



EFFECTS OF RUSSIAN IMPERIAL POLICY ON FOREST MANAGEMENT IN BESSARABIA

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Abstract

The Soviet system of forest management in Bessarabia, similar to that of the entire Soviet Union, was characterized by centralization and strict state control. Forests were considered its property and specialised institutions, such as the Ministry of Forestry and Forest Fund Management, were responsible for their management. During the Soviet period, the forests of Bessarabia were intensively exploited, without taking into account the need for natural regeneration or biodiversity conservation. A feature of the Soviet system was the lack of promotion of private ownership of land and forests, which led to ineffective management and deterioration. A feature of the Soviet system was the lack of promotion of private ownership of land and forests, leading to inefficient management and deterioration. The exclusion of local communities from the forest management process also contributed to a lack of responsibility and involvement in forest protection and management. The negative results of the Soviet period on forest resources in Bessarabia are evident, including massive deforestation, loss of biodiversity and degradation of soil and water quality. After the fall of the Soviet Union, efforts were made to improve forest management and develop private ownership, but obstacles such as bureaucracy and corruption prevented adequate progress. Today, the forest fund in the Republic of Moldova is considerably smaller than in the pre-Soviet period, but protection and development efforts are limited by financial resources and problems related to improper exploitation and illegal logging. It is imperative to continue and improve management efforts to protect and sustainably develop the forest fund, given the negative consequences of past logging practices and the prospects for improving management and private ownership of forest land to ensure a sustainable future.

Keywords: forest; forest fund; Bessarabia; property; exploitation

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1. Introduction

Bessarabia was annexed by the Russian Empire in 1812, after the signing of the Treaty of Bucharest between the Russian Empire and the Ottoman Empire. This annexation led to a number of changes in the territory's administration, economy and culture.

In terms of forestry management, the Tsarist authorities established a system for the exploitation of forest resources in Bessarabia. Between 1812 and 1917, a number of administrative bodies and institutions, specializing in forest management and exploitation were set up, such as forest directorates, forest inspectorates, logging companies and forest royalties. These institutions had, as their main objective, the exploitation and exploitation of forest resources, especially for the timber industry and for the military needs of the Russian Empire.

Looking at the way forests were exploited during the tsarist period, it was characterized by intensive and uncontrolled exploitation, which led to the continuous degradation of the forest fund. The forests were exploited without respecting the principles of regeneration and environmental protection, which led to the depletion of forest resources and the degradation of soil quality. Massive deforestation has also been practiced, leading to the destruction of natural animal habitats and reduced biodiversity. This practice led to a significant decrease in the area of forests in Bessarabia, from 31% of the total area in 1812 to less than 10% in the interwar period. (On the amendment of Government Decision No 150/2010 approving the Regulation on the organization and functioning of the "Moldsilva" Agency, its structure and staffing limits of its central apparatus)

The exploitation of Bessarabia's forest fund by the tsarist authorities was characterized by intensive exploitation policies, with an emphasis on the extraction of wood materials to meet the needs of tsarist Russia.

2. Methodology

The study of this topic was based on research of theoretical materials, documents, articles, synthesis works and materials from the press of the time that served as support for the application of research methods in the initial research to know the effects of Russian imperial policy on forest management in Bessarabia. The main methods used in the research were: historical analysis method, historical-comparative method, induction and deduction method, analysis and synthesis method, critical analysis method, interdisciplinary approach method, retrospective

method, which helped to provide a coherent methodological support for the article. Different principles were used for the research of this study, such as scientific principle, principle of objectivity, principle of systemic approach.

3. Results

In the 19th century, the tsarist authorities laid the foundations of a system of exploitation of forest resources in Bessarabia, by creating a state forest fund and a system for regulating the cutting and transport of wood. (Enciu, 2020, p. 3) These policies led to an increase in the area of exploited forests and a significant decrease in the area of virgin and old-growth forests. The system of exploitation of forest resources in Bessarabia established in the 19th century by the tsarist authorities involved legal regulations and forestry administration of the land. In this system, the state was the owner of all forests and had the exclusive right to exploit them. Also, a system was established to supervise the exploitation and to apply sanctions for legal violations.

The Tsarist authorities encouraged intensive exploitation of forest resources for the economic development of the region. (Enciu, 2020, p. 4) The system of logging established by the tsarist authorities had a negative impact on the environment through excessive and uncontrolled deforestation. However, it was also a first step towards modern and sustainable forest management in Bessarabia.

During this period, forests were seen as a valuable resource for timber production, but also for other economic activities such as papermaking, timber production and other forest products. Forests were also used for grazing animals and as hunting grounds. (Bejan, 2010, p. 6)

Forest exploitation during this period was carried out by private companies, which owned the rights to cut the timber. These companies were often accused of abusive exploitation of forest resources and the authorities paid insufficient attention to environmental protection and forest regeneration. The exploitation of forests in Bessarabia by the Tsarist authorities had a negative impact on the environment and local communities. The area of forests has decreased significantly, leading to a decrease in biodiversity and the loss of natural habitats for many plant and animal species. Local communities that depended on forests for their livelihoods have suffered from the loss of access to these natural resources. From the mid-19th century until the October Revolution in 1917, the Tsarist authorities tried to regulate forest exploitation by introducing new laws and regulations. However, these efforts

were largely ineffective and illegal logging continued to take place until the end of the period of Tsarist rule.

By the middle of the 19th century, in 1861, the area of forests in Chisinau County was estimated at 85.1 thousand ha, with a 21% afforestation rate. (Enciu, 2020, p. 5) The modernizing and commercial processes that took place throughout Europe, including in the eastern area, emphasized the increased agricultural potential of Bessarabia, which led to the initiation of the process of massive cutting of extensive forest areas, which led to the drastic reduction of the area them. The deforested lands were initially intended for grazing, later being transformed into arable land.

Forest degradation has also been largely influenced by the export of forest products, primarily timber and mangroves. As a result, soil degradation is occurring through increased erosion and landslides.

Another reason that stimulated the deforestation process was the form of ownership of land resources; by 1870, around 80% of the forest area was privately owned and 17% belonged to monasteries, predominantly foreign (especially monasteries dedicated to the Holy Mount Athos in Greece). (Postolache, Ciubotaru, Galupa, Begu, 2005, p. 5) Their owners, wishing to make large profits for fear of expropriation, exploited the forests extremely intensively. But even after 1873, when the forests were expropriated, the state of the forest landscape did not improve.

With the appearance of the iron road, the locomotives consumed exclusively wood, thus, continuously exploiting, without replanting in place, the forests of Bessarabia which were destroyed on a large scale. The methodical cutting of forests caused essential damage including to agriculture, exposing it to periodic droughts. The forests that still existed at the beginning of the 20th century in the North of Bessarabia were composed of trees that, with rare exceptions, were over 30 years old. (Teodorescu, 1919, p. 37) As a result, at the beginning of the 20th century, the forest area decreased to 56.4 thousand ha. (Boboc, 2008, p. 5) From 1906, taxes for deforestation began to be levied, and with the start of the inventory of ravines and landslides in 1910-1915, some measures were taken to improve the condition of the forests, which reached 85.4 thousand ha. Deforestation intensified greatly during the First World War, and by 1920 the forest area had fallen to 59.1 thousand ha. (Teodorescu, 1919, p. 37)

About the situation of forests in Bessarabia in 1896, compared to their area at the end of the First World War, we can analyze by the fact of their reduction from 276,581 ha to 249,356 ha in 1919. (Boboc, 2008, p. 5)

In the space of 23 years, 27,195 ha of forests had been cut down without replanting, or 1,236 ha per year. Chisinau county suffered the most, where around 30,000 ha of forest had been cut. The respective situation is explained, on the one hand, by the rather large wood needs of the respective county, and on the other hand, by the proximity of the railway line as well as by the few kilometers of road existing within the county, which facilitated the transportation the wood. (Enciu, 2020, p. 5) Soroca county was next, from which about 8,000 ha of forest had been cut. (Postolache, Ciubotaru, Galupa, Begu, 2005, p. 5) Timber was exported from this county, firstly to Ukraine and then on the Nistru river to Liman, where it was loaded onto ships, to the White Fortress or Ovidiopol, from where it was transported to Odessa or elsewhere. The Soviet system of forest management in Bessarabia was similar to that in the entire Soviet Union, it was centralized and under strict state control. Forests were considered state property and specialized institutions, such as the Ministry of Forestry and Forest Fund Management, were responsible for their management.

During the Soviet period, forests in Bessarabia were subject to severe over-exploitation. The communist regime cut down the forests without taking into account the need for natural regeneration and biodiversity conservation. Inefficient logging technologies were used, such as clear-cutting, which led to soil and environmental degradation. (Budianschi, Galupa, Guțan, Bacal, Ermurachi, 2013, p, 11) The Soviet system did not promote private ownership of land or forests, leading to a lack of interest from local communities or the private sector in forest conservation or development. This approach led to inefficient forest management and significant soil and environmental degradation. After the annexation of Bessarabia by the Soviet Union in 1940, many local communities with traditional forest use rights were excluded from the forest management process. This exclusion of local communities led to a lack of responsibility and involvement in the management and protection of forests in the area.

4. Conclusions

The Soviet system of forest resource management had a series of negative repercussions on the development of the current forest fund. During the Soviet period, forests were considered state property and were managed in a centralized way, through specialized institutions such as the Ministry of Forestry and Management of the Forest Fund.

One of the most negative effects of the Soviet period was the massive clearing of forests to produce timber and make way for intensive agriculture. This practice led to the loss of more than 40% of the forest area in the Republic of Moldova, and most of the existing forest area was planted after independence.

Also, the Soviet period led to a significant loss of biodiversity, as forests were exploited without taking into account the impact on the environment. In addition, Soviet-era forest management practices led to a deterioration of soil and water quality in forest areas.

After the fall of the Soviet Union, there have been efforts to improve forest management and to develop private ownership of land and forests. However, there were still significant obstacles, such as excessive bureaucracy, corruption and lack of interest from the private sector, which prevented adequate development of the forest fund.

Today, the forest fund in the Republic of Moldova is considerably smaller than in the pre-Soviet period, and protection and development efforts are limited by financial resources and problems related to improper exploitation and illegal logging. It is imperative to continue and improve management efforts to protect and sustainably develop the forest stock, given the negative consequences of past logging practices and the prospects for improving the management and private ownership of forest lands to ensure a sustainable future.

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