

## EXPLORING TRANSNATIONALISM IN ENVIRONMENTAL HISTORY: PARK SYSTEM PLANNING, RIVER FLOODS, AND LIVESTOCK DISEASES IN THE NORTH ATLANTIC WORLD

GHI-sponsored panel at the European Society for Environmental History Conference, Amsterdam, June 5–9, 2007. Organizer: Uwe Lübken (GHI). Chair: Christof Mauch (University of Munich). Panelists: Dorothee Brantz (SUNY, Buffalo), Uwe Lübken (GHI), Sonja Dümpelmann (Auburn University).

In recent years, comparative history, understood as the analysis of developments in different but similar nation-states, has been increasingly supplanted by transcultural, cross-national, or transnational perspectives. While it is difficult to keep track of the ever-growing transnational literature on social, political, and cultural issues, environmental history is still a field where this approach has hardly been tested. The panel “Exploring Transnationalism in Environmental History,” chaired by Christof Mauch at the ESEH Conference held in June 2007, aimed to explore the problems and potential insights of a transnational project in this field of historical inquiry.

Dorothee Brantz’s paper on “Canned Pigs and Delirious Cows on the Move” examined the historical problematic of the transfer of livestock diseases across the Atlantic. Whereas many livestock diseases originally had been imported to the Americas during the colonial period, the nineteenth-century expansion of US economic markets also brought them back across the Atlantic. Focusing on the specific examples of pleuropneumonia and trichinosis, Brantz demonstrated that the threat of livestock diseases led to economic embargos and diplomatic crises in the late nineteenth century, when many European countries banned the import of American livestock and meat products. Based on these empirical examples, Brantz then addressed the question of how recent debates about transnationalism might also apply to the field of environmental history. Insisting that the notion of transfer should not be regarded as an exclusively cultural category, as is often done in contemporary debates about transnationalism, she argued that historians also need to pay attention to material and environmental circumstances, as well as to transfers across species lines. Such a broadened conception of transfer might enable historians to uncover the broad implications of local and global networks and of the unintended consequences that often grow out of transnational exchanges. As Brantz pointed out, the transfer of livestock diseases is not

only a historical phenomenon, but is also a problem that continues in the present, as recent incidents of foot and mouth disease, BSE (mad cow disease), and avian flu indicate.

Uwe Lübken's presentation also related to the argument for a transnational environmental history. His paper, on river floods and flood control in Germany and the United States, provided another suitable example of the analysis of transnational aspects of environmental history. Physically, river floods are the most common global hazard. Furthermore, natural forces in general, and rivers in particular, know no political boundaries. Although rivers are often used to demarcate different political entities, they easily cross state lines and ignore non-natural divisions. At the same time, floods are most often a local or regional phenomenon. If more than one region is affected, however, the problem quickly becomes a matter for international rather than national action. But floods are often turned into a question of national concern because the nation-state is generally viewed as the most appropriate "container" to deal with problems of flood control and flood relief. Furthermore, the nation-state has played a vital role in how natural catastrophes have been perceived and represented. Having outlined this framework, Lübken examined different strategies of risk management in the Rhineland and the Ohio Valley in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, analyzing the relationship between local actors and the federal governments. Using the Rhine and the Ohio Rivers as examples, he explored transatlantic connections, transfers, and entanglements in the history of river floods, such as the exchange of flood-control knowledge, the dissemination of flood-control discourses, and the flow of relief money.

In her paper on "Municipal and Metropolitan Park System Planning as an International Phenomenon," Sonja Dümpelmann showed that the environmental aspects of city planning at the beginning of the twentieth century, such as municipal and metropolitan park system planning, were a result of the transnational transfer of planning concepts, as well as ideas of nature and the city. In the early 1900s, municipal and metropolitan park system planning as a component of city planning became increasingly relevant on both sides of the Atlantic. Using the examples of the park system plans for Chicago, Berlin, and Rome, Dümpelmann discussed how ideas concerning parks and park systems were adopted in their respective countries. Besides discussing the transfer of planning models and of subsequent parallel developments in these cities, Dümpelmann illustrated how park systems were used as a means to foster local and national identities while at the same time initiating environmental planning on larger scales. She pointed out that some of the early park system and city planners who promoted nationwide or even international programs that involved neighboring nations (and thereby crossed politi-

cal borders) anticipated current initiatives such as the Pan-European ecological network, as well as European and North American greenway associations. Thus the story of the park systems' inception is a transnational one that still continues today.

The three conference papers used examples from the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth century, when strategies were developed to bolster local, regional, and national identities, and when it became increasingly clear to political, social, cultural, and economic leaders that problems and issues concerning the natural and urban environment also had to be dealt with on larger scales that transcended political boundaries. Environmental calamities like river floods and epidemics crossed borders, while cities in different nations were dealing with similar problems, such as unsanitary conditions in overcrowded urban centers. It therefore seems that transnational approaches in environmental history could be an especially adept way to research the flows of knowledge and information concerning environmental issues in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, while at the same time providing a tool to discern local, regional, and national peculiarities.

*Dorothee Brantz and Sonja Dümpelmann*