

# A FORGOTTEN CONTEXT: ENVIRONMENT IN THE MONTENEGRIN HISTORIOGRAPHY

## ZABORAVLJENI KONTEKST: OKOLIŠ U CRNOGORSKOJ HISTORIOGRAFIJI

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### Summary

*The slow development of Montenegrin scientific institutions in the first, as well as the dominant dedication to the topics related to political, social and, in a lesser amount, cultural history in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, determined the diversity of research scopes of local historians. Being out of them, the environmental history remained among the many neglected historical domains. At this moment, one could only mention the environmental categories that had substantially or significantly affected the contemporary development of Montenegrin society, but neither of them has become the point of interest or the topic of historiographical endeavors. These categories, both natural, such as earthquakes, floods or droughts, and anthropogenic ones – urbanization or drastic constructional changes in the landscape, have been, at best, ephemerally mentioned as the common places in different works, without going into their essence. This paper aims to indicate some of them, at least the ones that have occurred in the relatively recent past, providing the existence of relevant historical sources to base scientific research upon.*

**Keywords:** Montenegro, environment, cultural heritage, earthquakes, urbanization

**Ključne riječi:** Crna Gora, okoliš, kulturna baština, potresi, urbanizacija

Until the middle of the last decade, the environment and the factors in which the given historical process or processes had taken place, have not been considered in Montenegro as anything more than the commonplace, i.e. overall self-evident context which has not attracted attention as the scientific topic itself. The dominance of the political and military history, complemented with themes of economic, social, and cultural proveniences, determined not only the Montenegrin historiographical mainstream but also, more-less, presented its full picture. With so much history to be covered by a small number of relevant institutions and engaged personnel, such a situation doesn't come as surprise.

Fortunately, the situation began to change in recent years, mostly due to the shift in the scientific approach to research topics. Adjusting to the nature of calls for project applications, that uniformly favored the multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary ones, the Montenegrin researchers had a hard time learning that multidisciplinary and interdisciplinarity are not limited to cooperation among the expert for medieval history with the one dealing with, for instance, the political history of 19<sup>th</sup> century, but that it assumes the joint approach to the related topic by scientists from all imaginable fields of interest. Having historians, biologists, computer scientists, physicians, etc. aboard the same project took a long

time to be accepted as normal practice. But such practice implied the search for the topic that would produce the material for different research affinities and expertises, so the wider problem complexes came to the forefront.

Although this paper focuses on the topics that are neglected, there are several new research projects and articles dealing with environmental issues.<sup>1</sup> Still, research is mostly done by foreign scholars, but the collaboration with Montenegrin scientists is growing steadily.

A good example of the such rationale was the project *Valorizing the Montenegrin katuns through sustainable development of agriculture and tourism – KATUN*<sup>2</sup>, which gathered historians, historians of art, architects, experts in forestry and agricultural sciences, and economists around one of the huge environmental contexts of Montenegrin history and social life – seasonal mountain settlements, traditionally called *katuns*. This project and its results received great attention and public acclaim, but more importantly, paved the way for further teaming with similar goals. In short, the results of this project encompassed the GIS database,<sup>3</sup> monograph,<sup>4</sup> and series of scientific articles and conference presentations on existing and abandoned katuns in one of the most exemplary katuns' regions in the country.<sup>5</sup> The research included a joint approach to the spheres of traditional agriculture, historical context, geographical characteristics and disposition, architectural analysis of the settlements and belonging objects, the potential for tourism valorization and biodiversity, forestry and landscape issues, from the current state, through the hazards and challenges they face, to the suggested measures of protection and practices of future sensible use.

Another question is the study on the livestock sector in medieval Kotor where the protection of arable land was the issue of particular attention from municipal authorities.<sup>6</sup>

One interesting topic emerging recently is winemaking and traditional wine growing. This was an important activity for local economies in the coastal region from ancient times, as inferred from relics like those found in the necropolis of the coastal city of Budva (in modern Montenegro, dated from the fourth century BCE).<sup>7</sup> Viticulture practices were intensified by Romans the after the Illyrian Wars, as observed in Dionysian/Bacchic iconography, and many remnants of pottery, amphorae, and cups.<sup>8</sup> Wine production continued during the Byzantine period, and documents like the Medieval Statute of Budva reflect the importance of grapevine cultivation in Montenegro in the Middle Ages. The Statute, dating to 1427, includes the relevance of certain grapevine varieties for local wine production,<sup>9</sup> like the “Cratosia”, probably referring to the grape cultivar currently known as *Kratošija* and also reflected in folklore traced back to the eighteenth century.<sup>10</sup> Later, many vineyards were destroyed during the Ottoman period, and only some survived in remote regions in the center of the country and in several parts of the coastal regions controlled by Venice. *Kratošija* was the dominant variety in the region until the *phylloxera* crisis, which forced the removal of many old vines and their replacement by new varieties.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. notes 2-5 and 13-14.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.ucg.ac.me/projekti/29/146>

<sup>3</sup> O. Pelcer-Vujačić, S. Kovačević, A GIS Database of Montenegrin Katuns (Kuči Mountain and Durmitor), in: Ioannides, M., Fink, E., Moropoulou, A., Hagedorn-Saupe, M., Fresa, A., Liestøl, G., Rajcic, V., Grussenmeyer, P. (Eds.), *Digital Heritage. Progress in Cultural Heritage: Documentation, Preservation, and Protection. 6th International Conference, EuroMed 2016*, Nicosia, Cyprus, October 31 – November 5, 2016, Proceedings, Part II. Lecture notes in Computer Science 10059 (2016): 72-80.

<sup>4</sup> Ivan Laković (ur.), *Katuni Kučke planine*, Podgorica 2017.

<sup>5</sup> *Održivi razvoj planinskih područja — iskustva, izazovi i perspektive*, Zbornici radova sa naučnih skupova, 145, Odjeljenje prirodnih nauka, 20, Crnogorska akademija nauka i umjetnosti, Podgorica, 2018; I. Laković, A. Kapetanović, O. Pelcer-Vujačić, T. Koprivica, *Endangered Mediterranean Mountain Heritage—Case Study of katuns at the Kuči Mountain in Montenegro*, *Land* 2020, 9(8), 248; <https://doi.org/10.3390/land9080248>.

<sup>6</sup> Miljan Gogić, *Prilog proučavanju stočarstva u srednjovjekovnom Kotoru*, *Održivi razvoj planinskih područja — iskustva, izazovi i perspektive*, Zbornici radova sa naučnih skupova, 145, Odjeljenje prirodnih nauka, 20, Crnogorska akademija nauka i umjetnosti, Podgorica, 2018: 191-198.

<sup>7</sup> Čedomir Marković, *Antička Budva. Nekropole Istraživanja 1980-1981*, Podgorica 2012: 58-65.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Sanja Pilipović, *Wine and the vine in Upper Moesia. Archeological and epigraphic evidence*, *Balkanica* 44 (2013): 21–34.

<sup>9</sup> *Statuta et leges civitatis Buduae, Scardonae et civitatis et insulae Lesinae*, ed. Sime Ljubic, Zagrebae 1882-3, *Statuto di Budua*, Cap. CCLXI

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Vesna Maraš et al. *Origin and characterization of Montenegrin grapevine varieties*. *Vitis* 54 (2015): 135–137.



**Picture 1.** *Landscape of Durmitor mountain, photo: I. Laković.*



**Picture 2.** *The landscape of Kuči Mountains, photo: I. Laković.*

*Kratošija* and *Vranac*, the most important cultivars for current Montenegrin viticulture, were also the two most commonly found genotypes across old Montenegrin vineyards, reflecting their relevance in the past century. The results of population genetics analysis in old Montenegrin vineyards reveal ancient ways currently active in *Vitis vinifera* as part of the scientific project financed by the Ministry of Science was published last year.<sup>11</sup>

One of the current activities of such kind is the project *Inspiring rural heritage: Sustainable practices to protect and conserve upland landscapes and memories – IRIS*, which the University of Montenegro started in cooperation with the University of Toulouse.<sup>12</sup> As the *KATUN* dealt mostly with seasonal mountain settlements in the areas of Durmitor and Kučka Planina, the IRIS is focused on the multilayered social, historical, archaeological, economic, botanical, agricultural, forestry, and many

<sup>11</sup> Vesna Maraš, Javier Tello, Anita Gazivoda et al, Population genetic analysis in old Montenegrin vineyards reveals ancient ways currently active to generate diversity in *Vitis vinifera*, *Sci Rep* 10 (2020): 15000 <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-020-71918-7>.

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.heritageresearch-hub.eu/project/iris/>.

**Picture 3.** *The landscape of Sinjajevina mountain, photo: I. Laković.*



other contexts related to Sinjajevina mountain, one of the largest homogenous pasturelands in Europe. Hopefully, in 2026 we will also have a paper collection on discourses on the mountains of Montenegro and Slovenia, as a result of the bilateral project.

These examples show how environmental history can find its way into the realm of regular historiographical fields of interest within a small, relatively ossified scientific community. What is more important, the topics of this category are innumerable, since the historical development of the population and society in contemporary Montenegro was greatly and, often, essentially determined by environmental factors. Changing the research perspective, from focusing on historical processes with an environmental background to approaching the environmental context providing historical consequences and complex human-nature interactions can contribute to gaining new knowledge and deepening the existing ones.

Without trying to provide a thorough list, this paper wants to present a selection of important, big topics still waiting to be explored. Without some specific order, examples of environmental history topics in seminatural and highly anthropogenically altered environments will be given, which strongly and, sometimes, decisively co-influenced on and co-shaped the courses of life and lifestyle throughout Montenegrin history.

The impact of physical changes in the landscape and coastline of the Adriatic region since the Late Pleistocene has been significant, and it is widely accepted that sea-level rise during the earlier part of the Holocene has flooded many coastal sites dating to this period. Historical data regarding sea-level changes cover a relatively short period – 2000 to 3000 years in the best case, but usually only the last few centuries, and they are generally based on a reinterpretation of data that do not correspond to the sea level directly. There are now several new studies dealing with underwater archaeological sites from the Roman period in Croatia,<sup>13</sup> especially in the region of Istria<sup>14</sup> and for the island of Pag in the post-Roman period,<sup>15</sup> confirming the so-called Roman maritime transgression, but unfortunately, this type of research, combining biological, geomorphological and archaeological methods, has not been done for the Montenegrin coast yet.

<sup>13</sup> Maša Surić, Rekonstrukcija promjena morske razine na istočnoj obali Jadrana (Hrvatska) – pregled, *Geoadria* 14/2 (2009): 181-199.

<sup>14</sup> Eric Fouache et al, Morska razina u rimsko doba, *Vjesnik Arheološkog Muzeja u Zagrebu*, 3. s., XXXVII (2004): 173–190; Annamaria Correggiari, Antonio-Cattaneo Offshore sand for beach restoration: North Adriatic shelf examples, Conference: *Erosion Littorale en Méditerrané Occidentale*, Tanger, Volume: CIESM Workshop series n. 18, (2002). [https://www.researchgate.net/figure/Progressive-widening-of-the-Adriatic-basin-during-the-last-sea-level-rise-Transgressive\\_fig1\\_271527511/download](https://www.researchgate.net/figure/Progressive-widening-of-the-Adriatic-basin-during-the-last-sea-level-rise-Transgressive_fig1_271527511/download).

<sup>15</sup> Nick Marriner et al, Post-Roman sea-level changes on Pag Island (Adriatic Sea): Dating Croatia's "enigmatic" coastal notch?, *Geomorphology*, Elsevier, 2014, 221: 83-94. doi: 10.1016/j.geomorph.2014.06.002).



**Picture 4.** *Landscape of Skadar Lake – southern shore, photo: I. Laković.*



**Picture 5.** *Landscape of Skadar Lake – northwestern shore, photo: I. Laković.*

Articles on medieval mines in Brskovo that opened in the Tara mountains around 1254, usually do not deal with any environmental history.<sup>16</sup> Nevertheless, there is one research paper on exceptionally high levels of lead pollution in the Balkans mentioning this Montenegrin site<sup>17</sup> and it could be the starting point for further research.

Another major publication was a paper collection on the Skadar Lake basin, encompassing a geographical, biological as well as a historical overview.<sup>18</sup> Despite numerous inconsistencies and inaccuracies, it still marks an important step in the research of this area.

<sup>16</sup> Milijan Gogić, Rudarska proizvodnja u srednjovjekovnom Brskovu, *Istorijski zapisi* 1 (2010): 195-213.

<sup>17</sup> Jack Longman, Daniel Veres, Walter Finsinger, Vasile Ersek, Exceptionally high levels of lead pollution in the Balkans from the Early Bronze Age to the Industrial Revolution, *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* Jun 2018, 115 (25) E5661-E5668; DOI: 10.1073/pnas.1721546115: Comparison with other lead pollution records indicates the amount of lead deposited in the Balkans during the medieval period was, if not greater, at least similar to records located close to western European mining regions, suggestive of the key role the Balkans have played in mineral resource exploitation in Europe over the last 5,600 years.

<sup>18</sup> Vladimir Pešić, Gordan Karaman, Andrey G. Kostianoy, *The Skadar/Shkodra Lake Environment*, The Handbook of Environmental

In the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Drim river left its former riverbed and, using the riverbed of the smaller Kiri River, flowed into the Bojana river below the city of Skadar. It slowed down the run off from the Skadar Lake and the rise of its level by 2-3 meters. The change in the Drim River bed was partly caused by its canalization in the frame of drainage of the fields to the east of Skadar, but it seems more likely that the unequal tectonic subsidence forced the change of courses of all the river flows towards the west, instead of their natural orientation toward the south-east<sup>19</sup>. Since the northern banks of the lake are flat, swampy lowlands, this process caused the permanent flooding of large areas, the disappearance of numerous settlements, changes in traffic and communications among the ones that remained, as well as their new perspectives in the face of changed environmental context they had to adapt to. Considering the fact that the majority of arable land was situated in this the part of Skadar Lake basin, with a significant number of settlements and human population being affected by the flooding, one would expect that these historical events and processes they triggered would be treated in passing, at least, and more regularly mentioned. Unfortunately, this change of environmental conditions is taken as something that has just “happened”, without analyzing its impacts and consequences.

The great 7-Richter-scale earthquake from 1979 is commonly considered the highest magnitude natural disaster that has struck contemporary Montenegro. In the early morning of April 15<sup>th</sup>, 1979, this violent earthquake with its epicenter in the Adriatic Sea, struck the coastal Montenegro and Albania. The devastation spread over 100 km across the whole Montenegrin and northern parts of the Albanian seaside, killing 101 people in Montenegro and 35 in Albania. The cities of Ulcinj, Bar, Petrovac, Budva, Tivat, Kotor, Risan and Herceg Novi suffered heavy damage, while some 250 smaller settlements have been destroyed. Severe damage was caused to cultural-history monuments, situated mostly within the most impacted, seaside area. The same goes for the 53 healthcare objects, 570 social and child care facilities, 240 schools, and the majority of modern hotels and tourism facilities in the region, as well as 350 km of main and some 200 km of regional roads<sup>20</sup>. Altogether, according to UNESCO data, 1436 objects were destroyed or irreparably damaged<sup>21</sup>. The reaction of then-Yugoslav society was swift and thorough. The Federal Assembly brought the Law on the restoration of Montenegrin littoral, and the relevant Fund of solidarity was created, where all employees in Yugoslavia were paying a percentage of their salaries. The restoration works took a decade, with impressive results achieved. This disaster itself, as well as the impact it had on the society and societal responses that followed, are, without any hesitation, among the most significant segments of Montenegrin history of the second part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. But, judging by the historiographical interest they provoked, one can hardly get it.

The anthropogenic factors also caused drastic and impactful changes in the Montenegrin environment. Their dimensions and significance have been gradually increasing over time, shifting their course and reaching previously unimaginable levels during the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. After World War II, the whole paradigm of the social and economic context of lifestyle has changed. Rapid and forced industrialization and urbanization have decimated the traditional agricultural way of life, causing depopulation and abandonment of rural areas, especially ones in the central and northern mountainous territories. The current ratio among the urban and rural communities, in the sense of inhabitation and perspectives of development, stands in diametric opposition to the same indicator less than a century ago. Within the life of three generations, the human environment in Montenegro became unrecognizable, but mentioned dynamics did not acquire any systematic scientific treatment, aside from scattered, individual research endeavors ephemerally touching this topic in the works mainly focused on its political, economic, and social aspects.<sup>22</sup>

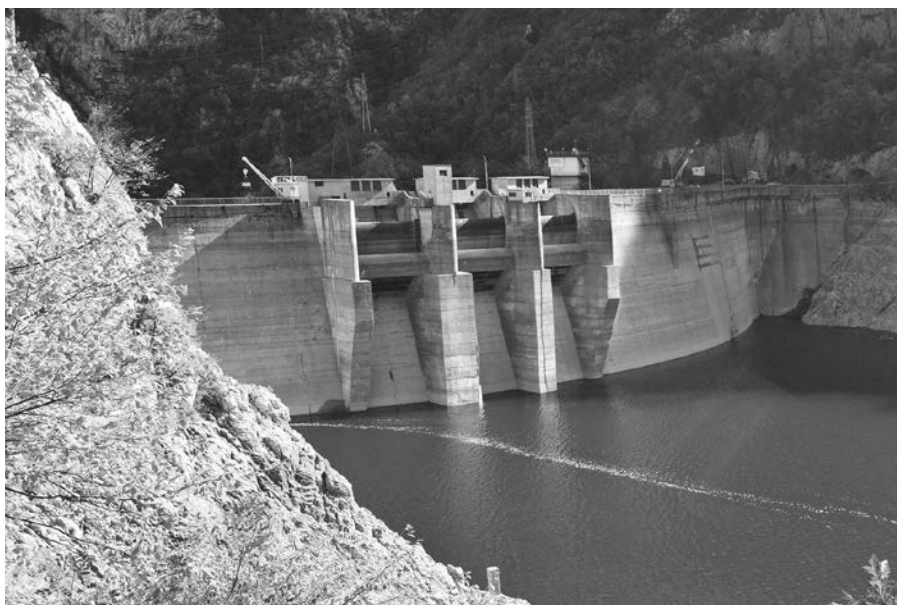
Chemistry volume 80 (2018), Springer; cf. A. Prekić, Cultural-Historic Heritage of the Lake Skadar Basin: 459-479.

<sup>19</sup> 7.2 Hronologija epoha i nasleđa prostora. Prostorni plan područja posebne namjene za Nacionalni park “Skadarsko jezero”, Službeni list Crne Gore, broj 46/2001 reg. br. 471.

<sup>20</sup> <http://www.seismo.co.me/questions/13.htm>.

<sup>21</sup> <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000147207>.

<sup>22</sup> N. Perošević, *Nikšić, grad u Crnoj Gori: 1945-1955*, MA thesis presented in Belgrade in 2005.



**Picture 6.** *The Mratinje dam, photo: I. Laković.*



**Picture 7.** *Power plant in Pljevlja, photo: O. Pelcer-Vujačić.*

Even more, this trend led to direct intervention to the natural environment, fundamentally changing it irreversibly. Construction of the dam “Mratinje” on the Piva River resulted in flooding of its upper basin, including many villages and town of Plužine, with the famous Piva monastery being dismantled and rebuilt on the new location. The surface coal mine in Pljevlja, and the local thermoelectric plant burning this coal, are both located near or in the suburbs of the city. Both of them have a huge impact on the environment of the area, especially through the drastic air pollution that electric plant causes. Not to mention that the plant is located next to the site of Roman *Municipium S* ( ), one of the few of its kind in the country, and air pollution contributes to the damage to preserved inscriptions thus making them almost illegible and partly obscuring that part of history.<sup>23</sup> The situation is also dire for archeological findings of tumuli dating from the Neolithic in the coal mine in Pljevlja.<sup>24</sup>

Gigantic industrial complexes, such as the Aluminum processing plant and the Plant for the production of construction machinery “Radoje Dakić” in Podgorica, ironworks “Boris Kidrič” in Nikšić, pulp and paper factory in Berane to name but few, have attracted permanent immigration of thousands

<sup>23</sup> More on the site: M. Mirković, *Municipium S* ( ). *A Roman Town in the Central Balkans, Komini Near Pljevlja, Montenegro*, BAR International Series 2357, Archaeopress, Oxford 2012; M. Mirković, *Municipium S – rimski grad na centralnom Balkanu u Kominima kod Pljevalja*, Filozofski fakultet, Beograd 2012.

<sup>24</sup> Mine Potrlica, more on archaeological excavations there <http://www.ckacg.me/aktuelno.html> (accessed June 18th 2021).

**Picture 8.** Remnants of construction machinery "Radoje Dakić" plant in Podgorica, photo: I. Laković.



**Picture 9.** Remnants of pulp and paper factory in Berane, photo: I. Laković.



of people from rural areas into the cities, but with the collapse of Yugoslavia, the heavy industry lost its economic relevance. Former workers have found themselves estranged from the previous lifestyle pursued by their ancestors, with their descendants growing up in an urban context, but without the source of income, these factories had provided. As well, the construction of the railroad Belgrade-Bar, which vertically crossed Montenegro and mostly followed the course of the Montenegrin part of the Adriatic highway,<sup>25</sup> immensely influenced the organization of life, transportation, and travel within the country, making some traditional traffic directions obsolete and abandoned and, at the same time, turning some previously extremely remote areas almost into outskirts of cities.

In this context, it would be interesting to mention that the wave of increased industrialization of Montenegro, after WWII, did not drastically affect only the natural environment, but even the most representative cultural-historical landscapes tremendously suffered from it. For instance, the rail ran over the site of ancient Doclea, putting a central part of the former Roman city under the tracks the former

<sup>25</sup> Branislav Marović, Beograd-Bar, in: Slavko Burzanović (ed.), *100 godina željeznice Crne Gore*, Cetinje-Podgorica, 2009: 95-125.



**Picture 10.** Aerial view of the Doclea archaeological site, with railroad passing through, photo: R. Koprivica

Roman city.<sup>26</sup> Although it was not the original intention, now the passengers can have the closest look possible at the remnants of its forum and surrounding buildings and facilities, as if someone made a train passing through a museum.

The list of environmental history topics that have not received adequate research attention in Montenegro so far is not only the consequence of a lack of interest among educated and trained scholars. In the system of higher education in Montenegro, especially related to history and historiography, there is no training available for the possible profile of future environmental historians. Even in the curriculum of historical geography at the Department of history, Faculty of Philosophy in Nikšić, as the discipline closest to this field, there is no trace of anticipation that someone might, someday, be dealing with the environment and its past in the context of historical research. It is easy to point out what is missing and what should be done, but it is fair to admit that the current academic community neither recognizes the lack of this kind of research as a serious problem nor invests in a cadre able to change or reverse that trend. Despite the enthusiasm, sporadic ventures into this realm by the researchers, primarily dealing with other topics, cannot substitute or replace the systematic efforts of dedicated experts.<sup>27</sup>

In the end, we can only hope that the attractiveness of the topics will, finally, get recognized among both Montenegrin scholars and students from the field of historiography. Mentioned themes should be understood as only the handful of the ones first crossing one's mind, while their exhaustive list would occupy much more space. We tried to pay attention both to the lack of research in those domains, but also to the systematic lack of dedicated or interested researchers who could pursue them. Although any decisive change in this domain is not to be expected soon, we hope that the scientific experiences, similar to the ones promoted by the *European Society for Environmental History*, will more frequently find their way to the bibliographies of Montenegrin historians.

<sup>26</sup> Branislav Kovačević, Nikšić-Titograd (Podgorica), in: Slavko Burzanović (ed.), *100 godina željeznice Crne Gore*, Cetinje-Podgorica, 2009: 75-94.

<sup>27</sup> A special overview on many issues, but not typical historiography, could be found in spatial plans for certain parts of Montenegro, cf. Gojko Nikolić et al. *Bazna studija Kartografija - Sektorske studije Analize i Ekspertize (SE-AE) za potrebe Protornog plana Crne Gore (2020-2035)*, Podgorica, 2018, 1-251.

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## SAŽETAK

Spor razvoj crnogorskih znanstvenih institucija u prvoj, kao i dominantna posvećenost temama vezanim za političku, društvenu, a manjim dijelom i kulturnu povjest u drugoj polovini 20. stoljeća, odredili su raznolikost istraživačkih dometa lokalnih povjesničara. Budući da je izvan ovog opsega, povijest okoliša ostala je među mnogim zanemarenim povijesnim domenama. U ovom trenutku mogle bi se spomenuti samo ekološke kategorije koje su bitno ili značajno utjecale na suvremeni razvoj crnogorskog društva, ali nijedna od njih nije postala zanimljiva niti tema historiografskih nastojanja. Ove kategorije, kako prirodne, poput potresa, poplava ili suša, tako i antropogene – urbanizacija ili drastične konstrukcijske promjene krajolika, u najboljem su slučaju efemerno spominjane kao zajednička mjesta u različitim radovima, ne ulazeći u njihovu bit. Ovaj rad ima za cilj ukazati na neke od njih, barem na one koji su se dogodili u relativno nedavnoj prošlosti, osiguravajući postojanje relevantnih povijesnih izvora na kojima se može temeljiti znanstveno istraživanje.

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