



Call for Papers

Workshop: 'The Environmental History of the Central European Borderlands Since the 1980s'

Prague, 20 September 2019

The borderlands between the former Eastern Bloc and the West have been attracting the interest of researchers for they represent a nearly seamless space that was formerly separated by antagonistic politics. The divide between the two European macro-regions remains visible even after the end of the Cold War and the enlargement of the European Union to the east. Differences in the use of land on either side of the border are closely related to the quality of the environment found there. Next to practical cooperation in land management, differences in mentality, culture and politics are mirrored in the land use policies of the territories crossed by state borders. The environment of the border regions has also a cultural meaning that is inscribed onto regional and national identities.

Policies pursued in national capitals can lead to joint solutions to environmental problems but also to 'ecowars'. One well-known example is the dispute between the Czech Republic and Austria over the nuclear power plant in Temelín, Czech Republic. The conflict impacted both countries' national politics as well as the situation in the borderlands where border crossings were blocked and the issues of nuclear emergency or nuclear waste storage were debated. Similarly, the dispute between (post-)socialist Slovakia and Hungary over the Gabčíkovo-Nagymaros dam and between the Czech Republic and Poland over brown coal mines and the use of solid fuel for heating can be mentioned here.

Researching the relationship between man and nature in the borderlands enables not only a joint perspective that spans state borders but also a critical reassessment of simplistic mental patterns that assume an 'ecological' West and an 'ecocidal' East. Even though ecological activism was difficult under dictatorial socialist regimes, ecology became an important topic in the 1980s and was one of the triggers for the 1989 revolutions. Air pollution, waste management, and protection of nature were more or less overtly, but nonetheless hotly, discussed. Thus, the environmental history of the borderlands can serve as a local laboratory for exploring different paths in the modern and postmodern values of capitalism and (post-)socialism. What kind of cross-regional environmental convergence developed since the 1980s and where were its limits? How close were the standards and practices in protected areas such as the Bavarian Forest on the German side and the Bohemian Forest on the Czech side of the border been? The goal of our workshop is to examine the possibilities of applying the environmental history of the borderlands of Central Europe, focusing attention on the relationship of man with nature and on the cross-border ecological ties that have developed since 1980s.



Suggested topics

The changing relationship between humans and the land in the borderlands: how much convergence has there been in the East, the West and between the two?

The role of agriculture and industry in the borderlands: between exploitation and recultivation?

The rise of environmental protection in cross-border areas: standardization and best practices.

Tourism in the borderlands: is it a threat, or a blessing?

Management of natural disasters and cross-border cooperation.

Presentations should be no more than 20 minutes long and delivered in English. Travel costs as well as accommodation will be reimbursed for invited speakers. A peer-reviewed publication of selected papers is planned.

Please send an abstract of your presentation (about 300 words) as well as a short CV to Kateřina Vnoučková at katerina.vnouckova@fsv.cuni.cz by 30 May 2019. Successful candidates will be informed shortly thereafter.

The workshop will take place on 20 September 2019 at the Faculty of Social Sciences, Charles University, Smetanovo nábřeží 6, Prague.

The workshop is organized in the framework of the research network 'The Border in the National and Transnational Cultures of Remembrance between Czechia and Bavaria (2017–2020)', which is funded by the Bavarian-Czech Academic Agency. More information about the network can be found at <https://www.uni-regensburg.de/bohemicum/forschung/forschungsverbund-grenzen-n-in-erinnerungskulturen/index.html>

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