

Urban Society and Environmental Change in Small and Mid-size Cities, ca. 1700-1900. Luisa Pichler-Baumgartner / Georg Stöger, Department of History, University of Salzburg, 10.03.2017–11.03.2017.

Reviewed by Doris Hörmann

Published on H-Soz-u-Kult (July, 2017)

On the 10th and 11th of March 2017 a workshop on the relations between social actors and urban environmental change was held at the University of Salzburg. Case studies on small and mid-sized cities in the period from the 18th to the 19th century were discussed. The event, which was funded by the University of Salzburg and the European Society for Environmental History (eseh), was organised by Luisa Pichler-Baumgartner and Georg Stöger from the Department of History.

The workshop was opened by ANSGAR SCHANBACHER (University of Göttingen) who investigated the concept of urban sustainability in central Europe in the 18th century. He introduced a set of ten elements, which might help examining sustainability in early modern European cities, such as resilience, sufficiency, geographical and geological factors, city networks, capacity for innovation and, conversely, ignorance. He exemplified this approach with his case study on the city of Brunswick, where changes of the urban environment have especially taken place when the city had to react to epidemics (e. g. the plague), crop failures or fires. The city government's and inhabitants' strategies of prevention and resilience have been pointed out as well.

MARC BANDITT (University of Potsdam) presented a case study on the environmental history of the city of Gdańsk (Poland) during the 18th and 19th century. Gdańsk is of special interest since it

was the first European city with both a water supply and a sewage system by the time of 1870. Banditt particularly asked how this implementation of a centralised infrastructure was shaped by change and persistence in the city's history. He emphasised the role of the urban scientific elite, which was engaging in transnational discussions on sanitation. Due to the lack of crucial sources, which can be explained by the political history of Gdańsk during the first half of the 19th century, not much is known about the changes and the discourse during this period. Banditt also briefly touched upon the issue of modernisation "from the top", which was expert-based and probably also driven by a certain competition between cities.

CHRISTIAN GEPP (University of Natural Resources and Life Sciences, Vienna) gave a presentation about his research on the "urbanity" of rural manufactory settlements ("single-factory-cities") in the Habsburg territories. He exemplified his approach by the "cities" of Nadelburg and Berndorf, both in Lower Austria, which were inspired by the concept of the "ideal city" by the French architect Claude-Nicolas Lexoux (1736-1806). Planned from scratch, these settlements included certain aspects of "nature" such as ponds and green space for growing fruit and for "leisure activities". They had similar necessities of water supply and sewage disposal as their urban counterparts, albeit on a different scale.

Yet, it seems that quasi-urban solutions have been implemented in rural areas.

ROBERT SKENDEROVIĆ (Croatian Institute of History, Zagreb) argued that the building of the fortress of Osijek (Slavonia) in the 18th century had the biggest environmental impact on the city and its hinterland in its history. When the city came under Habsburg rule during the Great Turkish War (1683-1699) and with the Muslims moving away, the population dropped drastically from about 15,000 to 600-800 inhabitants. Nonetheless, the Habsburg military decided to build a new fortress. Especially the need of timber for brick making resulted in severe changes of the urban hinterland. In addition, the repopulation and the Habsburg interests in this region led to further changes in the environment, such as swamp drainage.

GEORG STÖGER and LUISA PICHLER-BAUMGARTNER (both University of Salzburg) presented their paper on the introduction of water infrastructure and its actors in the Austrian city of Linz during the 18th and 19th century. Their main question was, when the already existing water-supply and sewage systems were considered as inefficient and when the discourse about their renewal set in. The houses in Linz, as in other cities, were traditionally supplied by a decentralized water infrastructure (wells, cesspools and privies), for which house owners were in charge of. The city council did not take over responsibility until the second half of the 19th century, when it voted for the implementation of a public sewage system, while a centralised water supply system should have been erected by a private company. These private efforts faced resistance by house owners, who feared the costs. Also, environmental injustice and inequality were addressed and exemplified by a micro-study on the hilly district of "Schullerberg".

ANNA AGAFONOVA (Cherepovets State University, Russia) researched the sanitary conditions and urban infrastructure of Vologda and Nov-

gorod regions during the late 19th and early 20th century. Agafonova detected a turning point in Russian urban environmental change when the responsibility for those issues was transferred to the municipal governments in 1870. During the first cholera epidemics in Russia in the 19th century, local sanitary commissions were responsible for investigating the sanitary conditions in public places, while urban pollution was monitored by the police. This system was highly inefficient and it was questioned by scientific advances such as the "bacteriological revolution", the professionalization of the medical personnel and by urban policies deriving from the central government.

In conclusion, the workshop showed the enormous potential in researching urban environmental history in small and mid-sized cities of the 18th and the 19th century with a special focus on the long term developments, the different human as well as non-human actors and their motives. The lively and stimulating discussion included annotations both on the theoretical and methodological approaches of the papers in view of a publication that will be the outcome of this conference.

Conference Overview:

Session 1

Ansgar Schanbacher (University of Göttingen): Sustainability in History – the Maintenance of Resources in 18th Century Braunschweig

Marc Banditt (University of Potsdam): At the Watershed of Modernity – Canalisation and Urban Elites in 19th Century Gdańsk

Session 2

Christian Gepp (University of Natural Resources and Life Sciences, Vienna): The "Urbanity" of Nadelburg and Berndorf

Robert Skenderović (Croatian Institute of History, Zagreb): Building a Fortress in Osijek as Environmental Change

Session 3

Georg Stöger / Luisa Pichler-Baumgartner
(University of Salzburg): Water and Society in
Linz (1700-1900)

Anna Agafonova (Cherepovets State University,
Russia): Urban Sanitation of the North Provinces
of the Russian Empire, 1870-1910s

Comments

Andreas Weigl (City and Provincial Archives
Vienna) / Angelika Möller (LMU Munich) / Martin
Knoll (University of Salzburg) / Reinhold Reith
(University of Salzburg)

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at
<http://hsozkult.geschichte.hu-berlin.de/>

Citation: Doris Hörmann. Review of *Urban Society and Environmental Change in Small and Mid-size Cities, ca. 1700-1900*. H-Soz-u-Kult, H-Net Reviews. July, 2017.

URL: <https://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=50255>



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No
Derivative Works 3.0 United States License.