

In Movement: New Histories of Environmental Movements

Rachel
Carson
Center

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Conveners: Frank Uekötter (Rachel Carson Center) & Jan-Henrik Meyer (Aarhus University/RCC)

Presenters: Tilmann Disselhoff (Berlin Institute of Technology), Raffael Fischer (University of Lucerne), Tilmann Grabbe (University of Marburg), Ute Hasenöhr (IRS Erkner), Richard Hölzl (University of Göttingen), Karena Kalmbach (EUI Florence), Astrid M. Kirchhof (Humboldt University of Berlin), Christof Mauch (Rachel Carson Center), Jan-Henrik Meyer, Christian Möller (Bielefeld University), Kevin Niebauer (Free University of Berlin), Jana Piňosova (University of Bonn), Michael Schüring (RCC), Thorsten Schulz (University of Cologne), Frank Uekötter, Tim Warneke (University of Heidelberg), and Anna Katharina Wöbse (University of Geneva)

The history of the environmental movement is a classic theme of environmental history research. In recent years, however, this field of inquiry has become noticeably more active. The question of how to write about contemporary green movements is now more open than ever before. This workshop, hosted by the Rachel Carson Center, aimed to offer a sort of interim assessment of events as well as an opportunity to discuss research goals and problems. The invited speakers were primarily doctoral students; the event also served as a RCC young researchers' meeting.

Following **CHRISTOF MAUCH**'s brief opening speech and introduction to the Rachel Carson Center, **JAN-HENRIK MEYER**'s introduction (Aarhus University/RCC) emphasized the challenges of a new environmental history. As well as new topics concerning ideas, personalities, and structures, he called for openness towards new research definitions, perspectives, and approaches. This would allow for a new angle on "traditional" topics such as conceptions of nature, organizational structure, and policy. For example, against the background of the current critical diagnosis of globalization, we might think about transnational exchange among environmental movements, which have, until now, been researched almost exclusively within national boundaries. Comparative, as well as transnational, transfer analyses are useful here. Meyer discerned new research definitions including non-ecological aspects—economic or security-related, for instance—as particularly fruitful, and advocated for the inclusion of social science perspectives in the debate about conceptualizing the environmental movement. How, and when, might environmental movements best be understood and studied as interest groups, as organizations, as (new) social movements, or as part of civil society?

In the first panel, “International Networks,” **ANNA KATHARINA WÖBSE** (University of Geneva) set out her aim to write a history of global environmental governance together with Matthias Schulz and François Walter. The focus of the project is the period 1945–1975, which stands out through the conjunctions of environment and economy and resources and conservation. The original idea of researching international debate about the concepts of air, water, and earth was discarded due to the inseparable relationship between these concepts. The term “Global Environmental Governance” is an open working concept, reflecting the varied and changing patterns of individuals and private and public institutions. A structural analysis of the four United Nations organizations—UNESCO, FAO, ECOSOC and WHO—will form the basis of a transnational environmental history. Image and film sources are the primary focal point of her research.

In the second paper of this panel, **JAN-HENRIK MEYER** presented his research on the European Environmental Bureau (EEB) and the collaboration of environmental groups in 1970s Europe. Here, Meyer used the image of a knot as metaphor for a compaction point in the relationships between environmental groups and European institutions. At the same time, he posed the question of how the establishment of a European Community (EC) environmental policy affected environmental associations. Next, he explained the structures that arose, and identified the significant actors. Despite the rather casual nature of its foundation in 1974, the EEB quickly became a semi-official association, which cultivated very close links to the EC commission and also profited considerably from it in financial terms. Using avian protection and the nuclear conflict as examples, Meyer demonstrated the sophistication of the EEB's “knot” function. In closing, he tried to show how the history of environmental movements will benefit from his observations. On one hand, he stressed the particular characteristics of transnational cooperation, such as language barriers, geographical distance, and symbiotic closeness to the European institutions, which caused particular path dependencies. On the other, he pointed to the fact that many phenomena—such as the problems of professionalization, or the politicization of environmental movements in the 1970s, as well as the problem of excessive government control—are also typical of the history of environmental movements in general. The panel “Paths into the Environmental Age” was opened by **JANA PIŇOSOVA** (University of Bonn), who presented her dissertation project, “The History of Conservation Movements in the Czech Republic, 1918–1938.” Her aim is to work on the actors involved and their concepts of nature in order to be able to more closely define and understand the conservation movement. The following questions are central here: To what degree did the foundation of the republic defeat the concepts and actions of the conservation movement? What other factors helped or hindered the movement in realizing its aims? According to Piňosova's hypothesis, the conservation movement contributed significantly to the building of the republic. She bases this hypothesis primarily on the actors who, coming from a bourgeois milieu, played a significant role in shaping the state. She sees the transmission of values as a tangible contribution of the conservation movement. Thus, conserva-

tion became part of the school curriculum, the protection of environment and homeland was advertised in cinemas, and research and administrative institutes were created. Furthermore, Piňosova argued that the conservation movement was divided along national lines. Although many German ideas were adopted, this remained unspoken within the Czech-dominated conservation movement, in which the Slovaks also played a subordinate role—unlike the Slovakian environment, which was accorded a particular importance.

THORSTEN SCHULZ (University of Cologne) spoke about his work on the integration principle of NATO Committee on the Challenges of Modern Society (CCMS), established in 1969. According to his hypothesis, this was an achievement of American and European environmental planners, who were trying to increase social unrest. Here the interaction of state and society is particularly evident, as the line of attack was as much social as political: enforcing a positive image for NATO, while the individual actors argued for the new political caucus. Their main demographic was the postwar generation: the student, anti-war, and environmental movements. Schulz identified the combination of politically and environmentally motivated demands within the student movement that also concerned transnational alliance politics. A further problem was the lack of long-term qualified personnel. Therefore, the aim was to recruit environmentally conscious volunteer brigades. According to Schulz, the CCMS sought to open up a new sphere of influence through the discourse of NATO security and the environmental movement. Advancing towards a federal system of safeguards, the CCMS contributed to the impression of increased NATO engagement and, with that, its consolidation. State and security would once more converge, security crises would be minimized, and societal stability guaranteed. Within the NATO debate, the environmental movement played a crucial role as a key argument for socio-political and societal security.

In his paper, **MICHAEL SCHÜRING** (RCC) spoke about the conjunction of contemporary church history and the history of environmental movements. He explained to what great extent the environmental movement makes use of religious imagery, apocalyptic expectations, calls to renunciation, and an associated zeal, while the significant role of churches as a resonance space for social debate must also be recognized. Despite this, churches are missing from the history of the environmental movement. His theory is that, alongside the ongoing process of secularization, scientists especially have predominantly been socialized outside the religious sphere. Moreover, the search for religious identity is nowadays privatized and pluralized. Therefore, the secularization paradigm has led to the existence of blind spots in the history of the environmental movements. There is a great deal of new information to be gathered, especially within the anti-nuclear movement. Schüring hypothesizes a sort of redirection activity at work, against the background of criticism of the ministerial church's passivity during the Nazi period. For him, the starting point of the church's engagement

with the environment is not the recent retreat to the *status confessionis*, but the commitment to resist a life-threatening development.

On the second day of the conference, the panel “Interrelations and Transfer Processes” was opened by **KARENA KALMBACH** (EUI Florence), whose dissertation project is a comparative analysis of the Chernobyl debate in France, Italy, and the United Kingdom. Her primary focal point is the memory history of the 1996 and 2006 anniversaries, taking the individual actors and the general framework of their perceptions into account. Kalmbach distinguished three categories of comparison: First of all, personal affectedness (*Selbstbetroffenheit*), that is, the perception of the event as local or the incorporation of the disaster into national nuclear policy. Secondly, using the competing narratives of apocalypse and radiophobia, she analyses the formative mindscape of the contemporary media coverage. This should reveal the individual actors and their interpretative power. Thirdly, she introduces the solidarity movement. By looking at the offers of assistance, she aims to define the perception of victimhood and clarify whether this is an expression of externalized or internalized fear.

ASTRID M. KIRCHHOF (Humboldt University of Berlin) likewise gave an account of transnational interconnectedness, referring to the transfer of ideas between the German and Australian environmental movements. Alongside the individual personalities and institutions, she also aims to take gender-specific patterns of action into account. Despite the obvious differences originating in geographical and demographic conditions, Kirchhof demonstrated clear thematic parallels and an intense interconnection. The contact between Petra Kelly and the Australian doctor and anti-nuclear activist Helen Caldicott, in particular, served as evidence for the reciprocal exchange. As well as their common attendance at meetings and campaigns and their participation in the anti-nuclear congress, Kirchhof designates Kelly's reference to the Australian "Green Ban" movement as a key moment: the "Green" idea was imported to Germany. She sees their respective formative experiences in the United States as one source of similarity between the two activists. Although not equivalent in content, the two movements inspired each other, and symbols, concepts, and ideas were transferred between them.

The focus of the second panel was “German National Environmental Movements.” **TILMANN GRABBE** (University of Marburg) presented his PhD project: a history of knowledge about the environment in the Federal Republic of the 1980s. The basis of his central hypothesis, that the environment was ecologically perceived from about 1970, is the triumph of the concept of ecology as a science with holistic claims. Thus, knowledge of the environment comes mainly from systematic, cybernetic, and ecological methods originating from a broad dissemination of scientific and mathe-

mathematical thought. The opening-up of reality through scientific and mathematical models shows the increasing significance of the computer. By analysing works of fiction and non-fiction, Grabbe sets out to prove that scientific interpretation is determinant of reality. His aim is to thoroughly analyze and historicize the construction of environmental knowledge.

In his presentation, **CHRISTIAN MÖLLER** (Bielefeld University) presented his dissertation project: a look at the narrative of the environmental movement of the DDR. Through an analysis of citizens' petitions to the Environmental Ministry as a key grievance mechanism, he is researching the perception of problems and environmentally oriented action. This serves to elucidate the mutual relationships between environmental damage, perception, and praxis, and how conservation functions in a dictatorship. The Western perspective, which has dominated until now, will be broken down with the use of a source base that allows the individual actors to speak. Similarly, he aims to close the breaches in environmental history, which excludes the DDR by virtue of its special conditions. In addition, Möller refers to the petitions as a mechanism of political campaigning, and to their varying structures and arguments: from the selfishly motivated individual petition to the collective petition, which is informed by specialist knowledge and which displays a great structural similarity to the citizen initiatives of the BRD.

In the panel "Histories of Movements on the Internet," **FRANK UEKÖTTER** (RCC) presented his online project "Ecological Places of Memory." Although he is working with Pierre Nora's definition, he referred to the particular characteristics of ecological "places," for the emotional and historical dimension must often be made explicitly clear. Starting from the current environmental debate, Uekötter proposes to depict those events that are surrounded by a particular mythos to a broad, ecologically aware audience. Unlike the classic omnibus volume, an internet publication allows a more flexible, intuitive approach, as the landscape of memory for this topic must first be developed. Contemporary eyewitness accounts, reader comments, and the possibility of voting on whether the object described really is a place of memory will give the project an affirmative character. Uekötter justified the German remit of the project with reference to the group-specific nature of the memories. However, he pointed to the possibility of an international perspective, perhaps through comparative studies of reception, the search for identical myths, or a way of seeing memory as a biophysical process in the landscape.

Concerning international perspectives, **TILMANN DISSELHOFF** (Berlin Institute of Technology) outlined the significance to conservation of the protection of non-sovereign lands in the panel "International Environmental Movements: Aims and Ideas." In his dissertation he addresses this phenomenon, which he encountered as a consultant for the EU. Although the practice of acquiring non-

sovereign lands under private law presented a particular conservational concern from the start, until now it has not appeared in the history of conservation. Disselhoff wants to fathom the significance of this measure: How great were the resources? Did the involved actors change their position? What self-concept did the conservation movement display in its role as steward? Likewise, he aims to analyze the consequences of this differentiation. Since the protection of non-sovereign lands has a long tradition in the Anglo-Saxon realm, Disselhoff chose the US land-trust movement as research object. Its enormous growth over the last twenty years leads him to the hypothesis that also in Europe the significance of non-sovereign land acquisition will grow and lead to a specific organizational formation in the future.

In his presentation, **TIM WARNEKE** (University of Heidelberg) demonstrated the relationship between criticism and metaphysics in the thought of the alternative movements. According to his hypothesis, not only pragmatic motivations are evident here. Above all, individual utopias seem to have been influenced by the search for good order. Whether social criticism aimed for a change in the status quo or a fundamental transformation, it always needed points of reference outside society. He pointed to the fact that utopias are fundamentally influenced by metaphysical elements. As an example, he cited critiques of consumerism—seen as an undesirable lifestyle—which reached their peak in the 1970s. Metaphysical approaches to war and armaments can also be found. Debate was no longer shaped by a concrete threat to democracy, but by a general assumption of metaphysical incompatibility. Thus, according to Warneke, the utopia of the environmental movement consisted in the construction of a humanistic ideal society, seeking binding guidelines and the restoration of a clearly ordered cosmos.

In the subsequent panel, “International Environmental Movements: Actors and Policies,” **KEVIN NIEBAUER** (Free University of Berlin) presented his Master’s thesis on José Lutzenberger’s ideas and strategies. Niebauer emphasized the transnational processes evident in Lutzenberger’s biography. His significance is particularly central here: Should Lutzenberger be seen as an environmental activist, as the green conscience of the Amazon, even as a representative of the South, where conservation was believed to be unknown? Niebauer asks whether this European romanticization is not a rewriting of the story on an individual level. What at first glance looks like a success story ultimately reveals itself more as a symbolic one. Lutzenberger’s constant absence due to his international activities, the mistrust of other environmentalists in his homeland, the scarce contact with those affected—all this is evidence for a different interpretation of his role, which becomes clear through a transnational comparison.

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In his dissertation, **RAFFAEL FISCHER** (University of Lucerne) highlights politicians’ handling of nature and conservation in the example of Switzerland, 1947–2007. His focus is the question of how environmental policy is made. In his view, the significance of individual issues changes according to functionalization. Fischer divides his research into three periods and sets out their characteristic issues: Firstly, the conservation of 1947–1967, with the protection of water and opposition to hydroelectric plants; secondly, the environmental movement of the 1970s and 1980s, with its emphasis on anti-nuclear issues and the criticism of excessive road building; and thirdly, from 1991, the path to sustainability, with questions of genetic engineering, organic farming, climate change, and energy politics. His intention is to focus on the individual actors, their motives, and the way in which their issues find their way into policy. In order to give adequate consideration to the actors, Fischer decided to structure his dissertation as an oral history project. By interviewing eyewitnesses, he tries to grasp the changing ecological discourse and to qualify the question of how problems are defined as environmental.

RICHARD HÖLZL (University of Göttingen) and **UTE HASENÖHRL** (IRS Erkner) concluded the final day of the conference by reviewing the question: “How do we write the history of an environmental association today?” Their presentation referred to the book project, planned together with Frank Uekötter, for the centenary of the Bavarian Conservation League (BCL). Their aim is to write an environmental history of conservation in Bavaria with particular reference to the BCL. In the introduction, Frank Uekötter will discuss the findings of the project in the German and international context. The contributions by Hölzl and Hasenöhr, which are divided into pre- and postwar eras, are structured as a contextualized organizational history. In conclusion, the key findings will be reviewed for their impact on the current club and conservation work of the BCL. The authors aim to write a history of the club, analyzing three interrelated aspects. Firstly,

the organization itself: its construction, its supporters and key individuals, and its embeddedness in institutional networks. Secondly, the significance of nature; and thirdly, the practice of conservation, which will be explored through local case studies. Along with the classic textual layout, self-contained information sections will elaborate on important points.

In the lively closing debate it was clear that, despite transnational interconnections, new histories are still strongly influenced by national ideas. Whether this concerns only the institutional framework or also the cultural sphere could not entirely be determined. This certainly demonstrates the importance of observing individual actors within the history of movements. Furthermore, with regard to the environmental movement, a consensus was reached to define the years from 1970 as a distinct era, as it finally brought the—increasingly significant—environmental movement of the nation states one of the few expanding policy fields. The concept of “movement” was also debated to the last. It has repeatedly been shown to what extent government initiatives monopolize debate; it is often a matter of a network of elites. The call for more critical distance towards the environmental movement also caused much discussion. Since many of the research projects presented involved working with eyewitnesses, the methodological problems of maintaining balance in the writing of history were discussed. These projects, primarily conducted by graduate students, demonstrate the considerable interest of this emerging field of inquiry.

Sarah Waltenberger