

Call for Papers: “Rivers, Cities, Historical Interactions”

Rachel
Carson
Center

Conference at the Rachel Carson Center for Environment and Society (RCC), LMU Munich, Germany

21– 23 February 2013

Conveners: Martin Knoll (Darmstadt Technical University), Uwe Lübken (RCC), Dieter Schott (Darmstadt Technical University)

What is the river’s place in urban history? The historical co-evolution of cities and rivers is a research topic that requires both an urban and an environmental perspective. Rivers have been essential to the foundation, growth, prosperity and development of many major cities around the world. At the same time, cities have considerably altered rivers and created their own hydraulic regimes. Rivers perform a variety of fundamental functions for the cities they touch, providing transport, energy, food, drinking water, and a site for leisure. They are concurrently universal sinks for waste. Rivers protect cities, as well as link cities to each other, attracting traffic from far afield via natural fords or bridges. Whereas cities tried to control and manage their rivers for centuries, these attempts have never been fully successful due to the natural dynamics of rivers. Enormous variations in water discharge due to frequent floods could result in heavy damages to urban infrastructure and drinking water contamination by pathogens transported from riverine landscapes, which heavily affected urban populations.

This conference will explore city-river relations as an essential part of urban environmental history. We want to apply a comparative perspective, both in chronological and regional terms, focusing on cities in different world regions. We are interested in long-term legacies, as well as in fundamental change in city-river relations between pre-industrial and industrialized societies. Therefore, a first focus will be laid on pre-modern cities. During this “Age of Water” (in André Guillerme’s terms), the adaptation of local watercourses played a crucial role for urban development and economy. Major manipulations of rivers already took place in this period but are still underestimated in current research. The second part will concentrate on the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Industrialization then offered new technologies to cross hitherto un-bridged rivers, to link “new” rail transport to “traditional” (but machine driven) river transport, to create artificial river beds on large spatial scales, and to reshape the course of rivers to accommodate new functions, such as extensive urban ports, industrial parks, hydro-power stations, etc.

We are looking for contributions that re-think cities as elements of highly dynamic fluvial landscapes, and that re-think urban rivers as perceived and manipulated parts of urban infrastructure. In particular, we encourage proposals that address RCC’s major research topics:

- Transformation of landscapes (urban rivers and the transformation of cityscapes)
- Natural catastrophes and cultures of risk
- Scarcity of resources (rivers as urban resources)
- Perception, knowledge, and culture

Please send a proposal of no more than 500 words and a brief CV by email to:
conferences@carsoncenter.lmu.de

The deadline for submissions is August 1, 2012. Participants will be notified by mid-September.

The conference will be held in English and will focus on the discussion of pre-circulated papers of about 5,000 to 7,000 words (due a month before the conference) that have not already been published nor are under consideration for publishing. The RCC will cover participants' travel and accommodation costs.

We plan to publish a collected volume consisting of works from this conference and other pertinent events.

If you have any further questions, please don't hesitate to contact us:

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