

CfP “How New Are the Renewables? Historicizing Energy Transitions”

Conference at the Deutsches Museum, to coincide with the special exhibition *energie.wenden*

21–23 February 2018

Organizers: Sarah Kellberg, Deutsches Museum; Patrick Kupper, Innsbruck University; Helmut Trischler, Rachel Carson Center/Deutsches Museum

In view of dwindling natural resources and, in particular, the threat of rising global temperatures, we will need to reconsider our global energy networks entirely over the coming decades. Both in terms of energy consumption, which will have to be uncoupled from economic growth and substantially reduced, but also in terms of the ways that energy is produced. Bioenergy, hydropower, wind, solar, and geothermal energy should replace fossil fuels and thus remove carbon dioxide from the energy equation. Whether nuclear power should also be reduced, if not fully abandoned, or, alternatively, become a major player in the new energy economies, is a contentious question. Different states are currently pursuing different strategies.

In discussions about *energy transitions*, renewable energy is often presented as a “new” resource. However, the exploitation of biomass and hydropower have a long history (one predating the adoption of fossil fuels) as does the exploitation of the “new” renewable resources of wind, solar power, and geothermal energy, all of which have been used for decades, or even centuries. Thus, we observe that alternative energies have always competed with fossil fuels, yet their usage has been marginalized or their development obstructed or prevented by the prevalence of coal and oil. With the exception of the large-scale development of hydroelectric plants, historical energy transitions have advanced our societies over the past 200 years, with their basis in non-renewable resources. In light of the global challenges facing this form of energy economy, the history of alternative energy since industrialization looks rather like a history of missed opportunities.

This workshop looks at the social contexts that drive people to advocate the use of renewable energies. Which social contexts encourage the adoption of alternative energies, and which hinder it? What role is played by political actors and social models, economic and technical rationales, the availability of natural resources, or the actions of individuals or societies in limiting energy production or consumption? Which differences and similarities can be seen in an international or transnational comparison?

We are looking for studies of the history of specific renewable energies (wind power, solar power, etc.) and their applications (as fuel, heating, electric power, etc.) as well as case studies analyzing the history of renewables in a particular time period and region (e.g. in Nazi Germany, (post-)colonial India, or in the USA during the 1970s). We especially welcome comparative approaches. We are focusing mainly on the time period following the industrial revolution.

Transport and accommodation costs for participants can be covered. Please send proposals with an abstract of 300–400 words and a short CV (in a single file) to conferences@rcc.lmu.de by **31 August 2017**. Successful applicants will be asked to submit a 3000-4000 word manuscript by 31 January 2018. We aim to publish the findings.

For further information or in case of any questions, please contact either Patrick Kupper (patrick.kupper@uibk.ac.at) or Helmuth Trischler (h.trischler@deutsches-museum.de).