

'Promising land': struggle with industrial pollution of the environment in imperial Lodz (1880-1917)

In 1820, Prince Konstantin Romanov declared Lodz a fabric city, where industrialists received great privileges for development of their enterprises. As the result, by the end of 19th century Lodz became one of the biggest industrial centers of the Russian Empire with the multicomponent urban society, consisted of very different social, ethnical, and religious groups of population.

Among the most important problems of such large industrial centers as Lodz was industrial pollution of the environment. Questions of sanitary control over industry were quite complicated at the period and closely related to the problems of public health, property, agriculture, urban environment, commercial profit and national welfare. From this point of view, pollution conflicts involved a series of relationships between people, rather than between people and environment.

Usually, urban communities and voluntary organizations were main (if not only) initiators and drivers of pollution conflicts in Russia, and provincial authorities tried to defend industrialists from the public pressure. In contrast, Lodz was probably the only city in Russia, where governors initiated and actively supported the struggle for clean environment against textile manufacturers. During late 19th and early 20th centuries, they tried to work out local sanitary legislation and to close dangerous plants, but absence of all-Russian environmental legislation has made all their attempts unsuccessful.

In my report, I plan to show pollution conflicts in Lodz from the perspectives of an industrial border city, a crossroad between different cultures, nations and religions. How cultural differences between main social actors influenced the conflict? Was the struggle of Petrokov governors against Lodz industrialists a matter of environmental values, or rather of power and domination?

One of the most important sources for my study (aside from official documentation, scientific literature of the period and periodicals) is the Vladislav Reymont's novel '*Promising land*'. The novel represents many aspects of relations between different social groups of Lodz urban community, which cannot be traced in other historical sources. Artistic perception of the industrial city is very important for understanding its history.