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The Ecological Ontology of the Common Good: Unifying Society through a Politics of Nature

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Abstract. This article investigates the contested role of environmental values as a potential basis for social cohesion in contemporary Russia. While ecological crises are often presumed to generate new forms of solidarity by virtue of their universal threat, we argue that such a hypothesis obscures the increasingly politicized nature of environmental discourse. Drawing on the theoretical framework of political ecology, the study shows that environmental issues in the Russian public sphere operate less as a consensual ground than as a structuring axis of political division between ecological stewardship and economic growth imperatives. Surveying the national agenda, the authors find that environmental concerns remain peripheral relative to state security, infrastructural expansion, and human development — these are the priorities that dominate public discourse. However, this macro-level marginalization contrasts sharply with the micro-level dynamics observed among younger cohorts. Based on original focus group data, the article demonstrates how youth appropriate the environmental agenda as a resource for civic identity formation. By engaging in individual environmental practices that restore a sense of personal agency, young Russians increasingly articulate their belonging through what we term *ecological patriotism* — an identity strategy that, while locally and generationally cohesive, does not translate into national-level consolidation. The article thus advances a nuanced understanding of environmental solidarity as a phenomenon that is generationally bounded and locally situated rather than universally scalable.

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Природа и экология как объединяющая ценность для общества: к новой политической онтологии общего блага

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Аннотация. Рассмотрен потенциал природоохранных ценностей как фактора общественной консолидации в современной России. Авторы исходят из гипотезы о том, что экологический кризис создает уникальную ситуацию, в которой общие угрозы могут способствовать формированию новой солидарности. Однако, как показывают исследования, экологическая проблематика все чаще становится не столько зоной консенсуса, сколько глубоким структурирующим политическим расколом между экологизмом и экономической эффективностью. В российской общественной повестке природоохранные ценности не достигают статуса доминирующего национального ориентира, уступая приоритетам государственной безопасности, инфраструктурной модернизации и развития человеческого потенциала. Вместе с тем именно в молодежной среде ценности сбережения природы демонстрируют высокую аттрактивность и интегративный потенциал. На основе данных, полученных в результате фокус-групповых интервью, показано, как экологическая повестка входит в поле гражданской идентичности современной российской молодежи. Отдавая предпочтение индивидуальным экологическим практикам, обеспечивающим ощущение субъектной агентности, молодое поколение все более склонно конструировать свою идентичность на основе экологического патриотизма. Авторами сделан вывод о двойственной природе экологических ценностей, которые, не будучи консолидирующими на макроуровне, приобретают объединяющее значение в горизонте поколенческих и локальных сообществ.

Ключевые слова: политическая экология, экополитология, зеленая повестка, экоактивизм, общее благо, социальная справедливость, экологический патриотизм

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Introduction

From the ontological to the value-political, the relationship between man and nature has many facets that influence ways of thinking, acting, and reflecting. The distinctions between philosophical, religious, and civilizational worldviews are largely determined by how differently these relationships are understood. Though they provide epistemologically different models for understanding the relationship between man and nature, worldviews that challenge the prevailing Western paradigm of economic utilitarianism and consumerism are fundamentally based on the search for a lost unity of the world. In his 1959 lecture course "The Human Situation" at the University of Santa Barbara, Aldous Huxley argued that the prevailing Western environmentalist view of nature as the creator and determinant of civilization ignored the reality that man has altered the natural environment nearly as much as nature has shaped history [Huxley 1977]. Aurelio Peccei, one of the Club of Rome's founders, later argued in his political-academic "testament" that harmony between man and nature is not only a prerequisite for human existence but also a cultural value, a source of anthropological sustainability, and a means of preventing "dehumanization" [Pecchei 1984]. The philosophy and epistemology of solving the global environmental issue must change since current government institutions and organizations are sadly unable to provide answers to this basic issue [Pecchei 1984].

Ecological Ontology, Ethics and Axiology

Environmental vulnerability and threats, from global to local, pose not only a challenge to economic models and technological systems (the question of green transition), but also a fundamental problem for the political organization of society. Growing climate risks, biodiversity loss, and the degradation of natural systems pose questions for political science that go beyond traditional understandings of policy.

Ecological ontology is a subsystem of knowledge that studies the fundamental categories of being, existence, and interconnections in natural systems, viewing the environment not as a passive background or resource, but as an active, dynamic, and self-organizing reality in which all things (including humans) exist in a network of material, energetic, and informational interactions.

The question of whether environmental concerns can serve as the foundation for a new social consensus and a unifying value that can bridge current sociopolitical divides is particularly significant. The search for such a consensus gave rise to a global *environmental ethic,* the principles of which later evolved into the spirit of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as a global action plan.[1] These goals are intended to serve as a model for building a better and more sustainable future for all people on Earth. In the corporate management context, this has resulted in the priorities of ESG[2] strategy (which stands for Environmental, Social, Governance) — an approach to business management that complements financial performance with an assessment of a company's impact on the environment, society, and the quality of corporate governance, with the goal of ensuring quality growth that does not harm future generations.

Ecological axiology offers a perspective on nature, a hierarchy, and a justification for values in relation to the natural environment, living beings, and ecosystems. It views the surrounding world not merely as an object of utilitarian use, but as a bearer of intrinsic value independent of human needs and explores the foundations of human moral obligations to the biosphere. The structure of ecological axiology distinguishes:

- Instrumental (utilitarian) value is nature as a means of satisfying human needs (resources, ecosystem services).
- Immanent (internal) value is the intrinsic value of nature, which exists regardless of its usefulness to humans (the right of all species to exist).
- Spiritual and aesthetic value is the intangible significance of nature for culture.

For this paper, it is this latter dimension of ecological axiology that is fundamentally important.

[1] The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

[2] ESG (Environmental, Social, Governance) is an approach to doing business in which financial indicators are complemented by an assessment of the company's impact on the environment, society, and the quality of corporate governance. Adherence to ESG principles was not only an extension of global environmental ethics, but also a necessary part of a corporation's reputational capital, including ethical values and responsibility. However, recent research indicates the end of the era of ESG as a fashion and the beginning of an era of sustainability as a competitive advantage. See "The Redefinition of ESG. Why Corporate Sustainability Practices Are Changing and What They Can Become." *Kommersant*. Retrieved August, 16, 2026, from https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/7798691?ysclid=msd6trfsiy392822608

Environmental Ethics as Relating to Religious Tradition

The struggle between anthropocentrism and biocentrism is one of the basic epistemological frameworks for examining environmental ethics. The ontological status of nature and human moral agency are valued to differing degrees in different cultures and civilizations. It is important to note that the secular modernist paradigm (instrumental rationalism) is the main source of pure anthropocentrism. Religious traditions, even with their pronounced "central" position of humans, introduce constitutive limitations (divine prohibition, karmic responsibility, the sacredness of creation), which reduces the role of humans in relation to nature to responsible anthropocentrism. Theocentrism acts as a mediator. Christianity and Islam both avoid biocentrism (which they consider ontologically incorrect) and anthropocentrism (which is ethically dangerous), retaining nature within a system of references to the transcendent. When analyzing cultural and religious traditions, it is more correct to speak not of a binary choice between anthropo- and biocentrism, but of a spectrum of moral ontologies in which the key variables are: a) the status of the transcendent, b) the criterion for inclusion in the moral community, and c) the understanding of human agency as dominance or service.

These ideas can be traced in the concept of "the ethics of environmental concern", that became the title of R. Attfield's classic book [Attfield 1983], according to which there is a tradition of managing nature and a tradition of cooperating with nature. Growing out of religious traditions (with different approaches to the status and agency of humans and the living world), environmental responsibility extends to all living things. Thus, the New Testament notes that God cares not only for humans, but also for small birds — sparrows (Matthew 10:29), or that Jesus spent 40 days "in the desert", i.e., among the wild nature, where "He was with the wild animals" (Mark 1:13), and then crossed the "Sea of Galilee" for solitude (Mark 4:35, 6:45, 8:13). Thus, it can be assumed that Jesus viewed nature not only as a source of resources, but as a home for humans and as a place for spiritual renewal. On the other hand, according to R. Attfield, the Epistle of the Apostle Paul says that nature was originally beautiful and good, but is now exploited by the forces of evil and death, is in an oppressed position and can find salvation through the spiritual liberation of man: "…all creation as a whole is engulfed in the drama of salvation" [Attfield 1983].

Christianity is characterized by a conditional *anthropocentrism* with elements of theocentrism. Holy Scripture (Genesis 1:26) endows man with a special subjectivity in managing nature. However, modern environmental theology (e.g., Steve Bishop,[3] "Green Theology and Deep Ecology", Lynn White Jr. [1974] vs. John Passmore [1974])

[3] Bishop, S. Green Theology and Deep Ecology. *Proza*. Retrieved on January 2, 2026, from https://proza.ru/2024/10/07/530?ysclid=mssod8erus311748159

rethinks this governance, where power means service. Nature has value as God's creation, but the highest moral status is retained by man, created in the image of God. Pure biocentrism is impossible here because of the ontological gap between Creator and creation. In contemporary Catholicism, ecology is an integral part of social justice: Pope Francis in his 2015 encyclical Laudato Si speaks of "inseparability between concern for nature, justice for the poor, a conscientious attitude toward society, and inner peace."[4] This encyclical earned Pope Francis the reputation of being the "green pope."

In the Islamic tradition, the rhetoric of anthropocentric responsibility is also inseparable from theocentrism. Man is the caliph (viceroy), but his central position does not grant him property rights (milk), but only the right of use (manfa'a) within the framework of trust (amanat). Nature is an ayat (signs of God), which grants it sacred status but not independent subjectivity. In Orthodox theology, nature has no rights, but disrupting its balance (mizan) is a sin against God, which functionally brings this ethic closer to biocentricity while remaining within a theocentric framework.

Ecopolitical Science vs. Green Agenda?

Religious and philosophical views are reflected in political constructs based on the principles of "owning", "governing", or "forming a unity." The spillover of these ideas into the political sphere and the politicization of sacred argumentation led to the emergence of *political ecology (ecopolitology)* in the academic field as a response to the fragmentation of scientific knowledge and the inability of traditional disciplines to adequately describe the complexity of the relationship between society and nature. This branch of humanities knowledge, which not only studies ecology in politics, but also examines all environmental issues through the prism of political struggle, power, and socially significant decision-making in the context of a global environmental crisis. In the Latin American context, where this tradition has developed particularly strongly, political ecology is understood as both an inter- and transdisciplinary perspective on academic knowledge and a renewed political practice, intertwined with the struggles of social, indigenous, and peasant movements.

In Russian science, the focus is on the history and conflict nature of the relationship between politics and environmental issues [Yakutseni, Burovsky 2015], ontological problems of the relationship between nature and man, as well as the formation of political ecology as a discipline and its place among others: cultural ecology, social ecology, anthropological ecology, etc. [Marmazova, Fomenko 2021].

[4] Encyclical. *Archivio Radio Vaticana*. Retrieved on January 2, 2026, from archivioradiovaticana.va/storico/2015/06/18/ the encyclical of Pope Francis "laudato_si" was published / ru-1152365

The key contribution of political ecology is that it focuses not only on conflicts of ecological distribution but also on the power relations intertwined between the ways of life of communities that maintain socio-ecological coexistence and the dynamics imposed by a globalized world. This approach allows us to view environmental problems not as isolated technical challenges, but as integral parts of broader political and social contradictions.

It is crucial to note that political ecology, as a field of political knowledge, is inherently ideologically conflicted. On the one hand, it recognizes the plurality of knowledge and the need to construct alternative rationalities. Indigenous knowledge, based on centuries-old experiences of coexistence with local ecosystems, was marginalized in the modern era, yet it offers alternative models of relationships with nature. This epistemological position, close to *the civilizational approach*, is fundamental to understanding ecology as a unifying value: it presupposes the inclusion of diverse voices and perspectives, which potentially broadens the basis of social consensus. On the other hand, the current stage of political ecology's development is associated with a rather monologue and ideologically rigid approach, referred to as the "green agenda", and the word "agenda" carries negative connotations here. The key document of this new phase was the report to the Club of Rome,[5] calling for radical measures: halting economic and population growth, renouncing state sovereignty, and creating a single world government based on a spiritual and moral worldview that openly calls for the power of supranational structures and total control, as well as the creation of a new ideological framework that compels the world to engage in social and political activism. A striking example of this is the "Greta Thunberg" project — a supranational political technology project created within the mainstream of Western ecopolitical thought [Marmazova, Fomenko 2021]. Thus, having long been part of Western political discourse, the green agenda introduces its own contradictions and grounds for socio-political divisions.

In defining the subject of political ecology, T. Romanova points out: "for political ecology as a field of knowledge, three problems are key: limited resources and their uneven distribution; the relationship between industrialization and environmental pressures; and, finally, pollution and industrial waste" [Romanova 2010]. In this regard, she shows how various approaches to political science — (neo) realism, liberal institutionalism, "non-ecologism", constructivism — solve the problems of the relationship between politics, economics and ecology in diametrically different ways. She concludes: "there is no predetermined interaction between politics, economics and ecology; there is our perception of biospheric problems through the prism of ideas

[5] Club of Rome, Anniversary Report. The Old World is Doomed. The New World is Inevitable! *Aftershock News*. Retrieved on January 2, 2026, from https://aftershock.news/?q=node/601798

that either already exist or are being formulated. At the same time, the definition of a particular problem and the ability to disseminate this concept constitute the core of the power and influence of the state today. In practical terms, this, as a rule, means the ideological power of the West, its priority in defining what is normal and normative" [Romanova 2010].

However, ecopolitical science, stitched together with liberal globalism, can be unstitched within the framework of a civilizational approach and national models of balanced environmental policy based on the search for a social contract among the state, big business, and society. B. Latour [2018] proposes developing a new concept of political ecology that allows for the combination of scientific practices with democratic decision-making — a program for building a "common world" in which non-human actors (natural objects, technologies) participate equally with humans. This resonates with ideas of environmental responsibility. The environmental ideology proposed by the West requires a rethinking of sovereignty as a collective responsibility for common resources, rather than as a right to unlimited use of natural wealth. These presupposes are: recognition of the transboundary nature of environmental risks; responsibility to the global community and future generations; and limiting sovereignty in favor of preserving common goods.

However, given the existing, ever-increasing global inequality, this approach cannot be universal. It appears that the principles of recognizing the transboundary nature of environmental risks and responsibility to the global community and future generations do not automatically necessitate the sacrifice of sovereignty but rather strengthen it through social consensus.

Cases for Domestic Ecopolitical Science: Between Disengagement and Solidarity

In Russia, the intersection of politics and ecology is somewhat different, yet it nonetheless triggers acute socio-political crises at the local and regional levels. For instance, the crisis surrounding the soda deposits of the Kushtau shikhan[6] in Bashkortostan is not simply an environmental dispute, but *a political conflict with a sacred-value perspective*, pitting the interests of big business, society, and the state against each other.[7] The driving force behind the political protest is not conscious political goals and interests, but rather an infringement on the sacredness and sanctity of natural symbols. At the same time, this conflict can be interpreted

[6] Mount Kushtau in Bashkortostan is considered a sacred site. It is associated with folk epics, legends, and tales, and is seen as an important symbol of the Bashkir cultural heritage.

[7] How Bashkiria Defended Kushtau (and Lost BSK): Chronicle of Loud Protests in Defense of Shihan. *UFA 1*. Retrieved on January 2, 2026, from https://ufa1.ru/text/ecology/2021/08/15/70058681/?ysclid=msnctpqal5516892098

as *a contradiction between the "value of development"* (jobs, taxes, industrial capacity) and *the "value of conservation"* (unique natural environments, cultural heritage, and the right of people to a favorable environment). "The main difficulty is that for one side, this issue is purely economic in nature, while for the other, it lies in the political and sociocultural realm. This is precisely why the opponents fail to hear each other — they appeal to completely different categories and rely on different logics. The question of what is more important — the socioeconomic well-being of the city or the preservation of a historical and cultural shrine — has no clear answer, because it is a question of values, the perception of which lies beyond purely administrative, rational decisions" [Khaynatskaya 2023]. On the one hand, the resolution of such conflicts shows the real balance of power and the mechanisms for making environmentally significant decisions in modern Russia. On the other hand, it demonstrates the depth of protective social mechanisms in the face of threats to consolidating and significant natural symbols and objects, including those imbued with historical and sacred significance.

The common good and justice have once again become central to philosophical and political discussions and the design of a vision for the future, with environmental issues playing a significant role. The relationship between the universal and the particular within these parameters is manifested in environmental issues and conceptual foundations — from the tenets of environmental ethics to the perception of natural objects and symbols in terms of values and identities.

While contemporary theorists question the assumption of a single common good, linking it to the world's civilizational and political gradations, the environmental crisis adds a new dimension to the debate about the common good. Nature and ecosystems are, by definition, a common good in the sense that they cannot be excluded from consumption and are non-rival in consumption — clean air or a stable climate are available to all, regardless of their contribution to their preservation. In this context, environmental issues require a rethinking of the common good not as a predetermined hierarchy of values, but as the result of a political process that takes into account both environmental constraints and social needs.

A key problem preventing the perception of ecology as a unifying value lies in the social differentiation of environmental risks and the burden of transition. Traditional understandings of sustainable development often prioritize the economic and environmental dimensions, leaving the social dimension in the background. Environmental policies that are perceived as unfair in the distribution of costs can undermine social cohesion and provoke resistance rather than consolidation. The opposite is equally true: economic and political decisions made in the name of grand gains and achievements that result in serious damage to nature are perceived by society

as unfair to people, especially children. A critical role in the success of environmental policy is played by social justice through the mechanism of social cohesion and sustainability: social equality leads to cohesion, cohesion leads to sustainability, and sustainability leads to policy success. This means that the ecological transition cannot be sustainable without simultaneously addressing issues of social justice.

Ecology, Solidarity, Justice: Results of Empirical Research

The presented theoretical propositions are supported by the results of empirical studies conducted by the authors in 2013 and 2022–2024, as part of projects related to the study of Russian identity. This section of the paper presents some summarized results from expert interviews (2013) and focus groups (2022–2024) conducted with student youth.[8]

One of the most persistent trends in Russian public consciousness, linked to solidarity, the common good, and identity, is the topic of ecology. It is no coincidence that research has documented the principle that today's priority unifying goal is the protection of the state and the country (with a strong environmental emphasis). This concern is evident in the fact that respondents directly link the future of the state and the environmental agenda: *"By 2050, the environmental agenda will likely be one of the most pressing. Russia will face challenges of climate change, environmental pollution, and the depletion of natural resources. Therefore, one of the priority areas of politics and economics will be related to sustainable development."* Moreover, respondents' heightened interest in ecology goes beyond simply acknowledging problems. Respondents demonstrated erudition, showing a particular interest in environmental topics, which underpin their vision of the country's future: *"In the near future, Russia will be a country with a developed legislative framework for environmental protection, will support environmental culture, implement environmental education for citizens, and introduce alternative energy methods."* A clear demand was recorded for increased attention to the environmental agenda in the context of strengthening civic identity on the part of the state through various collective forms: *"I would like to see more exhibitions and festivals related to ecology, for them to be larger-scale, and for people to attend with great pleasure. I think this is entirely realistic and achievable."*

[8] The results of the projects "Preparing Proposals for Developing Effective Mechanisms for Educating the Younger Generation of Russians Based on an Analysis of the Depth of Historical Memory of the Russian Population" (2013), "Russian Identity: Political Meanings and Indicators of Value Consolidation" (2022), "Parameters of Russian Civilization: Sovereignty, Solidarity, Identity" (2023), and "Identity as a Resource for Overcoming Divisions in Russia: From Preserving the Core Values to Options for Value Consensus" (2024) were used. The results are presented in a generalized form.

Young people are increasingly concerned about environmental crises caused by technological development. Consequently, environmental *initiatives are not only welcomed by young people but also serve as examples and models of correct and cooperative action, a project-based, consensus-based goal-setting that bridges seemingly deep divides.*

Despite the environmental agenda's great potential and the positive, unifying message it has already articulated in Russia, the idea of protecting *nature as a goal that could unite Russians is not a leading one.* It is overshadowed by socio-political priorities such as protecting the state, new infrastructure projects, and comprehensive personal development.

However, this general approach can clash with specific cases where environmental challenges become existential. A case in point is the fuel oil spill in the Black Sea in southern Russia in late 2024. The response was a spontaneous mobilization of civil society: volunteer networks developed through horizontal connections, implementing a range of measures — from pollution cleanup to saving biota — revealing a new format for collective action focused on environmental protection. In our view, this exemplifies the great potential of environmental issues for public mobilization and solidarity.

In modern Russian history, destructive manifestations of this trend can also be observed, namely, the overlap between environmental and political action (for example, the aforementioned case of the Kushtau shikhan). The environmental agenda can be seen as politically divisive, but its conflict component is less relevant than environmental identity as a unifying foundation, as it is aimed more at maintaining consolidation than at radicalizing differences. Thus, public initiatives aimed at helping nature and animals are met with unequivocal approval, regardless of their practical involvement.

The shared nature of a large country, with its vital, sacred, and sociocultural meanings, is an important aspect of the shared value continuum and civilizational identity. Its utmost limits constitute one of the boundaries of the symbolic stability of Russian civilization, defining the overall significance of its protection and, consequently, the urgency and diversity of the environmental agenda. Interestingly, young people are most actively involved in waste sorting initiatives. It is worth noting that waste sorting is perceived as *a more individual and diverse* practice: *"I turn off the hot water", "I save electricity", "I collected bottle caps for three years while living in a dorm. I ended up with a whole bag."* These environmental initiatives are associated with individual choice, are characterized by a low barrier to entry in terms of time and effort and reinforce a sense of personal efficacy in a world where climate

problems seem intractable. In these circumstances, waste separation restores agency and control over life.

The degree, to which the environmental agenda is prioritized, reflected in the support and appreciation of the agendas of "green" parties, organizations, and movements, appears to be another significant aspect of the issues under consideration. While awareness and attention to the environmental agenda are evident, and pessimism is absent, environmental issues are currently not a political priority and do not structure the political spectrum. At the same time, there is a demand for big businesses to participate in addressing these issues and a willingness to take small actions. "*On the one hand, it is very good that people are thinking about nature. On the other hand, the general obsession with lithium batteries, which are no better than gasoline…", "If only big business were to make some effort to develop environmental initiatives, that wouldn't be a bad thing overall", "I believe we are unlikely to make our planet a better place than it is now. We have polluted it by 70% in 20 years, and we will pollute it by another 10% in the next 30 years. Yes, pollution will remain, but it will be less, and we will live longer.*" Respondents show moderate optimism and an understanding of the complexity of environmental issues, which should not be simplified or interpreted one-sidedly in line with certain ideological approaches; "agenda-like" approaches should be avoided. However, not everyone demonstrates such an understanding.

The described results allow us to conclude that Western trends toward implementing this agenda as a political goal and basis for division are increasingly influencing the perception of this issue in Russia. Ecology as such does not carry a conflict component; rather, it is becoming a driver for the recognition of the possibility and acceptance of solidarity. Despite the fact that environmental practices are predominantly situational or individual in nature, the nature and environmental agenda for Russian society, and particularly its youth, carries axiological and teleological content.

Nature as a Symbolic Reservoir of Identity

The symbolic content of natural symbols is also a facet of environmental policy and environmental ethics. The value and sacred content of natural objects become not only a symbolic reservoir for the formation of the image of the Motherland, but also criterion of identity and, consequently, political meanings. As early as 2013, a study documented a clear trend toward the increasing importance of natural symbols as representations of the image of the Motherland, which manifested a revitalization

of symbolic meanings, an increased significance of archetypal symbols associated with nature, and a diminished significance of state-political symbols.

Accordingly, natural symbols took on the function of political representation. No single, strictly political (or politico-cultural) symbol was the absolute leader in frequency of mention; even the Moscow Kremlin was mentioned far less frequently than expected. On the contrary, natural symbols — primarily Lake Baikal (mentioned at a similar frequency to the Kremlin as a symbol of the state) — and other natural objects were presented as symbols and enrichment of Russia's image, leading to a significant *shift in the image of the Motherland — from "my country" to "my land", toward a more profound relationship between humans and nature that builds sociality, ontology, and ethics.* This trend has become clearly evident over the past 10 years: year after year, focus group studies have featured natural themes alongside national symbols (the flag, anthem, and the Kremlin) — both nature itself (forests, birch trees, and bears as individual symbols) and individual natural objects (Lake Baikal) or regions (for example, Kamchatka). The dominance of natural objects and images of nature and the displacement of symbols of a political or social nature marks the frame *"My Land"*, reflected both in the picture "mountains, seas, forests, taiga", and in the natural objects themselves — Baikal, Siberia, the Volga.

This is a profound anthropological and sociocultural shift, documented by many researchers. The shift from historical and cultural symbols (monuments, dates, heroes, architectural styles) to natural ones (the sea, steppes, forests, cliffs, clear water, sun) as markers of identity is particularly noticeable among younger generations. This shift may be due to a number of factors:

1. Unlike cultural and historical symbols, which are almost always woven into official ideologies and state narratives, natural symbols are apolitical. Amid a crisis of trust in institutions, young people choose what cannot be falsified: the mountains, the sea, or the taiga.

2. In the era of total virtualization and digital simulacra, physical presence in the landscape becomes the primary criterion of authenticity ("it is real"). Identity is no longer learned, but lived.

3. Nature, unlike history, is not traumatic. By turning to it, the young man sheds the burden of the "damned questions" of the past and moves on to a timeless, existential experience ("I am part of this earth, not part of this history").

4. The more acute the awareness of the climate crisis, the more important nature becomes as a symbol.

5. Historical symbols are a narrative that requires context. Natural symbols are an image that is perceived instantly and emotionally. In the clip-based thinking that

dominates young people; visual and emotional codes are more powerful than linear historical chains.

6. In contrast to the state narrative of historical memory, transmitted through political socialization in the education process, nature is perceived as more personal, familial, local, and authentic.

Thus, we are witnessing a gradual shift from historical patriotism to environmental patriotism, where the Motherland is not a history of conquests, but clean air, water, and land that could be lost right now. And this long-term trend must be considered.

Conclusion

Nature and ecology hold significant potential as unifying values for modern society. The environmental crisis creates a unique situation in which shared threats can foster a new solidarity. Research shows that environmental issues are increasingly becoming not just a matter of consensus, but a deep, structuring political divide between environmentalism and economic efficiency. In the contemporary Russian public agenda, environmental values do not occupy a dominant position as a unifying national focus. Their importance is overshadowed by priorities related to ensuring national security, implementing large-scale infrastructure projects, and developing human potential, which are perceived as more pressing sociopolitical development tasks. Nevertheless, for young people, environmental values are attractive and unifying. While prioritizing individual environmental initiatives that provide a sense of agency, young people are increasingly inclined to build their identity on the basis of environmental patriotism.

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