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ENVIRONMENTAL ACTIVISM: TRENDS AND PROSPECTS

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Abstract. Environmental activism, or environmentalism, is a social environmental movement that spread in the twentieth century in European countries, aiming to strengthen environmental protection measures.

Environmental activism today plays an important role in overcoming misunderstandings between scientists, politicians, the media and the public on environmental issues.

Key words: *Environmental Activism, Civic Engagement, Environmental Protection, Ecology, Green Economy.*

ЭКОЛОГИЯЛЫҚ АКТИВИЗМ: ҮРДІСТЕРІ МЕН БОЛАШАҒЫ

Мадина Бектенова, Айдана Акесина

Аңдатпа. Экологиялық активизм немесе энвайронментализм – ол ХХ ғасырда Еуропа елдерінде кең тарала бастаған, қоршаған ортаны қорғау бойынша шараларды күшейтуге бағытталған әлеуметтік экологиялық қозғалыс.

Экологиялық активизм бүгінде экологиялық мәселелер бойынша ғалымдар,

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саясаткерлер, бұқаралық акпараттар құралдары мен қоғамдастық арасындағы түсініспеушілікті еңсеруде маңызды рөл атқарады.

Түйін сөздер: *экологиялық активизм, азаматтық белсенділік, қоршаған ортаны қорғау, экология, жасыл экономика.*

ЭКОЛОГИЧЕСКИЙ АКТИВИЗМ: ТЕНДЕНЦИИ И ПЕРСПЕКТИВЫ

Мадина Бектенова, Айдана Акесина

Аннотация. Экологический активизм или энвайронментализм – социальное экологическое движение, распространившееся в XX веке в европейских странах, направленное на усиление мер по защите окружающей среды.

Экологический активизм сегодня играет важную роль в преодолении непонимания между учеными, политиками, средствами массовой информации и общественностью по экологическим вопросам.

Ключевые слова: *экологический активизм, гражданская активность, защита окружающей среды, экология, зеленая экономика.*

Introduction

In 2019, the media began to write about environmental issues much more frequently. The Guardian released an environmental manifesto. International environmental projects and NGOs are being recognised at the highest level, and the movement itself has a bright public face. These triggers suggest that more activists and environmentalists will look deeper into the issue and put pressure on the financial institutions and governments that support fossil fuel extraction.

The internet and social media have given a new impetus to the global trend towards environmental activism. However, the possibilities of digital forms of environmental participation are ambiguous. On the one hand, there is a paradigm shift in the interaction of actors, in which they become not only consumers of information, but also its active producers; accordingly, channels for civil society to influence decision-making processes are expanding.

On the other hand, digital practices alienate users from real action.

The purpose of this study is to identify the most relevant trends in the environmental movement globally and in Kazakhstan, and the barriers and obstacles faced by environmental movements and activists in Kazakhstan.

Research methods

This article is mainly based on descriptive and comparative research methods.

As part of this study, an expert survey was also conducted, in a semi-structured interview format, with the participation of 8 environmentalists, eco-activists, eco-bloggers, representatives of state structures and non-governmental organisations. The expert survey made it possible to identify the current state of development of eco-activism, the main problems and possible ways of solving them.

Global trends in environmental activism

Recognition of environmental challenges

In 2015, the UN member states adopted 17 goals for the period up to 2030 - the sustainable development of the future. The goals aim to optimise the allocation of scarce resources, introduce environmentally friendly technologies into production, and create better living conditions for future generations. They are considered to be key indicators of a green economy. These goals will have to be achieved by the member states of the United Nations through their own strategies[1]. Of the 17 goals, 7 are directly related to environmental protection and conservation, while 10 are indirectly related (Table 1):

Table 1. UN Sustainable Development Goals

	Eradicate hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture
	Ensuring availability and efficient use of water resources and sanitation for all
	Ensuring access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all
	Ensuring sustainable consumption and production patterns
	Taking urgent action to combat climate change and its effects
	Conservation and sustainable use of the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development
	Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss

Environmental activism as a value

According to the 2019 European Barometer study, in Europe, more than nine out of ten respondents (94%) say that environmental protection is important to them personally, and among them, more than half (56%) believe it is extremely important[2].

Climate communications researchers at George Mason University in the US say data from a long-running survey of US adults, conducted almost every year since 2008, shows that audiences are becoming increasingly receptive to eco-activist messages: "Adults are becoming increasingly concerned about environmental issues, and this has been the case since 2015."

A 2016 survey of 1,860 people in the UK found that 61% were willing to pay up to £20 a month to prevent climate change-related deaths in 2050, 2080 and 2115[3].

Participants in a 2017 study in Portugal and Australia were willing to spend as much money on preventing the negative impacts of climate change on future generations as they were on protecting themselves[4].

Experts also note that for many, fighting climate change has become a global justice issue - an approach that is more rational than a purely environmentalist message.

The growing role of environmental NGOs

Environment and animal welfare groups are among the fastest growing sectors of the non-profit world, increasing by 15% from 2005 to 2015 - during the same period there was a decline in the number of arts and health non-profit organisations. In the US alone, there are around 15,000 registered environment and animal welfare non-profits[5].

At the same time as the number of environmental NGOs and activists is increasing, they are taking on a more assertive position as political actors in international organisations. The UN explicitly recognised the

need for cooperation with NGOs at the Conference on the Environment (1992): "The United Nations system, including international financial and development agencies, as well as all intergovernmental organisations and forums, should, in cooperation with non-governmental organisations, take steps to ... strengthen existing mechanisms and procedures for involving non-governmental organisations in policy-making and environmental programme design, implementation and evaluation.

NGOs can also be formally represented in negotiations at semi-public international conferences. For example, the International Union for Conservation of Nature includes 669 NGOs as well as states and governments. Environmental NGOs can now also be members of international commissions (e.g. the International Commission for the Scientific Exploration of the Mediterranean Sea)[6].

Non-governmental organisations around the world have helped to promote ecological values by raising awareness of environmental issues. Their methods include both direct lobbying and specially designed public information campaigns, the distribution of educational materials, and social media campaigns. NGOs also organise citizen science groups and projects to engage the public in the fight against environmental change[7].

The new faces of global environmental activism

For many years, the main recognisable public environmentalists have been foreign stars who have drawn attention to pollution, climate change, etc. For example, actor Leonardo DiCaprio and

his Leonardo DiCaprio Foundation (LDF). The foundation funds research and development in the field of renewable energy. It actively supports the distribution of green technology to private companies and non-profit organisations. The actor himself is on the board of directors of the World Wildlife Fund (WWF).

Today, however, we can say that global youth environmental activism has become personified in the image of environmental leader Greta Thunberg.

Sociologists at the University of Maryland in the US who study activism note that the latest generation of eco-activists is much "louder" and better coordinated than its predecessors. The movement's visibility on social media and in the press has attracted more young people to the environmental movement. In addition, sociologists note a generational feature of the high level of involvement: "There is no generation that puts so much at stake when it comes to the negative effects of climate change as Generation Z. Their future is tied to the planet, and they are capable of protecting it.[8]"

Greta Thunberg's speeches have inspired many young people all over the world and brought environmental issues to the attention of politicians, businessmen and the public.

A new way of life

In recent years, the 'ecological approach' to life has been gaining popularity as a response to the negative effects of the technological revolution and pollution problems.

Ecological approach to life, calls for living in harmony with nature and fostering an ecological mindset to solve specific

environmental problems. Ecologisation of consciousness, means ecologisation of the needs, motives of behaviour and the behaviour of the modern man himself.

Eco-lifestyles include living a healthy lifestyle, using natural materials and raw materials, sorting and recycling waste, supporting eco-friendly brands, boycotting companies that do not go green and other such activities.

Digital environmental activism

Modern information technology offers the public fundamentally new possibilities for civic expression and collective mobilisation by creating decentralised, networked structures without visible organisational hierarchy. Internet activism is generally characterised by anonymity, heterogeneity, dynamism and freedom, and is more scalable and adaptable. New technologies have also become an innovative source of citizens' self-development, mastering the skills of environmental monitoring and self-reflection in relation to the information received, increasing environmental knowledge and awareness; and the networking of digital activists is a source of various offline resources, facilitating collective civic action. The main forms are:

Clicktivism (from the word 'click'), clicktivist actions include signing online petitions, copying and using statuses or messages from social media, and changing personal details or avatars on social media to express a particular civic position. Clicktivism is mainly engaged in individual groups on social media to accumulate civic engagement.

Digital petitions are seen as a form of activity that requires a guaranteed response from the government.

E-financing includes online cash transactions: donations, cryptocurrency mining, online fundraising auctions, etc.

'Data activism' is the organisation of voluntary work with different types of data (open governmental and non-governmental sources, scientific data, etc.).

'Hacktivism' is hacking (obtaining data without official access to a system) to achieve individual or collective social, environmental or political goals. The potential impact of this kind of digital activism is large and can affect government, citizens and industry.

Kazakhstan trends

In Kazakhstan, eco-activism is on the rise. Today, public attention to environmental issues is more than justified and will only increase under the influence of *the global trend of environmental protection*. Climate change, desertification of land, air and water pollution, loss of biodiversity, unauthorised landfills, and industrial waste disposal are only some of the main environmental problems on the global agenda.

Kazakhstan faces the same environmental challenges as the rest of the world. However, there is a difference in the way and speed with which they are solved and in the development of the environmental sphere as a whole. Against the background of all these problems, society is asking questions and demanding solutions, hence the predictably increasing environmental activism. This is the expected and right reaction of society.

Transformation of eco-movements in Kazakhstan

In general, the situation with environmental activism can be assessed as rapidly developing; as it develops, it will transform and form into an institution of interaction between society and the authorities. All the more so since environmental problems cannot be solved with government involvement alone. Active action is required from the civil sector, NGOs, businesses, concerned citizens and volunteers.

The environmental movement in Kazakhstan dates back to Soviet times. Suffice it to recall the anti-nuclear movement Nevada-Semipalatinsk, founded by writer Olzhas Suleimenov in 1989. The initiative proved successful - the nuclear test site was soon closed, and the process of conserving the nuclear reactor in Mangistau began. Then the public turned its attention to the tragedy of the Aral Sea.

In the 1990s and 2000s, several eco-NGOs emerged and became quite active in politics. Mels Yeleusizov, Chairman of the Ecological Union of Associations and Enterprises of Kazakhstan "Tabigat", MP and presidential candidate, stood out against the general background.

Today, thanks to the global agenda and social media, there are an increasing number of environmental movements in Kazakhstan, volunteers and eco-activists who are actively working and encouraging people to join their initiatives.

Digital eco-activism and new faces

On the expanses of Facebook, Instagram and YouTube, under various hashtags reflecting environmental

issues (*#ecologykazakhstan, #birge, #tazaqazaqstan, #sokhranimkokzhailau, etc.*), one can find a noticeable number of popular pages of ecological organisations and movements. Particularly active and productive initiatives have their own popular faces. Among them are Yevgeny Mukhamedjanov, founder of the *EcoNetwork* project; Pakizat Saylaubekova, an environmental activist and founder of the Recycle Birge project; Mikhail Belyakov; Daniyar Bakimov; Timur Yeleusizov, Chairman of the Eco Fund Tabigat; Kirill Osin, Director of the Eco Mangistau NGO; and others. Kazakhstani bloggers also raise the topic of environmental problems in their broadcasts.

The effectiveness of Kazakh eco-activism could be observed in the examples of cancellation of construction of the resort at Kok-Zhailau, revision of development of Bozzyr tract, illegal felling of trees and development in the cities of the country. Meanwhile, eco-activists periodically assemble various marathons, rallies, monitorings, seminars, eco-subbotniks and other events in support of ecology in the country.

Atmospheric air quality and low levels of solid waste recycling are high on the environmental agenda of Kazakhstan's eco-activists.

For example, according to the Pollution Index Rankings for 2020, Kazakhstan is the 26th dirtiest country in the world out of 110 (our country's pollution index is 75.15)[9].

In Kazakhstan, the Environmental Ministry plans to recycle 40% of waste by 2030 and 50% by 2050. According to the Ministry of Energy, 3.2m tonnes

of solid waste accumulated in August 2019, in addition to unregistered landfills, which no one keeps track of. Every year, 5-6m tonnes more solid waste is added. Kazakhstan recycled 9% of MSW in 2017 and increased its recycling rate to 11.5 in 2018.

Kazakhstan has 130 waste sorting and recycling organisations, several of which subsequently produce new products from recycled materials. Raw materials suitable for recycling account for 46%, but the problems faced by both recycling companies and recyclers cannot be solved without help from the state.

State environmental initiatives

State environmental initiatives in the country are also intensifying, as are the activities of green companies and NGOs. The Ministry of Ecology, Geology and Natural Resources of Kazakhstan, the International Centre for Green Technologies and Investment Projects, and the Association of Environmental Organisations of Kazakhstan (AEOC) have been established. A radical reform of environmental legislation is taking place.

Kazakhstan has always been progressively pro-environmental policy; it has signed a number of important conventions, international treaties, joined the Kyoto Protocol, the Sustainable Development Goals, developed the concept of transition to a green economy, and established a Council under the President for the transition of Kazakhstan to a green economy.

The adoption of a new Environmental Code and the approval of roadmaps for each region are also considered to be effective instruments for tackling environmental

issues. Above all, the "polluter pays and corrects" principle is implemented through the code. This means both increasing the fines for polluters many times over and for them to take the necessary measures to repair the damage caused. In addition, the National Project "Zhasyl-Kazakhstan for 2021-2025" is being developed.

As part of the Year of the Volunteer, the first national eco-meeting was held in February 2020, attended by activists, volunteers, representatives of government agencies and international organisations from all regions of the country. A roadmap was developed at the rally, which included the environmental initiatives of activists and volunteers in Kazakhstan, confirming the support of the eco-activist movement at the state level in Kazakhstan.

In the opinion of the representatives of Kazakhstani eco-activism themselves, what is more important in this matter is the position taken by the people themselves. We are talking about ecological consciousness.

The trend towards environmental consciousness

Among the main trends in supporting ecology, ecological consciousness, ecological behaviour or reducing the ecological footprint in the environment are highlighted. Recently, more and more people in Kazakhstan are abandoning plastic, unhealthy food and harmful household chemicals, and are switching to sensible consumption. Increasingly, people are shifting to a more comfortable environment for the planet.

Meanwhile, many people are no longer choosing the position of a bystander. They come up with their own projects and solve

environmental problems at their own level. This is how the website Airkaz.org appeared, showing measurements and key indicators of air pollution. Or the EcoNetwork project, which independently implements Green Office and Green School projects. In 2020, the Tazastan project was launched on The Village.kz, reflecting current topics on human impact on pollution.

An important trend is also the greening of public events and the eco-friendly orientation of the event sector[10].

The trend towards a scientific component of eco-activism

The development of eco-activism also implies the development of a scientific component, qualified expert support, explanation and mainstreaming of environmental issues. This is also a good factor to prevent eco-activism from turning into a hype or groundless couch activism. Today in Kazakhstan there is a tendency to increase expert assessment of the situation, and new names in science and applied scientific research are appearing.

Problems and prospects for the development of eco-activism in Kazakhstan

Experts' assessment of the current situation in the field of environmental activism in Kazakhstan.

Along with the global trend, the environmental movement in Kazakhstan is gaining momentum every year. Experts note that eco-activism in Kazakhstan is developing rapidly. And the concept of the Hearing State, initiated by President Tokayev, plays an important role in this. Civic initiatives are developing well

mainly in large cities. But there are also sporadic examples of eco-activism in the regions of the country.

Environmental activism involves young and ambitious citizens. Young people are not indifferent to environmental issues and information and opinions are exchanged through all existing information channels. Environmental activists take part in events at all levels and their position can be heard and taken into account when crucial political decisions are made.

The role of social networks in the dissemination of information and the opportunity to unite is high. In general, experts believe that anxiety about the environment is felt throughout the world and is necessarily reflected in Kazakhstan's reality. Eco-activism in the world is no longer just a trend, but a concern confirmed by real scientific research. The Kazakhstani public is just starting to become active in this regard, but the process has been launched and its relevance will grow day by day.

According to experts, eco-activists in the country are divided into two main groups: some deal with air pollution and others with waste. A small number of eco-activists are focused on greening. However, water and biodiversity issues are occasionally raised.

The main problems of environmental activism according to experts are

- There is a lack of venues for eco-activists to gather to discuss problems and solutions.

- A high level of distrust of eco-activists towards the executive authorities. Difficulties include lack of understanding, inaction on the part of officials, the emergence of "barbaric laws", promotion

of harmful technologies (incineration, for example), etc.

- Little awareness of ongoing projects in the RoK;

- Fragmented views of the activists themselves on the topic. Environmental organisations themselves are reluctant to join partner networks and coalitions;

- The division of resources among active NGOs, i.e. low state material support for eco-activists. Often, eco-activists have to turn to foreign grants or use the crowdfunding system;

- Low accessibility to data and sources of specialised bodies (meaning statistical data, financial reports, research reports, etc.)

- The development of excessive (radical, unprofessional, aggressive) eco-activism is also cited as a problem, which, in turn, can have a negative impact on the development of the economy, business and generally cause destabilisation processes in society. This is often due to the fact that there is no clear understanding of what eco-activism is, its essence, principles and ultimate goals. Many eco-activists interpret their ideas as the only correct ones. At the same time, both business and the state do not seek compromises, each pursuing its own interests. The issue of interaction between the state, business and the public in this context is being brought up to date.

In this connection, some experts have voiced the position that it is the state that should direct and regulate the field of ecology. Eco-movements, especially if they are founded spontaneously, without a scientific and qualified component, can do tangible harm to the development of proper eco-activism. According to Kamshat

Tusupova, PhD in Water Resources Engineering at Lund University (Sweden), there are five areas that should be regulated exclusively by the state - education, health care, social welfare, defence and ecology. Therefore, any ecological education, people's training, ecological ideology presuppose the state to have a written, clear program-plan. And we should not wait for results in 3-4 years, everything that concerns change of consciousness requires long time and continuous work in this direction.

- Low level of environmental awareness and education in the country. The majority of the population lacks environmental education and culture in relation to the environment, animals, consumption, and solid waste management. The problem is to change the consciousness of the citizens themselves. The more people in Kazakhstan begin to change their values, the measure of consumption, live ecologically and reduce their ecological footprint, the more chances the country has to improve the ecological picture and to develop quality eco-activism in general.

- Lack of expertise and qualified knowledge among the eco-activists themselves. Like any process, eco-activism needs to develop. This is possible through continuous training, the development of eco-movement representatives, scientific research, and the training of qualified personnel in this field. All this requires a systematic, science-based approach.

- "Clicktivism" that does not translate into active action. Citizens are not ready to spend their own time and effort on proactive action to protect the environment;

- Citizens, on the one hand, wish to improve environmental conditions, but are

not prepared to pay for the environment, for environmental levies and increased tariffs.

- In Kazakhstan, volunteerism and philanthropy are not as well developed as in Western countries: the population is extremely reluctant to donate money to non-profit environmental organisations (which is one of the main reasons for environmental NGOs to seek funding from other countries).

The effectiveness of interaction and communication between the state and civil society on environmental issues:

- Experts note that there is often a quick response from state authorities to minor issues, but a lack of systematic communication and resolution of serious environmental problems.

- There are some perspectives, for example the Council under the Ministry of Environment and the ambassadors for this topic are a really working mechanism, but at the same time there is not a sufficiently effective scheme of interaction or awareness of the civil sector on this activity.

Conclusions

One of the main current trends in eco-activism is the emergence of many independent grassroots initiative groups, indicating a significant growth of the environmental movement in quantitative terms. On the other hand, eco-movements are gaining an impressive presence on the international stage, which indicates their qualitative and authoritative growth. A global shift in social consciousness is taking place, in which the right to a healthy environment is a defining value. The environmental agenda is becoming an independent political agenda for

international organisations, political parties and community leaders.

Institutional recommendations

The first priority for the state should be sustainable economic development, which would then allow both citizens and the state to increase spending on the green economy.

The state needs to support the really working environmental movements and projects (informationally and financially). Raise awareness, provide training on how to obtain material support from the government. Many environmental movements find it easier to apply for grants from foreign countries, as they have simple schemes for communicating and handling documents, as well as for obtaining funding.

It is important to develop a scientifically based, competent algorithm for action at state level, a plan for the development of the environmental sphere, indicating all the objectives, indicators and mechanisms for their achievement, with further monitoring of progress.

The creation of professional associations, based on the example of European countries, consisting of qualified specialists in a particular field of environmental knowledge, possibly even interdisciplinary in nature, for a narrower and deeper study of the environmental situation and problems in Kazakhstan. And also to provide qualified consultations and expert assessments.

Educational initiatives

Governments need to guide representatives of environmental movements to acquire environmental

knowledge, as many of them often lack the necessary knowledge in the field of ecology; improve access to information, data, training, etc. Support for environmental impact assessments is also important, linking environmental movement representatives to experts and scientists in the field of ecology.

Systematically, it is also important to raise the level of environmental scientists, while at the same time emphasising the training of our own professional staff. The state spends many millions of funds to invite foreign scientists and pay them for their work as scientific project managers. It would be more appropriate to study the shortage of specialists, scientific personnel and educational pathways in the country, formalize agreements with foreign partners and send their young scientists (including through the Bolashak programme) to improve their scientific level and qualification skills.

The ideology should be aimed at building environmental awareness. It is fundamentally important to raise public responsibility through stricter measures, as well as through raising intellectual capacity. It is one thing when a person knows that one should not harm the environment, it is another thing when

he/she is responsible for it, and most importantly, when he/she is truly aware of the consequences of his/her actions. There is no punishment for everyone, so it is important to work on raising the intellectual awareness of the importance of environmental behaviour.

Recommendations to improve the relationship between government, business and civil society

It is necessary to create a single portal for communication with civil society and eco-activists on environmental issues. Break it down by directions of environmental problems. The portal would include all aspects, algorithms of step-by-step actions, information and news from all over Kazakhstan. Also on this portal it would be possible to register and hold all public hearings, events and meetings related to environmental topics, both online and offline.

It is essential that society, government and international bodies develop mechanisms that enable non-governmental organisations, and hence environmental movements, to become effective and responsible partners in devising a sustainable development path that prevents environmental destruction.

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