most fully reflected in three landmark publications that influenced the development of the environmental movement worldwide: the Club of Rome report *Limits to Growth* (Meadows et al., 1991), *A Blueprint for Survival* by the editors of *The Ecologist* with a foreword by the famous biologist Ehrlich, and *Small is beautiful* by Fritz Schumacher (Aksenova, 2006).

In fact, the transition from the anthropocentric to ecocentric paradigm of societal development, where the highest value is the harmonious development of nature and man, began at the 1972 Stockholm UN Conference on the environment, when the link between sustainable development and environmental conservation was defined and a joint plan of action of states was adopted¹. The UN Conference on Environmental Protection (Earth

Summit) in 1992 in Rio de Janeiro adopted the Rio Declaration, which defined the basic principles of international environmental law², contributing to the development of environmental legislation in a number of countries.

Attention to environmental problems at the global and subnational level necessitates the creation of special services to protect the environment at the national level as well. In Russia by that time, in 1991, the USSR Ministry of Nature Management and Environment was created.

Putting environmental security at the top of the global agenda led to the adoption of the United Nations Millennium Declaration in 2000, which stated the need to implement the principle of sustainable development. And in 2012, at the UN Conference on Sustainable Development Rio +20, the report *The Future We Want* emphasized the need to integrate the environmental, social and economic dimensions to achieve sustainable development goals in all its directions³. Among the most

¹ Report of the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment. Stockholm, 5–16 June 1972. United Nations. New-York, 1973. Available at: <https://daccess-ods.un.org/tmp/6735631.22749329.html> (accessed: July 12, 2022).

² Rio Declaration on Environment and Development. Adopted by the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, Rio de Janeiro, June 3–14, 1992. Available at: https://www.un.org/ru/documents/decl_conv/declarations/riodecl.shtml (accessed: July 12, 2022).

³ Rio+20. United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development. Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, June 20–22, 2012. Available at: <https://www.un.org/ru/events/pastevents/rio20.shtml> (accessed: July 12, 2022).

significant documents where ecology is a priority, let us mention the 2015 UN report *Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*⁴, as well as a package of programs for the 2019 Decade of Action to Achieve the Global Sustainable Development Goals by 2030⁵.

Such active inclusion of ecological problems in the political discourse of our time led to the formation of special branches at the junction of ecology and other sciences: political ecology (Wolf, 1972), social ecology (Losev, 1998; Deryabo, 1999; Panov, 2004), and also caused research interest in issues of interpretation and general assessment of environmental risks and threats (Gladun et al, 2021; Maslova, 2022), problems of formation of ecological consciousness (Shumeiko, 2003; Oreshkina, 2014; Gordin, Ryumina, 2021; Kozlovskii et al., 2022).

In the development of the “new ecological paradigm” (Catton, Dunlap, 1978; Dunlap, Catton, 1994) Russian scientists made a significant contribution, laying the foundations of modern ideas about the specifics of the interaction between society and the natural environment (Bondarev, 2010; Babkin, 2014; Yanitskii, 2014) as well as the sustainable development of territories (Voronov, Narbut, 2013; Shushkova et al., 2017). Additionally, it makes sense to mention those works that emphasized a consumerist, eco-phobic system of values in Russia, which led to disastrous consequences in the reproduction of the natural environment (Oreshkina, Konyashkin, 2018) and ineffective systems of civil society pressure on business and government structures (Efremenko, 2006).

⁴ Resolution adopted by the General Assembly on September 25, 2015. *Transforming our world: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*. Available at: https://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/70/1&Lang=R (accessed: July 12, 2022).

⁵ Decade of Action. Available at: <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/ru/decade-of-action/> (accessed: July 12, 2022).

The task of studying the awareness and involvement of citizens in the statement and solution of environmental problems has been repeatedly raised by Russian sociologists. Here we note a number of VCIOM studies: monitoring of the ecological situation in general⁶ and problems of air pollution and garbage dumps⁷, survey conducted in 2021 specially for the Environmental Forum of the Russian Union of Industrialists and Entrepreneurs (RSPP), during which respondents evaluated the environmental situation in their region, in Russia and around the world⁸. The study of Russian citizens' assessments of the environmental situation in their areas of residence, the criteria for a favorable environmental situation and awareness of the national project “Ecology” was also conducted in the course of a nationwide survey of the population by the Analytical Center of the National Agency for Financial Research (NAFI)⁹.

The results of studies show the low level of environmental literacy, low awareness of citizens about environmental risks, the growing interest in environmental problems in conditions of environmental disadvantage, but do not allow assessing fully the changes in public awareness, affecting the behavior and the formation of new social practices, including in the sphere of environment-friendly behavior.

⁶ Ecological situation in Russia: Monitoring. Available at: <https://wciom.ru/analytical-reviews/analiticheskii-obzor/ekologicheskaya-situacziya-v-rossii-monitoring> (accessed: July 15, 2022).

⁷ The environmental situation and garbage disposal: Monitoring. Available at: <https://wciom.ru/analytical-reviews/analiticheskii-obzor/ekologicheskaya-situacziya-i-vyvoz-musora-monitoring> (accessed: July 15, 2022).

⁸ The biggest harm to the environment comes from garbage and vehicles... Available at: <https://wciom.ru/analytical-reviews/analiticheskii-obzor/samyi-bolshoi-vred-ehkologii-nanosjat-musor-i-transport-trete-mesto-deljat-promyshlennost-i-lesozagotovki> (accessed: July 15, 2022).

⁹ Clean air, water and soil are the three pillars of good ecology according to Russians. Available at: <https://nafi.ru/analytical-reviews/chistye-vozdukh-voda-i-pochva-tri-kitakhoroshey-ekologii-po-mneniyu-rossiyan/> (accessed: July 15, 2022).

Following the logic of W. Beck and K. Kropp, who focus their attention on the features of social construction of environmental risks (Beck, Kropp, 2007), we intend to consider the dynamics of subjective perceptions of society regarding the environmental situation in the country, as well as the environmental risks and threats that are realized and articulated in the public consciousness and public discourse and that shape certain social practices.

The theoretical and methodological basis of the study is the theory of socio-cultural threats and risks (Beck, 2010), according to which environmental hazards and their impact on social processes act as a clear threat to the existence of modern society on a global level. In this logic, we interpret the ecological crisis as a manifestation of ecological risk (Mol, 1995), which could potentially turn into a threat. Understood by threats as a violation of the normative order in the sphere of social interactions, we consider environmental problems, environmental disadvantage as a social threat, potentially dangerous to the state and society.

We share M. Bookchin's view that "almost all of our contemporary ecological problems stem from entrenched social problems ... these ecological problems cannot be understood, let alone solved, without a careful understanding of our contemporary society and the illogic that dominates it" (Bookchin, 1996; Bookchin, 1993).

In turn, we operationalize ecological consciousness, which becomes exclusively social, based on the reflection of social needs and interests (Ashkhamaf, 2010; Berkut, 2010), through the values and norms that individuals follow in their daily lives. In this sense, the term "ecologization of consciousness" in the title of the article implies not only an increased awareness of the presence of environmental threats and the degree of risks, but also joint activities to overcome these threats, mastering certain social practices.

The empirical basis of the work includes the data of the All-Russian sociological monitoring "How do you live, Russia?"¹⁰ and the sociological survey "Political Culture of Russian Society..."¹¹ (ISPR FCTAS RAS), the data of quantitative-qualitative content analysis of the media, conducted as part of the study "Features of the representation of socio-cultural threats in the Russian mass media" (sociological department of the Russian State University for the Humanities)¹².

¹⁰ Sociological monitoring "How do you live, Russia?" has been conducted by the Center for Social and Socio-Political Studies of ISPR FCTAS RAS since 1992. The research supervisor is V.K. Levashov, Doctor of Sciences (Sociology). The study used a quota-proportional all-Russian sample with interdependent characteristics of the general population: gender, age, education, and place of residence. The territorial location of the sample was based on the economic and geographic zoning of the country while respecting the proportion of the population and the proportion between the urban and rural populations. The sample size at various stages was 1,312–1,866 respondents. The empirical object of the study was the adult population of Russia. By May 2022, 51 stages of the monitoring were conducted.

¹¹ Sociological research "Political culture of the Russian society in the context of transition to a new technological mode and implementation of Presidential Decree 204 "On national goals and strategic objectives of development of the Russian Federation for the period through to 2024", dated May 7, 2018" was conducted by the Center for Social and Socio-Political Studies of ISPR FCTAS RAS in May – June 2019. The empirical object of the study was the adult population of Russia. The study used a quota-proportional all-Russian sample with interdependent characteristics of the general population: gender, age, education, and place of residence. The territorial location of the sample was based on the economic and geographic zoning of the country, while respecting the proportion of population and the proportion between urban and rural populations. The sample size was 1,800 respondents. The research supervisor was V.K. Levashov, Doctor of Sciences (Sociology).

¹² As part of a content analysis of publications in the media on environmental issues for 2012, 2015 and 2019 (January–September), 1,139 publications were included in the analysis from the primary sample of 1,357 sources in the newspapers *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, *Moskovskij Komsomolets* and *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, because some articles did not contain an informative component. Only the print versions of particular leading media outlets were processed, since newspaper websites often contain materials that, for various reasons, are not published in the paper pages. Data collection methods: quantitative and qualitative content analysis of articles posted in the information space of the Russian Federation. Time interval: the sample includes publications from January to September 2012, 2015 and 2019.

Environmental issues are considered throughout the monitoring study “How do you live, Russia?” in the context of assessing the level of anxiety about the state of the environment, the maturity of environmental awareness, the readiness of civil society and individual citizens to take concrete measures to protect nature, etc. After the adoption and launch of the national goals and development projects of the Russian Federation, new blocks of questions were included in the monitoring set of tools, which allowed assessing the level of awareness of citizens about the objectives, progress of the project “Ecology” and the opportunities created within its framework.

The research instrument “Political culture of the Russian society...” allowed clarifying and specifying the monitoring data. We received answers to the questions about how the environmental situation in the place of residence of the respondents has changed over the past 5 years, the possibility of aggravation of which problems in the field of ecology is of the greatest concern.

In conducting a quantitative and qualitative content analysis, we selected three periodicals reflecting different perspectives on the processes taking place in Russia and the world: *Komsomolskaya Pravda* and *Komsomolskaya Pravda. Tolstushka*; *Moskovskij Komsomolets*; *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* and *Rossiyskaya Gazeta. Week*. The criterion for the selection of the media were their national importance, the breadth of the audience, and the circulation of the publications. In addition, we considered publication diversity: *Komsomolskaya Pravda* is a conservative-populist source, *Moskovskij Komsomolets* is a liberal-populist source, and *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* reflects the official point of view on processes taking place in Russia and the world. The study identified the features of the reflection of real and possible environmental threats and risks in the media, which allowed identifying clusters of environmental problems presented in the information space.

Ecology in Russian politics and public discourse

The ecological factor as one of the grounds for sustainable development is assessed and interpreted differently at the national level, within the framework of public policies of different countries. Basic documents on sustainable development, including the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, were signed on September 25, 2015, but countries that have made global commitments are developing and funding their own sustainable development strategies, plans, and programs.

Unfortunately, the Environmental Security Strategy of the Russian Federation, while emphasizing the external threats to environmental security (p. 21), does not clearly formulate the content of internal threats¹³. Experts in this field distinguish two groups of threats: those caused by human activities in the industrial and economic spheres (e.g., diminishing stocks of various natural resources or unproductive use of natural resources) and those associated with illegal manifestations in the actions of certain individuals and groups (e.g., overuse of natural resources or poaching) (Vorontsov et al., 2017).

Ecological modernization, which in this case is the basis of socio-economic changes, involves the rejection of a utilitarian, anthropocentric attitude to the environment (Kulyasov, 2005). In the Russian Federation, the national set of indicators of sustainable development goals¹⁴ is largely focused on environmental issues. The goals of sustainable development largely determine the content of the national project “Ecology”¹⁵, which suggests the implementation of such tasks as environmental protection, waste management and recycling,

¹³ “On the environmental security strategy of the Russian Federation until 2025”: Presidential Decree 176, dated April 19, 2017. Available at: <http://www.kremlin.ru/acts/bank/41879> (accessed: July 15, 2022).

¹⁴ National set of SDG indicators. Available at: <https://rosstat.gov.ru/sdg/national> (accessed: July 15, 2022).

¹⁵ Passport of the national project “Ecology”. Available at: https://www.mnr.gov.ru/upload/medialibrary/0bd/NP_EkologiyaPasport.pdf (accessed: July 16, 2022).

preserving water bodies and improving the quality of drinking water, reducing air pollution, nature and animal protection, the introduction of the best environmental technologies. Unfortunately, the national project “Ecology” and the federal projects included in it showed the worst results in terms of cash execution in the first quarter of 2022. As of April 1, out of the 117.1 billion rubles allocated in 2022, 8.2% of the planned funds (9.5 billion) had been allocated for implementation. In the second quarter the result was better: 35.5% of the allocated 128.3 billion rubles was spent on implementation (45.5 billion), and the ninth place out of 14 in terms of the level of funds use (*Tab. 1*).

The formation of the environmental agenda depends on different actors, both state and non-state. The adoption of the law on “foreign agents” caused a significant decrease in the number of non-profit organizations (NPOs) dealing with environmental issues in 2012–2015 (Kefner, Morgun, 2020). E.A. Topoleva-Soldunova, chairman of the Commission for Development of the Non-Profit Sector and Support of Socially

Oriented NPOs of the RF Civic Chamber, speaking about environmental organizations, noted: “...This is not a priority area for state support. International foundations used to be a good support in this sphere. There is no Russian substitute for them yet”¹⁶. The reduction in the number of NPOs in the field of environmental protection becomes a kind of brake on the development of a green economy, since there is no effective public control over the activities of both government and for-profit structures, as well as large industrial monopolies (Tsepilova, 2019).

In this regard, we agree with those colleagues who believe that environmental issues lag far behind socio-economic and political issues in terms of priority (Velikaya, 2019; Rastorguev, 2022), while in the political public space they have always been relegated to the periphery, which was explained by the urgent need to solve economic and social problems. Attempts to incorporate the environmental agenda into the official discourse have resulted in declarative goals and objectives and, as a result, weak public participation in environmental projects.

Table 1. Cash execution of federal projects that are part of the national project “Ecology”

| Federal project | 1st quarter of 2022 | | | 2nd quarter of 2022 | | |
|--|------------------------------|----------------|------|------------------------------|----------------|------|
| | Allocated, billion rubles | Transferred | | Allocated, billion rubles | Transferred | |
| | | billion rubles | % | | Billion rubles | % |
| Conservation of biodiversity and the development of ecological tourism | 1.1 | 0.4 | 35.0 | 1.1 | 0.7 | 64.4 |
| Conservation of unique water bodies | 2.7 | 0.6 | 22.6 | 3.0 | 1.0 | 34.0 |
| Forest conservation | 5.3 | 1.1 | 20.6 | 5.4 | 3.4 | 62.1 |
| Clean air | 11.3 | 1.1 | 9.6 | 11.7 | 3.5 | 29.7 |
| Restoration of the Volga | 24.2 | 2.2 | 9.1 | 25.3 | 8.3 | 32.9 |
| Conservation of Lake Baikal | 9.2 | 0.8 | 9.0 | 8.1 | 1.8 | 21.9 |
| Clean country | 39.3 | 2.9 | 7.5 | 37.0 | 18.5 | 49.8 |
| Integrated system of solid municipal waste management | 17.6 | 0.4 | 2.2 | 26.3 | 2.7 | 10.3 |
| Infrastructure for hazard classes I-II waste management | 5.7 | - | 0 | 10.4 | 5.7 | 54.8 |

Source: Execution of federal budget expenditures on the implementation of national projects. Available at: https://minfin.gov.ru/common/upload/press_center/2022/04/01_04_22.xlsx; https://minfin.gov.ru/common/upload/press_center/2022/07/01_07_2022.xlsx (accessed: July 15, 2022).

¹⁶ The number of patriotic and sports NPOs is growing in Russia. Available at: <https://iz.ru/news/677126> (accessed: July 17, 2022).

Public inattention to the topic of ecology did not allow a “green” political party with a noticeable political weight to gain a foothold in the Russian political space. Thus, two environmental parties participated in the 2021 elections: the Russian environmental party “The Greens”, registered back in 2012, and the new party “Green Alternative”, registered in 2020. The overall result of both parties in the elections did not reach 2%, which does not allow us to hope for a successful environmental project in the field of Russian politics in the near future. The environmental component of the electoral programs of most political parties participating in the 2021 elections is represented in a limited way, as a rule, it was discussed in the context of other instrumental tasks (Rastorguev, 2022). While the programs of the parties “United Russia”, “A Just Russia” and “Yabloko” included separate sections on ecology, the programs of other political parties (Civic Platform, Party of Growth, Russian Party of Pensioners for Social Justice) do not address environmental issues at all.

At the same time, environmental threats are represented in the media in their entirety and cover a wide range of existing risks and dangers related to the environment. However, in the overall rating of threats represented in the media, it is one of the last in terms of the volume of the text corpus. According to the results of the content analysis of the media for 2012, 2015 and 2019, among the publications directly related to environmental issues, we were able to identify the main clusters by threats most frequently mentioned in the media, namely:

- harmful air emissions, air pollution, traffic emissions, etc. (139 publications for the entire period);
- conservation of forests and green spaces – illegal logging, forest fires, peatlands, bark beetles, snags, etc. (138 publications);
- collection, accumulation, storage, sorting, recycling and disposal of waste and garbage (121 publications);

- pollution of waters of the world ocean, rivers, lakes, groundwater, drinking water sources, reduction of water resources, shoaling of water bodies, conservation of unique water systems (Lake Baikal, the Volga), wastewater and operation of sewage treatment plants (108 publications);
- compliance of enterprises and their products with environmental standards and norms of environmental safety – environmental impact, reduction of harmful emissions, etc. (67 publications);
- climate change issues – global warming, melting of glaciers, global sea level rise, greenhouse effect, ozone layer depletion (62 publications);
- reduction of bioresources and biodiversity, disruption/destruction of complex ecosystems (34 publications);
- soil pollution, subsoil management (34 publications);
- issues of nuclear power, development of the peaceful atom, radiation (accidents at nuclear power plants, their consequences, etc.), and disposals of radioactive waste (22 publications);
- development of electric power and alternative energy sources, energy saving, utilization of electric power sources (19 publications).

Publications belonging to the above clusters form an idea of ecology as a “problem”, a “risk factor”, and a “source of threats”. The most urgent problems appear to be forest conservation (addressed in 19% of all publications), air pollution (19%), waste management (16%), and water pollution (15%). At the same time, the most frequent topics of forest vegetation, air and water pollution were raised in 2012, and the waste problem – in 2019. In the studied period (2012–2019), the increase in relevance is characteristic only for the topic of waste disposal. The number of publications related to the waste threat has increased significantly, from 6% in 2012 to 28% in 2019. The most tangible drop in relevance during the study period was recorded for threats to the conservation of forests and green spaces: from 25%

in 2012 to 14% in 2019; compliance of businesses with environmental safety standards – 12% in 2012, 9% in 2015, 7% in 2019; soil pollution – 7% in 2012, 6% in 2015, 2% in 2019.

In the total volume of publications since 2019 there have been articles related to the adoption and implementation of the national project “Ecology”, but there were no more than 20 of them. We should say that even now the level of awareness of citizens about this project does not inspire much optimism. According to our research, in 2020 only 1.7% of respondents were fully informed about the national project “Ecology”; 16.5% were partially informed; and a half (51%) had no information about the project at all (Levashov, 2020).

The fact that Russian society is still insufficiently informed about the tasks and results of the implementation of the national project “Ecology” was noted in the expert report on the three years of implementation of the project (from 2019 to 2021), presented at the meeting of the Public Council

under the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment of Russia, March 24, 2022. According to experts, it is necessary to “organize a large-scale public discussion of the national project activities with coverage in the federal media”¹⁷.

Assessing the importance of national projects for Russian society as a whole, in 2021 the majority of citizens considered “Healthcare” (78%) and “Education” (70%) to be the highest priority among them. The project “Ecology” came in third place, as 64% of respondents considered it significant for Russian society (*Tab. 2*).

It is worth noting that the project “Ecology” has consistently ranked third in the hierarchy of evaluations of the national projects’ importance both personally for respondents and for Russian society as a whole for the past three years. In 2020, the project was in fourth place according to its importance for the entire society, but the share of respondents who named it was the highest for all years (74%).

Table 2. Distribution of responses to the question “What national projects, in your opinion, are the most important?”, % of the respondents (RF, answers ranked by the column “For Russian society as a whole, 2021”)

| National project | For you personally | | | For Russian society a whole | | |
|---|--------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------------------------|-----------|-----------|
| | 2019 | 2020 | 2021 | 2019 | 2020 | 2021 |
| Healthcare | 84 | 80 | 76 | 82 | 87 | 78 |
| Education | 46 | 45 | 62 | 81 | 78 | 70 |
| Ecology | 48 | 49 | 55 | 72 | 74 | 64 |
| Housing and urban environment | 59 | 47 | 55 | 67 | 62 | 54 |
| Culture | 12 | 21 | 41 | 61 | 54 | 47 |
| Science | 22 | 18 | 33 | 57 | 62 | 44 |
| Labor productivity and employment support | 29 | 31 | 31 | 60 | 56 | 44 |
| Safe and quality roads | 47 | 58 | 46 | 66 | 76 | 43 |
| Demography | 13 | 14 | 21 | 52 | 63 | 34 |
| Small and medium entrepreneurship | 18 | 18 | 28 | 38 | 54 | 33 |
| Digital economy of the Russian Federation | 11 | 20 | 11 | 53 | 50 | 21 |
| A comprehensive plan for the modernization and expansion of backbone infrastructure | 4 | 4 | 9 | 38 | 27 | 18 |
| International cooperation and export | 2 | 5 | 6 | 28 | 30 | 13 |

Source: data from the Center for social and socio-political research ISPR FCTAS RAS; (Levashov, 2020; Levashov et al., 2021).

¹⁷ The national project “Ecology” will be brought closer to the people. *Vedomosti. Ecology*. March 24, 2022. Available at: https://www.vedomosti.ru/ecology/national_projects/articles/2022/03/24/915083-natsproekt-ekologiya-priblizyat-k-narodu (accessed: May 16, 2022).

Analysis of the assessment dynamics of the importance of the national project “Ecology” allows drawing a number of conclusions. First, according to citizens, the importance of the project for the entire society, while remaining high, is still decreasing (from 72% in 2019 to 64% in 2021, an increase of 2 percentage points in 2020 is within sampling error). Such a picture is characteristic of the evaluation of all the national projects without exception. It is likely that the topic of the national projects itself is gradually replaced from the public information field by other actualized problems (the coronavirus, sanctions, etc.).

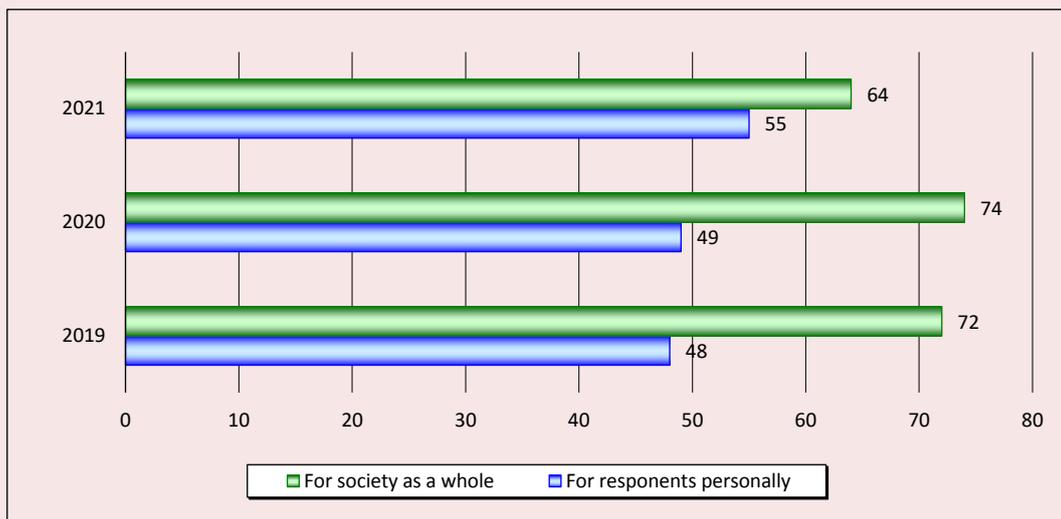
Second, the importance of the project “Ecology” personally for citizens during the same period increased from 48% to 55%. It can be assumed that citizens are increasingly aware of the “green” agenda’s importance for improving the quality of life at the household level (Fig. 1).

The current economic and political situation associated with the implementation of a special

military operation, has necessitated the adjustment of targets and funding norms for virtually all national projects, including environmental projects.

The worsening of relations with Western countries after the start of the special military operation in Ukraine caused a review of the country’s environmental commitments. On April 21, 2022, the chairman of the Supreme Council of the United Russia party published a text in *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* in which he spoke against the so-called ESG agenda, linking environmental, social policy and governance issues, calling it a provocation “in which ecology serves only as a locomotive to promote “democratic” rules, standards and liberal “values” ... We no longer need to align our values with those of the West, we do not need to bring them closer together, we do not even need to compare them. We only need to have an aligned information field with our “partners”. And to live and act in a way that is good for our citizens!”¹⁸. According to the politician, following the green agenda, the

Figure 1. Assessment dynamics of the importance of the project “Ecology”, 2019–2021 (RF), % of respondents



Source: data from the Center for Social and Socio-Political Research ISPR FCTAS RAS; (Levashov, 2020; Levashov et al., 2021).

¹⁸ Boris Gryzlov – about environmental sovereignty of Russia. *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, federal issue no. 13. Available at: <https://rg.ru/2022/01/21/boris-gryzlov-ob-ekologicheskoy-suverenitete-rossii.html> (accessed: July 16, 2022).

formation of a green economy, and compliance with signed commitments is becoming disadvantageous for citizens. It is obvious that behind these words and meanings are those interest groups that benefit from the exploitation of natural resources without regard to environmental legislation and the country's international obligations, which can now be neglected.

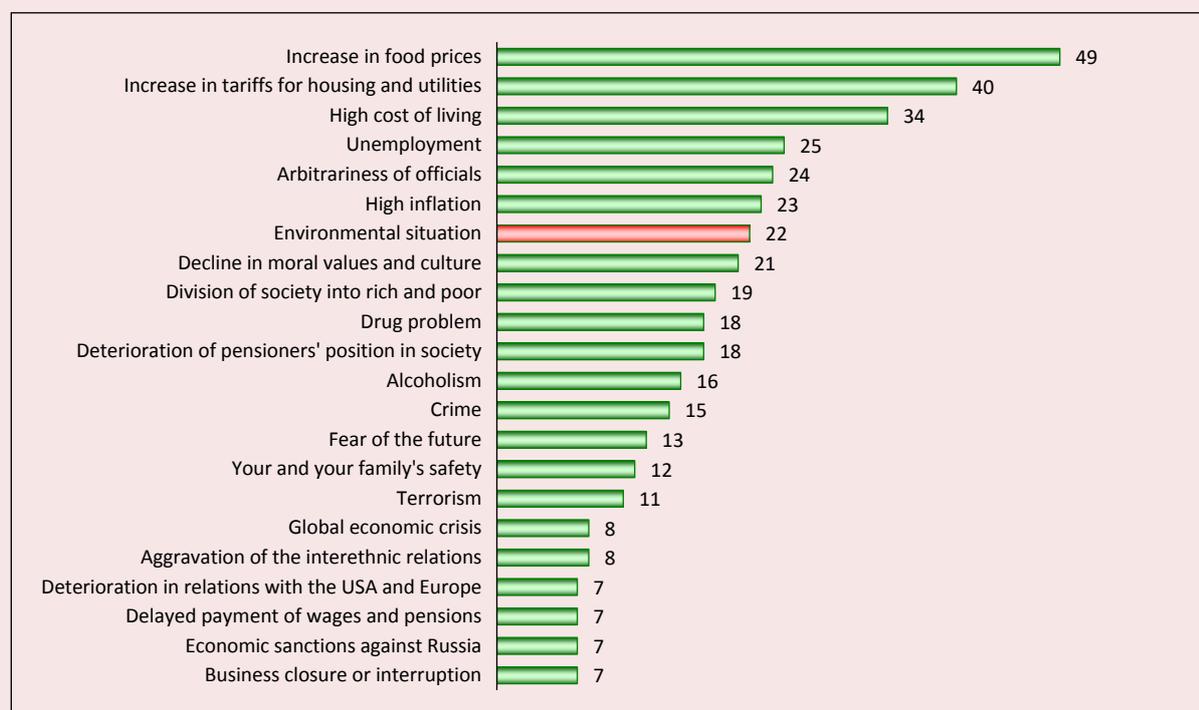
In particular, LUKOIL, like other major oil companies, is experiencing serious problems with fuel shipments under tough sanctions, which threatens to reduce production and shut down refineries. To avoid this, the company wants to redirect the excess fuel oil to CHP and proposes to temporarily abolish high fines for negative environmental impact. The same kind of allowances are needed for the burning of associated

petroleum gas, which, according to representatives of LUKOIL, may increase due to the temporary impossibility of selling abroad the liquefied petroleum gases (LPG) produced from it.

These measures actually threaten to abandon the “green transition” policy, create additional environmental risks, and reduce spending on federal projects under the national project “Ecology”. A possible return to the use of fuel oil would actually negate the meaning of the federal project “Clean Air”¹⁹. In the long term, the abandonment of a number of enterprises from green projects will not benefit the Russian economy as a whole.

Time will tell whether these innovations will be actively discussed in the information space and whether they will provoke a negative reaction from civil society.

Figure 2. Anxiety structure of respondents (distribution of responses to the question “What problems worry you most of all?”), 2021, RF, % of respondents



Source: data from the Center for Social and Socio-Political Research ISPR FCTAS RAS.

¹⁹ The federal project “Clean Air”. Available at: <https://www.mnr.gov.ru/activity/clean-air/> (accessed: July 16, 2022).

Public opinion on environmental risks and threats

Obviously, the solution to any problem, no matter how brilliant its substantiation and elaboration at the level of political decision-making, is impossible without an existing public consensus.

In proposing a review of the evolution of social perceptions regarding various facets of the current environmental agenda, we assume that in today’s high-tech society the prospects for security and sustainable development are linked to threats and risks arising in the sociocultural sphere no less than to threats of a military or man-made nature. In the context of our study, the transformation of the system of values associated with a consumer attitude toward the environment into a system of values oriented toward sustainable development is determinative.

The indicators included in the monitoring set of tools “How do you live, Russia?” allow revealing the levels and structure of respondents’ anxiety.

Environmental problems are the second most important group of fears, after the fears of the economic order: reduction of income, loss of work, inability to provide a decent life for the family, etc. (Fig. 2).

In particular, in June 2021, the level and structure of anxiety among Russian citizens were determined by a number of interrelated factors that have emerged over the past 2–3 years. The influence of such factors as the global economic crisis, the tense epidemiological situation, and the explosive growth of the introduction of digital technology have increased the already traditional concerns of Russian society not only about the financial situation and the infringement of the interests of the most vulnerable (pensioners, low-wage workers, etc.), but also about the environmental situation. Environmental risks are usually among the top five in the overall ranking of the most significant concerns of citizens. The greatest concern about the

Figure 3. Dynamics of respondents’ anxiety about the environmental situation, RF, % of respondents



Source: data from the Center for Social and Socio-Political Research ISPR FCTAS RAS.

environmental situation during the entire period of observation was noted in 2007–2008 (37–42% of respondents). Then it dropped to 17–20% in 2014–2017 and increased sharply again to 39% in 2020. On average, according to the sociological monitoring “How do you live, Russia?” for the entire period of observation, about a third of respondents expressed concern about the environmental situation (*Fig. 3*).

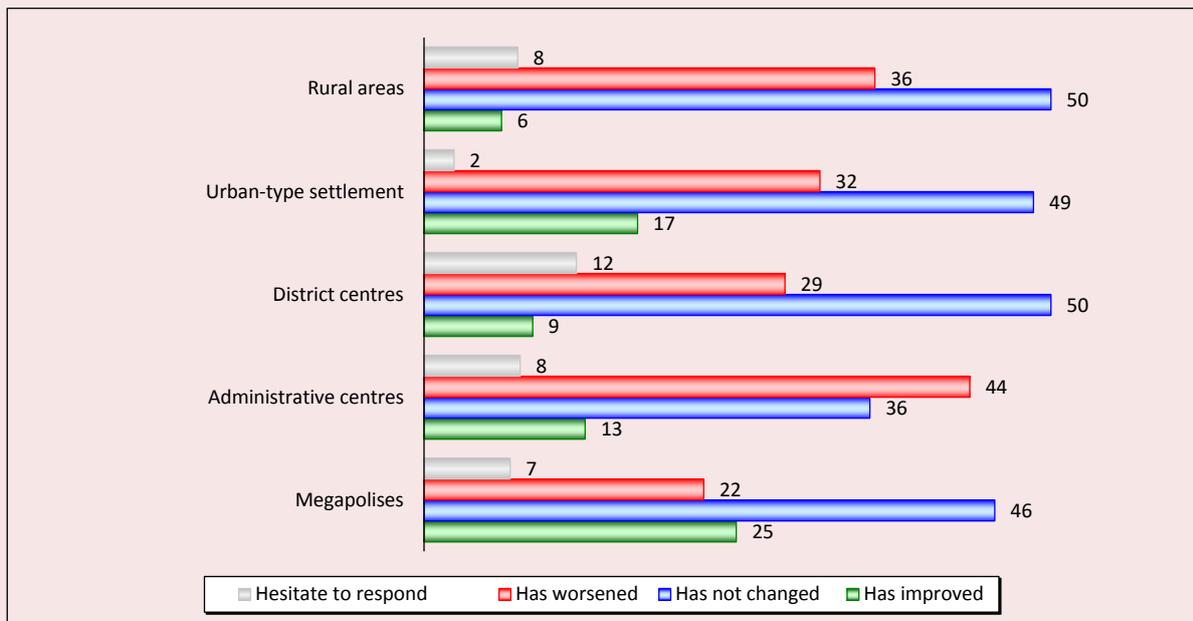
Remarkably, the all-Russian sample does not show any significant differences in responses by age. One-third of those surveyed (34% of young people and 30% of the older generation) perceived environmental degradation as a threat.

But there are obvious territorial differences related to the respondents’ place of residence. Our research shows that environmental problems are most acute in regional centers, small and medium-sized cities of Russia, and especially in the capitals of the constituent entities of the Federation, where the majority of respondents notice a deteriorating

environmental situation (*Fig. 4*). Indeed, the number of rather acute confrontations between civil society and the authorities over environmental problems has occurred in recent years in the Moscow Oblast, Saint Petersburg and the Leningrad Oblast, the Chelyabinsk, Arkhangelsk, Kemerovo, Tyumen, Volgograd oblasts, Khabarovsk Krai, and others.

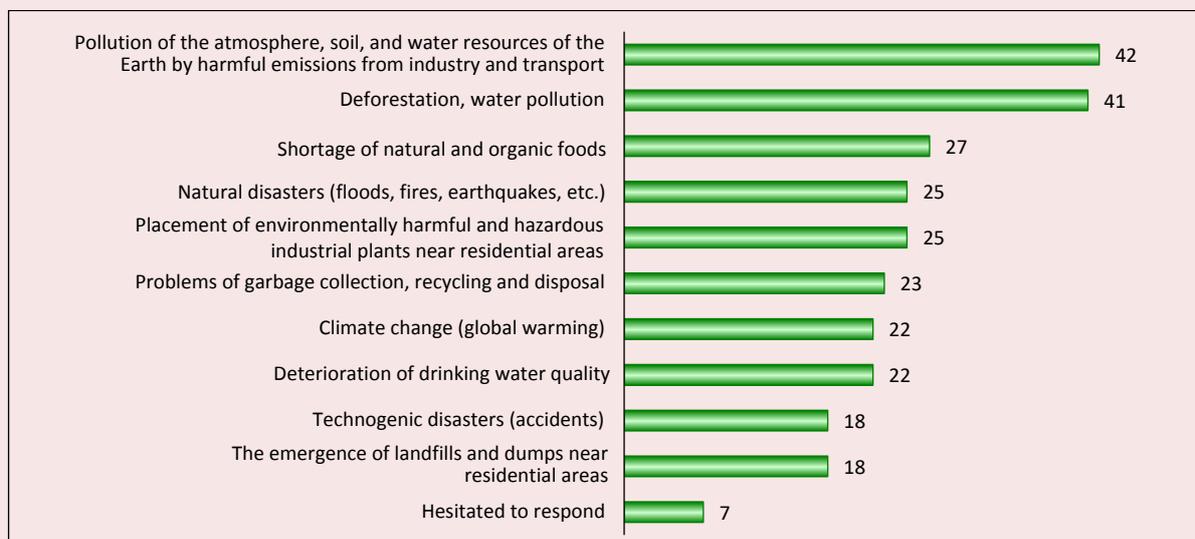
The environmental problems that worry Russian citizens can be conditionally divided into natural and anthropogenic ones according to their genesis. The data presented allow concluding that the possibility of aggravation of anthropogenic, in particular man-made, problems causes the greatest anxiety among the respondents. The possibility of threats associated with the pollution of the atmosphere, soil, and water resources of the Earth by harmful emissions from industry and transport, deforestation, and the pollution of water bodies is of concern to 40% or more of citizens (*Fig. 5*).

Figure 4. Opinion of residents of different types of settlements on how the environmental situation in their place of residence has changed over the past 5 years, 2019, RF, % of respondents



Source: data from the Center for Social and Socio-Political Research ISPR FCTAS RAS.

Figure 5. Distribution of respondents' answers to the question "Which of the following problems are you most worried about?", RF, December 2020, % of respondents (N = 1563)



Source: data from the Center for Social and Socio-Political Research ISPR FCTAS RAS.

A quarter of the surveyed citizens fear the placement of environmentally harmful and hazardous industries near residential areas (25%), as well as problems associated with the collection, recycling and disposal of waste (23%). Every fifth person expresses concern about the appearance of garbage dumps and landfills near residential areas (18%), which correlates with the results of the NAFI study mentioned above, where “respondents who consider the environmental situation in their settlement to be unfavorable primarily complain about the large amount of garbage and landfills (58%)”²⁰.

Accidents and man-made disasters are of concern to 18% of citizens – a significant figure, but incomparably less than the concerns associated with direct industrial activity and the activities of the population. Besides, anthropogenic problems are closely connected with deficit of natural and ecologically clean food (27%) and deterioration of

drinking water quality (22%), which are to a great extent caused by human activity. Threat of increase of natural disasters (floods, fires, earthquakes, etc.) alarms 25% of respondents, dangers related to climate change (global warming) – 22%.

Undoubtedly, all these fears have an objective basis. According to Rosstat, the rate of depreciation of fixed assets of enterprises in 2020 was over 60%, the wear and tear of vehicles – about 50%²¹. Untimely replacement of production assets remains the root cause of the growth of technogenic threats – pollution of the atmosphere, soil and water by harmful emissions. Although there are currently requirements for industrial and agricultural enterprises and fuel producers to ensure the environmental safety of production, they are not always met in full. In 2020, in order to compensate for the losses, companies began to save on environmental measures and suspended the modernization of machinery and equipment.

²⁰ Clean air, water and soil are the three pillars of good ecology according to Russians. Available at: <https://nafi.ru/analytics/chistye-vozdukh-voda-i-pochva-tri-kita-khoroshey-ekologii-po-mneniyu-rossiyan/> (accessed: July 15, 2022).

²¹ Fixed assets according to Rosstat (Tab. degree of depreciation). Available at: <https://rosinfostat.ru/osnovnye-fondy/#i-5> (accessed: July 16, 2022).

Over the past several years, uncontrolled clearance has resulted in the reduction of forested areas, leading to the narrowing of bird and animal habitats and the destruction of unique plant species. In addition, the expansion of human settlements, construction of transportation routes, and forest fires pose a threat to forests. The reforestation occurs at a much slower pace than its clearing. Solving most of the environmental problems of a man-made nature rests in the interests of the owners of economic entities. In the context of the market economy, especially during an economic crisis, the high priority task of the owners is to preserve and increase profits, which forces to save even more money on environmental compliance.

Ecological consciousness and its carriers

Ecological wellbeing is directly related to the ecological awareness, the assimilation of certain social norms. Our data show that changes in public consciousness in the sphere of the environment-friendly practices are occurring, but at slow pace (*Tab. 3*).

Significantly increased the number of respondents showing that they are ready to sort waste and deliver it to special collection points, but most practices are related to the need to reduce daily consumption: the number of those who save

water, gas, electricity, buy energy-saving goods has increased by almost 10 percentage points²² (Levashov, 2020).

Obviously, the Russian citizens have a growing awareness that the current excessive consumption of natural resources and minerals by the world's population and the consumerist attitude toward the environment comes at the expense and to the detriment of future generations. The number of those who agree with this statement, who we can conventionally call "responsible for the future", has increased by 8 percentage points since 2014, reaching half of the total number of respondents. The number of those who disagreed decreased by 6 percentage points. However, a third of the respondents did not define their position on this issue (*Tab. 4*).

Those who feel responsible toward future generations (we will name this group "the responsible") are mainly concerned about anthropogenic problems (*Fig. 6*): deforestation, water pollution (difference of 22 percentage points), problems of collection, processing and disposal of waste (difference of 16 percentage points), placement of ecologically harmful and hazardous industrial enterprises near residential areas (difference of 14 percentage points), and natural disasters (difference of 14 percentage points).

Table 3. Distribution of responses to the question "Among the following, what are you doing to protect nature?", RF, % of respondents

| Respond option | 2014, V | 2020, XII |
|--|---------|-----------|
| I try to toss the garbage only in designated areas | 82 | 80 |
| I pick up litter after a nature trip | 59 | 67 |
| I participate in volunteer cleanup events | 29 | 30 |
| I take hazardous waste (lamps, batteries, etc.) to special collection points | 5 | 18 |
| I save water, gas and electricity in my household | 36 | 45 |
| I buy energy-saving goods, equipment | 29 | 41 |
| I don't do any of the above | 3 | 6 |
| I do something else | 1 | 2 |
| Hesitate to respond | 2 | 2 |

Source: data from the Center for Social and Socio-Political Research ISPR FCTAS RAS.

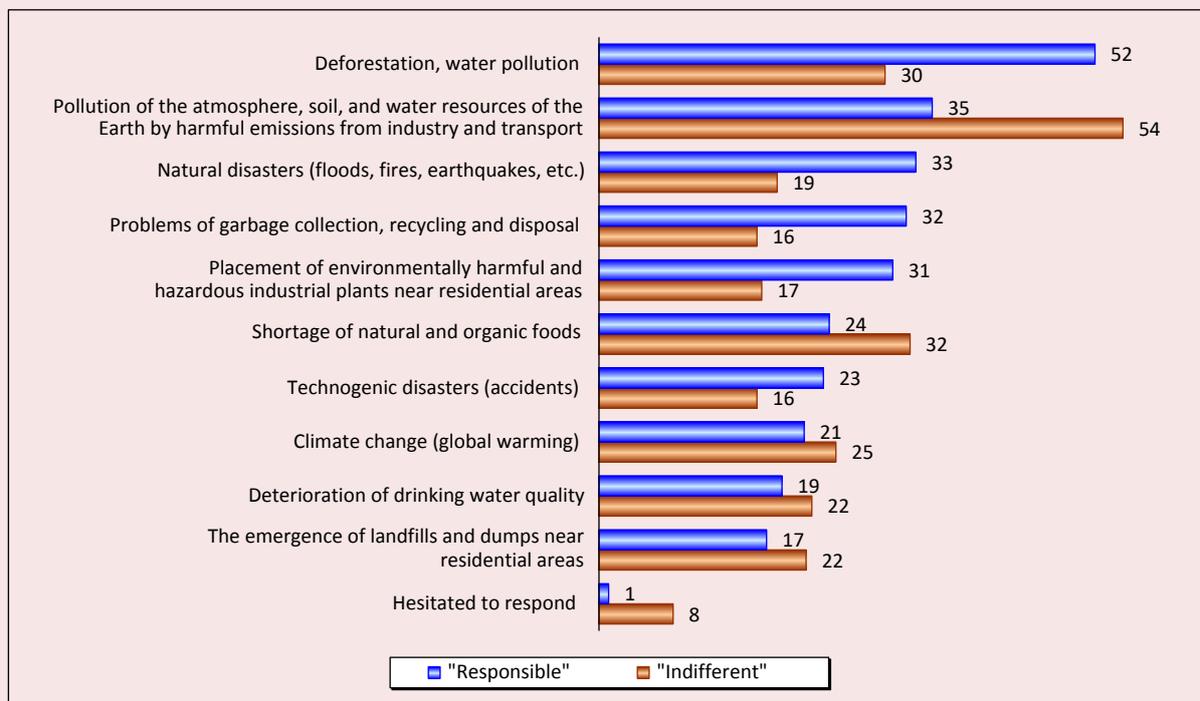
²² Levashov V.K., Afanas'ev V.A., Novozhenina O.P., Shushpanova I.S. How do you live, Russia? XL stage of sociological monitoring, June, 2014: Express-information. Moscow: ISPR FCTAS RAS, 47 p.

Table 4. Distribution of responses to the question “Do you think that mankind’s current needs for resources, minerals, and the environment are being met at the expense of future generations?”, RF, % of respondents

| Respond option | 2014, V | 2020, XII |
|---------------------|---------|-----------|
| Yes | 43 | 51 |
| No | 24 | 20 |
| Hesitate to respond | 33 | 29 |

Source: data from the Center for Social and Socio-Political Research ISPR FCTAS RAS; Levashov V.K., Afanas’ev V.A., Novozhenina O.P., Shushpanova I.S. (2014). How do you live, Russia? The XL stage of sociological monitoring, June 2014: Express-information. Moscow: ISPR FCTAS RAS, 47 p. (Levashov, 2020).

Figure 6. Distribution of respondents’ opinions on what is the most dangerous for the environment today, differentiated by the typological groups of “the responsible” and “the indifferent”, RF, % of the number of respondents in the groups



Source: compiled according to the data from the Center for social and Socio-Political Research ISPR FCTAS RAS; Levashov V.K., Velikaya N.M., Shushpanova I.S. Where are you going, Russia? Express information. Moscow: FCTAS RAS, 2021. 47 p. Available at: <http://испи.рф/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/куда-идешь-россия-экспресс.pdf>. DOI: 10.19181/monogr.978-5-89697-344-7.2021

For the “indifferent” in first place is also the anthropogenic factor, but it has less concrete content and does not involve the definition of the subject of the problems. In second place in this group is the shortage of natural and organic food.

We consider the group “responsible” as carriers of a new type of environmental consciousness, the

main factors in the formation of which are socio-demographic, political and socio-cultural. In particular, the group “responsible” is much younger: 39% of them are young people under 35 years old, the number of women (53.2%) is slightly higher than the number of men; the level of wealth is higher than that of “the indifferent”: the proportion of “the well-off” and less than the proportion of

“the poor”²³. Representatives of this group in the overwhelming majority (74.2%) believe that “people in power do not care about ordinary people” (the opposite opinion was expressed by 3.5%), which is associated with other claims to the state, for example in the social sphere. The “responsible” are less inclined to trust state institutions, public organizations, and especially the media (48.9% do not trust, 6.7% trust). In socio-political terms, they are rather optimistic: the majority (45.2%) feel confident about tomorrow, while 19.6% do not feel confident. Speaking about the future of Russia, the majority in the group (38.9%) believe that sooner or later the process of unification of peoples will begin around Russia.

As for the “indifferent” group, there are more men, fewer young people, and lower levels of wealth. Representatives of this group are more conformist: share of those who think that “the people in power do not care about common people” is 21 percentage points less (as compared to the “responsible”), they trust (30.3%) rather than do not trust (25.6%) public organizations; to a much greater extent than the “responsible” trust the mass media – 22.6%. 42.6% of the “indifferent” do not feel confident about the future.

It is obvious that the demand for a safe environment for the state on the part of society is growing. This actualizes the “green agenda”, despite the problems of socio-environmental nature. According to the results of the 51st stage of the monitoring “How do you live, Russia?” (2021) almost half of the respondents (47%) believe that the state does not realize the right of citizens to

a safe environment²⁴. Consequently, the issue of environmental protection is likely to remain in the protest movement over the coming years.

Conclusion

Currently, despite the values of green economy and ecological modernization shared by the world community (Weale, 1992; Mol, Spaargaren, 1993), there is a high risk of new threats, including in the ecological sphere, needing to be identified and interpreted. At the same time, the interdependent processes of globalization – localization change the nature of risks and threats that confront individuals and society, and the ability of social actors to meet these threats.

Environmental and climate issues, albeit slowly, are gaining a political dimension in Russia as well, becoming an integral part of the political agenda, where ecological modernization plays an important role.

In recent years, the main actors involved in environmental issues have been the state and affiliated structures of civil society, while independent non-profit organizations have been pushed to the margins of public life. This can be seen in the reduction in the number of civic initiatives aimed at solving environmental problems. As a result, the main actors of environmental and conservation movements remain local and regional civic initiatives, which are limited to territorial problems related to everyday life and the possibility of environmental degradation depending on the actions of the authorities.

As evidenced by the results of research, the emerging environmental consciousness is gradually becoming an essential part of the public consciousness. Environmental problems of society begin to be

²³ According to the set of tools of the sociological monitoring “How do you live, Russia?”, based on self-assessment of income levels, the following designations have been adopted: “the rich” – money is quite sufficient to afford oneself anything; “the well-off” – buying most durable goods (refrigerator, TV) is not difficult; “those with limited income” – money is enough to buy necessary food and clothing; “the poor” – money is only enough to buy food; “the have-nots” – money is not enough even to buy food.

²⁴ Levashov V.K., Velikaya N.M., Shushpanova I.S. “How do you live, Russia?” Express-information. 51st stage of sociological monitoring, June 2021: Bulletin; Moscow: ISPR FCTAS RAS, 2021. 42 p. Available at: <https://www.fnisc.ru/publ.html?id=9956>. DOI: 10.19181/monogr.978-5-89697-368-3.2021

perceived in a meaningful way by Russian citizens as a recognized threat to well-being, and there are prerequisites for the active participation of people in solving environmental problems of the present and future.

We can state that today the population of Russia does not have full access to objective, reliable and timely information about the state of the environment in places of their immediate residence, especially about the global environmental situation. The poor awareness of citizens about the implementation of the national project “Ecology” suggests that the relevant ministry pays insufficient attention to the organization of public relations and informing the public about the solution of environmental problems. Meanwhile, citizens’ awareness of the importance of national projects and participation in their implementation is impossible without full and targeted information about the strategic goals and objectives of federal and regional programs in the environmental sphere.

Most Russian citizens have an idea of what a favorable environment is, what the environment is like where they live, and what the region’s environmental problems are the most important. Individual social groups more concerned about environmental threats are emerging, leading to an ecologization

of consciousness expressed in more responsible and consistent environmental behavior. The main carriers of the new ecological consciousness are young people living in large cities, with a relatively high level of income. They are characterized by features of social optimism – confidence in the future, faith in the future of Russia. At the same time, young people are rather disinclined to trust the actions of government agencies and public organizations in the field of ecology, strongly distrust the media, rely on their own strength, and show a higher level of civic maturity.

It is these groups that articulate a request to the state and believe that the most important measures to prevent man-made threats are enforcement of environmental legislation, stricter requirements for the disposal of chemical waste, treating the discharged gases and industrial products, introduction of environmental indicators and standards.

The results obtained will not only make it possible to update the tools of future waves of monitoring research, but can also be used to develop strategies to increase public involvement in solving environmental problems in the country and regions, primarily in the interaction between government, civil society and business.

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