

Anthropogenic transformations of the environment in the context of modernization processes of the Congress Poland

Each forest has its own unique history and its past can testify to more general changes taking place in the background. In this context, an important research topic is the question of the installation of modernization processes in the Polish lands under partition and how (on the one hand) they affected the life of society at that time, but also what long-term effects of these processes we are dealing with today.

The overarching goal of the project is to examine how three major modernization processes have left their mark on the history of the Kampinos Forest (now Kampinos National Park). Hence, the core research will be to investigate: 1) how the installation of "modern" forestry in the territories of the Congress Kingdom took place, 2) how the melioration of wetlands took place, and 3) how successive waves of internal colonization progressed. The choice of the Kampinos Forest seems quite obvious. First of all, the Main Archive of Historical Records in Warsaw preserved about 120 plans of Kampinos Forest and its surroundings. In the context of the fact that during the II World War many of the 19th century holdings of the Main Archive in Warsaw were destroyed, these maps are an invaluable (and so far completely unused) source for observing the issues we interested in.

The project is part of the current of environmental history research, which has been intensively developed in Western Europe for several decades. It aims at a thorough understanding of the interactions between humans and the environment that have occurred in the past. Consequently, much of the environmental-historical research being done in the West is interdisciplinary in nature. Similarly, in the case of the project described here, in addition to historical and cartographic research, there will be work based on so-called natural archives. The project will involve paleoecologists, dendrochronologists and tree geneticists. Such a comprehensive approach will allow individual sources to complement each other. Thanks to this, we will be able to better and more accurately understand the environmental effects of modernization processes that took place in the Kampinos Forest in the past. In addition, the past of this forest will be supplemented by research on other forest areas in the nineteenth century. Due to the lack of written archives related to the Kampinos Forestry, supplementary queries will be carried out in the state archives in Radom, Lublin and Cracow. Thanks to this move beyond Kampinos, we will want to better understand how government and private forests were managed in the 19th century congressional district, and in what way the processes visible in the Kampinos area were part of general trends, and to what extent they were unique.

The project has the potential to make a significant contribution to the development of environmental history in Poland. Additionally, it will also influence the local history of the Kampinos Forest and allow for a better understanding of its past.