Mobility and Environment

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Conveners: Arbeitskreis Verkehr in der Gesellschaft für Technikgeschichte and the Rachel Carson Center for Environment and Society (RCC): Christopher Kopper (University of Bielefeld), Christopher Neumaier (Zentrum für Zeithistorische Forschung (ZZF)), Helmuth Trischler (Rachel Carson Center and Deutsches Museum)

Mobility, transport, and the environment are closely intertwined fields that structure society. Motorized means of transport and their physical infrastructures are responsible for a considerable portion of environmentally relevant emissions, noise pollution, and the consumption of space. On the other hand, new concepts of mobility have fuelled the growing discourse about sustainability and ecological justice. The policies and politics of transport and the environment are closely connected with close causal interdependencies. However, the dimension of historical experience is mostly absent from contemporary discourses about conflicts between transport and the environment—the topics and methods of environmental history are only partially integrated into the history of transport, traffic, and mobility.

The joint conference of the Arbeitskreis Verkehrsgeschichte and the Rachel Carson Center addressed these research gaps and examined environmentally relevant aspects of transport, traffic, and mobility from a historical perspective. The papers thus broadened our understanding of how mobility, environment, politics, and society are intertwined. Moreover, they delivered ample evidence that revealed how concepts of mobility and environmental concerns are linked to specific historical contexts.

The first section analysed how rail transport has been shaped by economy and ecology. In particular, **DIRK STEFFEN** and **DIRK METZLER** (Basel) reviewed the ecological aspects of rail cargo in Switzerland. Giving a short description of the history of railroad freight, they first pointed out several key events that continue to have an effect on rail transport, such as the 1970s energy crises. In the second part of the paper, the presenters discussed the current situation of SBB cargo

in Switzerland, which is constricted by national and European legislation on market regulation and environmental standards.

While their paper hinted at possible market strategies that allow for compliance with both requirements, the second section of the conference dealt with the shaping of the countryside between the nineteenth century and the end of the Second World War by traffic. **ZEF SEGAL** (Tel Aviv) asked how railroad infrastructure was fitted into the countryside during the nineteenth century. Claiming that nature is socially constructed, he showed how painted postcards portrayed the countryside, railroad tracks, and trains. Segal also identified several key themes that can be linked to specific historical contexts. Initially, trains and railroad were naturalized, i.e., they were depicted as symbiotic partners of the landscape. In the paintings, life continued harmoniously while the surrounding nature shifted and trains became a part of it. This fostered a growing acceptance of trains in Germany. In the late nineteenth century, the paintings changed: the impact of industrialization and the role of railroads were put on display. Since most of the paintings that were analysed were sponsored by railroad companies or tourist companies, their intentions still need to be reviewed. Moreover, this type of source needs to be compared with other images of rail traffic. Nevertheless, Segal's paper strongly contributed to our general understanding of how paintings can be used as a source for historical research. **SYLVIA NECKER** (Munich) added to the idea of traffic infrastructure shaping the countryside in her presentation on "embedded mobility." She focused on the concepts of road, countryside, and native Germany as discussed by the architect Alwin Seifert. He aimed, for instance, to model roads as parts of the "organic" countryside. Thus, he planned to embed the autobahn into the German scenery, a topos that was heavily used during National Socialism.

The third section of the conference moved to two wheelers and their significance as alternative traffic concepts. **PETER COX**'s paper (Chester/RCC) addressed the nexus between cycling, environmentalism, and social change in Great Britain during the 1970s. He scrutinized how cycling caused the emergence of environmental awareness. According to Cox, cycling was a way to transform the environment. But it also went beyond that,—three different types of protest groups were closely linked to cycling as a form of social protest. The first group formed a general opposition to the road program planned by the British government. New radical campaigning groups for environmentalism such as Friends of the Earth were also connected to cycling. Third, direct action groups considered the bike to be an alternative to the car. Cox's approach mainly presented the complexity of social protest from a bottom-up perspective. **RUTH OLDENZIEL** (Eindhoven), in contrast, chose a different angle. She reviewed how two-wheelers such as bikes, motorbikes, and e-bikes represent an alternative mobility concept to the use of cars in China. The

growing number of cars poses a major dilemma for the Chinese government. On the one hand, the purchase of cars is promoted because it fosters economic growth. On the other hand, the driving of cars is discouraged since it causes both severe gridlocks in major urban areas and heavy environmental pollution. In order to solve these problems, the Chinese government propagates the use of two-wheelers. Bikes, however, are not yet embraced by Chinese consumers because of class issues, especially since car ownership is far more prestigious. Currently, politicians, city planners, and mobility experts intend to test several options in Shanghai, China's laboratory, in order to increase consumer acceptance of two-wheelers.

Mobility and travel were at the center of the next pair of papers. **PHILIPP PLATTNER** (Innsbruck) explored mobility concepts in the Middle Ages. His case study on Duke Leopold III from Austria revealed the embeddedness of mobility in geographical circumstances, weather, and seasons. The travels of Leopold III were also determined by his needs as a ruler to visit most parts of his dominion to exercise power. Other motives for travelling appeared in **MORITZ GLASER**'s paper (Kiel). Leisure—apart from economic prosperity—was the driving force that initiated mass tourism in Spain in the 1950s. In the beginning, Spanish politicians, local tourist agencies, and residents primarily viewed the environment as an infrastructure that guaranteed tourism. This shifted as a growing number of tourists travelled to Spain and environmental pollution increased. This development started to threaten the very basis of tourism and triggered a critical debate, in which many motives were at play. Glaser claimed that the assumption of a linear progress from tourism to a growing environmental consciousness was not supported by his sources. Rather, he pointed to a complex negotiation process where local perspectives, national goals, and international debates clashed.

The problem of traffic gridlocks was at the center of the final section. **MASSIMO MORAGLIO** (Berlin) examined the reasons for a light rail renaissance in Europe. As car mobility caused problems such as the congestion of inner cities or pollution in the 1970s, light rail appeared as a solution. It was a cost-effective, efficient, and tried and tested system. Consequently, several European cities such as Strasbourg embraced this idea. During the 1980s, the popularity of this mobility concept further increased. It was promoted as a factor that induced urban renewal. Light rail transport enabled consumers to travel swiftly from the outskirts to the city centers. Moreover, it considerably reduced environmental pollution, since fewer cars entered the cities. Nevertheless, Moraglio indicated that light rail systems have only had a minor impact on transport in Europe. The Rise of the Airport Sprawl was the topic of **BRED EDWARDS**'s paper (Toronto), with a special focus on the airports in Vancouver and Montreal. Building these airports, the Canadian government, experts, planners, and local residents had to negotiate the consequences of the growing noise

pollution caused by an increase in air travel. The problem also became a major concern since suburbanization brought residential areas closer to airports. Hence, the airport Montreal-Mirabel was built in a remote location and designed as vision for future air travel. Yet, travelers neither accepted its design nor its remote location away from the city center. Soon after its opening, passenger numbers tumbled and airlines thus decided to route their passengers via the old Montreal -Dorval airport..

Mobility and environment formed the core of this interdisciplinary workshop. The papers demonstrated how both environmental and mobility history strongly profit from a multi-perspective approach that allows the interdependencies between mobility, environment, and technological parameters as well as political and social interests to be highlighted.