

## ***Railroads and the Central European Environment***

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This research project examines the long-term effects of railroads on the landscapes and environments of Central Europe, from their earliest construction in the 1840s through today. Trains did not conquer nature, particularly not in Central Europe. Railroads made use of rivers and existing terrains to carve their paths, or built along canals and roads. Trees were felled by rail construction, yet forests benefitted from the shift to coal power over wood. Today, rail has become a symbol of ‘clean’ mobility, even as it remains a significant draw on mineral and energy resources. While railroads have irrevocably altered Central Europeans’ relationship to their ‘natural’ landscapes, they have also become part of those landscapes, and have powered visions for a greener future.

My aim is to show how Central Europe’s iron rails – as engines of industrialization – reshaped but also worked within existing landscapes and environments, creating their own panoply of ‘envirotechnical’ landscapes. As locomotives for modern capitalism, trains can easily be tied to the vast environmental changes wrought by industrialization generally. To avoid intellectual sprawl, my project focuses on the material manifestations of railroads. My three main interlaced themes encompass the topographic imprint of new tracks and locomotives, the environmental demands of powering them, and the remaking of environments through new mass mobility of goods and people. These three themes – land, fuel, and cargo – define the structure of the work.