

## **Occupied Landscapes and Environmental Transformation on the Austrian-Russian Front of the First World War**

The 1914-1918 maneuver war on the Eastern Front rapidly militarised vast territories from the Baltic to the Black Sea. It quickly blurred the boundaries between nations, between front and rear: radicalized practices of nature exploitation, reckless resource mobilisation and environment subjugation to military logics. The armed confrontation changed the spatial orders, in these conditions the occupied territories whose affiliation changed several times during the war, turned into special military landscapes.

The war on the south-western Russian front and the occupation of Galicia played a special role for the Russian military and civil administration, for the relief organisations and combatants at the front, and for civilians in the rear. The duration of the occupation from September 1914 till June 1915, the reoccupation of the Eastern Galicia in 1916 and, above all, the imaginary affiliation of the province to the historical Russian territories shaped the Russian military experience. The dissonance between the successes at the beginning of the war and the subsequent defeat, the importance of terrain and natural resources for maneuver warfare, and the long-term contacts with foreign environment determined the role of natural factors in the reappraisal of the war experience during and after the war.

The source base of my research includes Russian military correspondence on warfare strategy and tactics, as well as communication between military and civilian administrations on occupation plans and practices in the "belligerently occupied" territories of Galicia. These materials have been found in the Russian Military Historical Archive. Moreover, I have also included published pamphlets that flooded the Russian book market in the short period of 1914-1915, medical (epidemiological) reports on the state of water and soil, and first-person documents.

Thematic fields:

### *1. Imaginary and real occupation militarized landscapes Galicia's*

The horizon of expectations of combatants and the military administration was strongly influenced by the propaganda that postulated Galicia's belonging to Russia and specifically, also on the basis of ecological arguments - the kinship of landscapes, the unity of river systems, flora and fauna. The creation of imaginary maps of Galicia for the Russian army was facilitated by the corresponding toponymic, which was artificially russified for this purpose in numerous propaganda publications. Under the influence of these representations, the first contact with the terrain contributed to the romanticisation of natural objects and their description in sublime metaphors. On the other hand, the unpredictable role of natural elements in combat operations led to their gradual demonisation and elevation to the status of dangerous enemies. The

anthropomorphisation of nature became a common descriptive device for both individual narratives and later military and strategic works.

## *2. Embattled and occupied environment Galicia's*

In the strategic documents of the wartime and interwar period, the environment of Galicia was anthropologised and made into a real actor that resisted, ruined tactical plans and undermined all the efforts. Certain landscapes and their elements were classified as more dangerous than the real enemy - the Austrian and German armies. The environment of Galicia was to be evaluated from strategic, tactical and logistical points of view. Mastering and taming the uncontrollable foreign terrain required complex geological and bacteriological research. The Russian military also tried to use it as a weapon against the enemy. The work on the conquered landscapes in the First World War was realised in a dilemma situation between the imaginary duration of the occupation on the one hand, which required consistent integration of the territory into the empire, and the situational response to the fighting needs on the other. According to the thorough study of the resource potential and the development of long-term plans for the environment of Galicia therefore went hand in hand with the negative transformations of the terrain.

## *3. Epidemiological threats: Galicia's landscapes in the Russian public health discourse*

The epidemiological threats posed by the hostile environment and the population living there according to the military and civilian authorities were at the center of discussions and practices during the occupation. Military doctors, scientists invited from Russia and loyal residents were involved in the procedures of the studying and disinfection of spaces. The real and symbolic sterilisation of occupied landscapes is seen as one of the options for their appropriation and integration into the structures of the empire outside the German heritage.