

Call for Papers: European Association of Urban History, 11th Conference on Urban History “Cities and Societies in Comparative Perspective, 29th August-1st September 2012 Prague, Czech Republic; Deadline for submission of paper proposals: 1st October 2011

Session: Cities and rivers – long term development of socio-natural sites

Organizers: Dieter Schott (TU Darmstadt, Germany), Martin Knoll (TU Darmstadt, Germany), Martin Schmid (Center for Environmental History Vienna, Austria)

Section: Main session

Period: All periods

What is the river's place in urban history? The historical co-evolution of cities and rivers is a research topic that needs a combined perspective of urban with environmental history. Rivers have been essential for the foundation, growth, prosperity and development of many major cities in Europe. Cities have considerably altered river stretches and hydraulic regimes. Rivers perform a variety of basal functions for the cities they touch: transport, energy, food, drinking water, leisure site, at the same time they are universal sinks for waste. Rivers protect and link cities to each other, via natural fords or bridges they attract traffic from far afield. 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 with frequent floods could result in heavy damages of urban infrastructure, pathogens from riverine landscapes, diffused by contaminated drinking water heavily affected urban populations. Rivers are an essential part of Europe's urban history. This panel approaches city-river relations in a comparative perspective, both in chronological and regional respect. The session's first part will focus on medieval and pre-modern cities. During this »Age of Water« – in André Guillerme's terms – the adaption 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 session's second part will concentrate on the 19th and 20th century. Industrialization then offered new technologies to span hitherto unbridged rivers, to link 'new' rail transport to 'traditional' (but machine driven) river transport, to create artificial river beds on large spatial scales, to reshape the course of rivers to accommodate new functions such as extensive urban ports, industrial parks, hydro-power stations etc. With such a long-term approach from medieval to contemporary times, the panel aims to identify and discuss long term legacies as well as fundamental changes in city-river relations. As a common conceptual framework we suggest to approach cities and rivers as »socio-natural sites« (Winiwarter & Schmid 2008) and therefore as hybrids between nature, society and culture.

We seek for contributions re-thinking cities as elements of highly dynamic fluvial landscapes, and re-thinking urban rivers as perceived and manipulated parts of urban infrastructure. In particular we encourage proposals which:

- identify **turning points** in the development of city-river-relations, or
- investigate **spatial interfaces** between cities and rivers, such as bridges, ports, promenades, flood plains, sewage plants, freshwater reservoirs etc., and their transformation over time, or
- focus on **energy** as an important link between nature and society and thus a way of approaching cities and rivers as socio-natural sites, that includes issues like kinetic energy use, the role of river transport for feeding and fuelling cities (e. g. fuel wood), riverine landscapes as a source of nutrients, food and fodder, etc,

- follow or open up a comparative perspective within or between river basins, within or across periods from late medieval till recent times

Please send an abstract of up to 250 words and a short academic CV to Dieter Schott (schott@pg.tu-darmstadt.de)

Deadline for submission: October 1st 2011.