

Essay Review

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POLITICS AND THE ‘ENVIRONMENT’
IN TWENTIETH-CENTURY GERMANY

Kai F. Hünemörder, *Die Frühgeschichte der globalen Umweltkrise und die Formierung der deutschen Umweltpolitik, 1950–1973* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2004), 388 pp., ISBN 3-51508-188-7

Frank Uekötter, *Von der Rauchplage zur ökologischen Revolution. Eine Geschichte der Luftverschmutzung in Deutschland und den USA 1880–1970* (Essen: Klartext Verlag, 2003), 640 pp., ISBN 3-89861-195-7

Dirk van Laak, *Imperiale Infrastruktur. Deutsche Planungen für eine Erschließung Afrikas 1880–1960* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh Verlag, 2004), 480 pp., ISBN 3-50671-745-6

Environmental history in Germany has undergone a renaissance.¹ However, it has yet to become a generally accepted part of German political and social history. Nor has the ‘environment’ found its way into the principal history textbooks. There are several reasons for this oversight. Until recently, other questions – the National Socialist genocide, the experience of war, as well as the Cold War – have dominated the German historical agenda. Environmental history has also sat rather uncomfortably alongside the prevailing methodologies of German history. It could not be incorporated easily into political history, or into the type of social history made famous by the Bielefeld School. Moreover, the engagement

¹ Franz-Josef Brüggemeier, ‘Umweltgeschichte – Erfahrungen, Ergebnisse, Erwartungen’, *Archiv für Sozialgeschichte*, 43 (2003), 1–18, especially 6. See also the special issue of *Historical Social Research*, 29 (3), (2004). For the USA, compare Kirk Dorsey, ‘Dealing with the Dinosaur (and Its Swamp): Putting the Environment in Diplomatic History’, *Diplomatic History*, 29 (4), (2005), 573–587.

of environmental history with tangible, real-world issues made it problematic for historians interested in language and culture.²

These books, however, do illustrate how an environmental-history perspective can be incorporated into a new political history, one that bridges the artificial gaps between the different schools. They engage critically with the dominant paradigm of environmental history in Germany and elsewhere. The sub-discipline first emerged in West Germany in the 1970s, largely in response to interpretations that emphasized the beneficial aspects of 'modernization'. It entails a view of history in which environmental dangers appear as the inevitable and negative by-products of civilization and modernity. As such, environmental issues lie outside theories of production and class. Twentieth-century environmental historians have thus adopted a negative version of modernization theory – one that emphasizes a lack of awareness before the 1970s.³ They have looked at human interventions in 'nature', a term that is itself hotly debated.⁴ There is usually an accusatory tone in their writings: how could such dangers have been overlooked?⁵ Their research has focused on the dynamics, and the social, economic, and political consequences of environmental politics.

This orientation is by no means limited to Germany. In the USA, environmental history has played an important part in rewriting the history of the American frontier as a story of remorseless exploitation of nature and indigenous peoples.⁶ This interpretation has assumed that we can learn something from pessimistic renderings of history.⁷ Yet, as Joachim Radkau has rightly pointed out, such

² For an overview of recent interpretations, see Konrad H. Jarausch and Michael Geyer, *Shattered Past: Reconstructing German Histories* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003).

³ Benjamin Ziemann, 'Sozialgeschichte jenseits des Produktionsparadigmas: Überlegungen zu Geschichte und Perspektiven eines Forschungsfeldes', *Mitteilungsblatt des Instituts für soziale Bewegungen*, 28 (2003), 5–36.

⁴ Cf. William Cronon, 'The Trouble with Wilderness, or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature', in Cronon (ed.), *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature* (New York and London: W.W. Norton, 1996), 69–90.

⁵ Compare Christian Pfister (ed.), *Das 1950er Syndrom: Der Weg in die Konsumgesellschaft* (Berne: Haupt, 2nd ed., 1996); and Christian Pfister, 'Energiepreis und Umweltbelastung: Zum Stand der Diskussion um das "1950er Syndrom"', in Wolfram Siemann (ed.), *Umweltgeschichte: Themen und Perspektiven* (Munich: Beck, 2003), 61–86.

⁶ Lynn White, Jr., 'The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis', *Science*, 155 (1967), 1203–1207; Clarence J. Glacken, *Traces on the Rhodian Shore* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967); Roderick Nash, 'American Environmental History: A New Teaching Frontier', *Pacific Historical Review*, 41 (2), (1972), 362–377; Carolyn Merchant (ed.), *Major Problems in American Environmental History: Documents and Essays* (Lexington: D.C. Heath, 1993).

⁷ John Opie, 'Environmental History: Pitfalls and Opportunities', *Environmental Review*, 7 (1), (1983), 8–16, at 10; William Cronon, 'The Uses of Environmental History', *Environmental History Review*, 17 (3), (1993), 1–22, at 1.

studies tell an already familiar story – at the beginning of the twenty-first century, we all know about smoky cities and environmental exploitation.⁸ Today, it is far more interesting to ask how ‘the environment’ has become a political issue. Many explanations follow Ronald Inglehart, who highlights the role of post-material values in shaping environmental consciousness. From the 1970s, so the argument runs, a post-industrial mindset no longer put a premium on production and consumption, and this led to changes in behaviour. A recent German textbook and many other accounts of the period have given this concept of ‘value change’ almost the status of a master narrative for the 1970s.⁹

However, this explanation has come under attack for its lack of historical specificity. For this reason, these three books are particularly welcome. In different ways, they challenge the assumptions of the inverse modernization theory adopted by many environmental historians, by emphasizing the complicated ways in which knowledge about the ‘environment’ has informed policy-making. They show the importance of new knowledge and political institutions, and they reject the idea of modernization as a key to understanding complex and differentiated societies. Instead, they highlight the importance of incremental change in specific policy areas.

INFRASTRUCTURE AND THE ENVIRONMENT

Dirk van Laak’s study of German infrastructural projects in Africa between 1880 and 1960 is not, strictly speaking, a work of environmental history. Rather, it is an examination of the way in

⁸ Joachim Radkau, ‘Technik- und Umweltgeschichte’, *Geschichte in Wissenschaft und Unterricht*, 50 (4), (1999), 356–384, at 376.

⁹ Ronald Inglehart, *The Silent Revolution: Changing Values and Political Styles among Western Publics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977), 28, 31, 82. The concept was also used in: Samuel P. Hays, *Beauty, Health, and Permanence: Environmental Politics in the United States, 1955–1985* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989); John McCormick, *Reclaiming Paradise: The Global Environmental Movement* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991); Franz-Josef Brüggemeier, *Tschernobyl, 26 April 1986: Die ökologische Herausforderung* (Munich: dtv, 1998); and Andreas Rödder, *Die Bundesrepublik Deutschland, 1969–1990* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 2004), 207–214. For a critique of the concept, see Wilhelm Bürklin, Markus Klein, and Achim Ruß, ‘Postmaterieller oder anthropozentrischer Wertewandel? Eine Erwiderung auf Ronald Inglehart und Hans-Dieter Klingemann’, *Politische Vierteljahresschrift*, 37 (3), (1996), 517–536.

which civil servants and scientists reshaped the environment in far-away colonies. However, the book has much to offer environmental historians, as it throws basic assumptions about ‘nature’ and ‘the environment’ into sharp relief.

Van Laak’s main theme is what he calls, following Jürgen Habermas, ‘the colonization of life-worlds’ (p. 415). Inspired by the new imperial history and the ‘geographic turn’ in historical writing, van Laak integrates themes and places – conceptualizing Africa as a mirror reflecting political, economic, and cultural perceptions of space,¹⁰ and demonstrating the importance of colonial planning for a new imperial nation with a short colonial past.¹¹ He follows James C. Scott’s arguments about the potentially totalitarian character of modern governments.¹² However, he modifies Scott’s position by conceptualizing state intervention as an ever-moving frontier. Van Laak highlights the importance of territoriality in German politics from the 1880s to the 1960s, and thus underscores the importance of geopolitics to history. He shows, for example, that planning was a key political category from the 1860s,¹³ and that politicians, thinkers, and scientists regarded such colonizing projects as railway and road-building and electrical networking not only as pillars of colonial integration, but also as measures of international prestige (pp. 9–10).¹⁴ A characteristic cost of these plans was the destruction of key features of the natural environment (pp. 27–28).

¹⁰ Compare Benjamin Schenk, ‘Mental Maps: Die Konstruktion von geographischen Räumen in Europa seit der Aufklärung’, *Geschichte und Gesellschaft*, 28 (3), (2002), 493–514; Jürgen Osterhammel, ‘Die Wiederkehr des Raumes: Geopolitik, Geohistorie und historische Geographie’, *Neue Politische Literatur*, 43 (3), (1998), 374–398.

¹¹ Compare, however, Birthe Kundrus (ed.), *Phantasiereiche: Zur Kulturgeschichte des deutschen Kolonialismus* (Frankfurt/Main and New York: Campus, 2003); and Sebastian Conrad, ‘Eingeborenepolitik’ in Kolonie und Metropole: “Erziehung zur Arbeit” in Ostafrika und Ostwestfalen’, in Sebastian Conrad and Jürgen Osterhammel (eds.), *Das Kaiserreich transnational: Deutschland in der Welt, 1871–1914* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2004), 107–128.

¹² James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998).

¹³ Compare also Dirk van Laak, ‘Zwischen “organisch” und “organisatorisch”: “Planung” als politische Leitkategorie zwischen Weimar und Bonn’, in Burkhard Dietz *et al.* (eds.), *Griff nach dem Westen: “Westforschung” der völkisch-nationalen Wissenschaften zum nordwesteuropäischen Raum* (1919–1960), (Münster: Waxmann, 2003), 67–90.

¹⁴ Compare also Dirk van Laak, ‘Infra-Strukturgeschichte’, *Geschichte und Gesellschaft*, 27 (3), (2001), 367–393.

For historians of the British Empire, many of van Laak's results will not come as a major surprise.¹⁵ However, he is among the first scholars to elaborate systematically the importance of the colonial experience for Germany's post-colonial history.¹⁶ His book brims with refreshing ideas. However, the text lacks a single clear line of argument, and, although there are many passages that re-tell the history of colonial expansion, there is little *systematic* analysis of the ways in which techniques were first tried out in Germany's African colonies, and later exported to the mother country.¹⁷ One would have also liked to know more about the technologies of government, as well as its administrative routines and 'little tools of knowledge'.¹⁸ There are too many unnecessary forays into other fields; and the history of popular perceptions is lumped together with the history of political, economic, and social ideas. Although van Laak has consulted a variety of sources, some of his arguments remain impressionistic, especially when he uses highly abstract terms to describe straightforward processes.

A brief summary illustrates the problem. The book starts with a discussion of theories of imperialism which, as the author admits, is not really important for his purposes (pp. 12, 35–43). In an early passage, van Laak traces the origins of the word 'infrastructure' in NATO military planning during the early 1950s, as a seemingly apolitical, technical term for social and economic intervention (pp. 18–19).¹⁹ There follows an account of German colonial policies in the late nineteenth century, with some examples of colonial planning (pp. 47–93, 101–149). While he highlights the importance of scientific knowledge to the success of German rule, this is hardly a new point.²⁰ Along the way, he comments on other subjects,

¹⁵ See, for example, Richard Drayton, *Nature's Government: Science, Imperial Britain, and the Improvement of the World* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2000), which is not quoted by van Laak.

¹⁶ For France, compare Kristin Ross, *Fast Cars, Clean Bodies: Decolonization and the Reordering of French Culture* (Cambridge, MA and London: MIT Press, 1995) and, more sceptically for Britain, Stephen Howe, 'Internal Decolonization? British Politics since Thatcher as Post-Colonial Trauma', *Twentieth Century British History*, 14 (3), (2003), 286–304.

¹⁷ Van Laak himself explores this theme in a brilliant essay: 'Kolonien als "Laboratorien der Moderne"?', in Conrad and Osterhammel, *op. cit.* note 11, 257–279.

¹⁸ Peter Becker and William Clark (eds.), *Little Tools of Knowledge: Historical Essays on Academic and Bureaucratic Practices* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2001).

¹⁹ Dirk van Laak, 'Der Begriff "Infrastruktur" und was er vor seiner Entstehung besagte', *Archiv für Begriffsgeschichte*, 41 (2), (1999), 280–299.

²⁰ Hendrik L. Wesseling, 'Knowledge is Power: Some Remarks on Colonialism and Science', in *idem*, *Imperialism and Colonialism: Essays on the History of European Expansion* (Westport and London: Greenwood Press, 1997), 27–37.

including the Baghdad Railway and the importance of maps (pp. 150–164, 165). He also offers some reflections on the importance of technology in German political discourse during the 1920s, as a compensation for the loss of colonies after Germany's defeat in the First World War (pp. 218–224).

In one of his more stimulating passages, van Laak draws on the history of colonial planning to interpret plans prepared by German governments between the 1920s and 1945 for the development of central Europe (pp. 224–228, 267–323). In an important section, he shows how technology, science, and the preservation of 'living space' and nature became connected to racial assumptions (pp. 271–272).²¹ Infrastructural projects were used not only to open up territories, but also to enclose them into a *Großraum*: a large (living) space intended to solve Germany's social problems and economic imbalances.²²

The book ends with a rather conventional overview of the individuals, organizations, and development policies that dominated the years from the foundation of the Federal Republic to the 1960s (pp. 376–388). This is a disappointing section. Van Laak fails to highlight the importance that infrastructural projects have come to assume in German society (pp. 414–415). He concludes with the rather unsurprising statement that, for many Germans, belief in progress ended when people discovered the dangers of large technological projects, such as nuclear power (p. 350).²³

POLITICIANS AND POLLUTION

Frank Uekötter's study of American and German policies on smoke abatement from the late nineteenth century to the 1970s offers a very different perspective. Uekötter takes a traditional

²¹ For more, see Joachim Radkau and Frank Uekötter (eds.), *Naturschutz und Nationalsozialismus* (Frankfurt/Main: Campus, 2003).

²² See also Alan E. Steinweis, 'Ideology and Infrastructure: German Area Science and Planning for the Germanization of Eastern Europe, 1939–1944', *East European Quarterly*, 28 (3), (1994), 335–347; Benjamin Madley, 'From Africa to Auschwitz: How German South West Africa Incubated Ideas and Methods Adopted and Developed by the Nazis in Eastern Europe', *European History Quarterly*, 35 (3), (2005), 429–464.

²³ At least up to the early 1960s, however, belief in scientific progress could go hand in hand with a rejection of nuclear energy for military purposes. Compare Holger Nehring, 'Cold War, Apocalypse and Peaceful Atoms: Interpretations of Nuclear Energy in the British and West German Anti-Nuclear Weapons Movements, 1957–1964', *Historical Social Research*, 29 (3), (2004), 150–170.

subject – viz., the ways in which governments have perceived environmental problems – and examines it in novel ways. Cautioning against over-emphasizing the importance of planning, he tells a story of slow, incremental, and not always unilinear change. His findings contradict those environmental historians who have seen a revolution in policy-making taking place during the 1970s. He argues that the shift began much earlier. Throughout, Uekötter highlights the importance of technical solutions, but he focuses on the institutional contexts of policy-making (p. 16) and the ways in which the practical workings of the political system determine outcomes.²⁴

The result is an important book that manages to connect environmental history to political and administrative history. His contribution lies in his systematic and rigorous application of the ‘organizational synthesis’ of business history to environmental studies. Uekötter shows that to impose the concept of environmentalism onto the reading of environmental history is anachronistic. Environmentalist programmes and ideas did not drive the practice of smoke abatement in Germany and the USA. Instead, they came about as a result of largely *ad hoc* measures. For example, as early as the 1860s, Prussia introduced legislative approaches to smoke abatement as part of its industrial policy.²⁵ American policies were, by contrast, far more effective from the early 1900s – owing to the emergence of different regulatory regimes.²⁶

In Prussia, precisely because of the importance of the bureaucracy (p. 145), there was less incentive to form an organized public response. Uekötter uses the term ‘issue network’ to describe a situation in which reforming interests, although often quite large, lacked stable membership and clear institutions around which to group and petition. Their knowledge about problems remained

²⁴ Louis Galambos, ‘The Emerging Organizational Synthesis in Modern American History’, *Business History Review*, 57 (3), (1983), 471–493; Frank Uekötter, ‘Confronting the Pitfalls of Environmental History: An Argument for an Organisational Approach’, *Environment and History*, 4 (1), (1998), 31–52.

²⁵ Ilja Mieck, ‘“Aerem corrumpere non licet”: Luftverunreinigung und Immisionsschutz in Preußen bis zur Gewerbeordnung 1869’, *Technikgeschichte*, 34 (1), (1967), 36–78.

²⁶ David Vogel, *National Styles of Regulation: Environmental Policy in Britain and the United States* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986); William T. Gormley, Jr., and B. Guy Peters, ‘National Styles of Regulation: Child Care in Three Countries’, *Policy Sciences*, 25 (2), (1992), 381–399, at 397.

fragmentary, contingent, disconnected, and localized.²⁷ Unable to communicate beyond the local level, these 'issue networks' were ultimately unable to challenge bureaucratic and technical approaches to smoke pollution – which focused principally on making chimneys and smoke stacks higher. Communication between civil servants and engineers was also limited (pp. 124, 132). Interestingly, the protagonists failed to see the urban situation as a whole (p. 117). Those who ran the large German cities sought to find a compromise between different parties, rather than implement more comprehensive reforms.

In the USA, by contrast, the major cities saw the emergence of reform-minded middle-class associations, which allied themselves with experts, such as engineers and physicians (pp. 91–109).²⁸ Medical, engineering, and economic discourses thus became integrated, and made an all-round approach possible. While German cities looked for compromise solutions amongst established players, American cities reacted to pressure groups (pp. 488–489). Moreover, according to Uekötter, economic arguments were far more important in America than in Germany (p. 137). While competition amongst US cities for the best smoke abatement policies brought local efforts into a national framework, such policies remained entirely local in Germany until the 1950s.

As Uekötter shows, reactive policies, operating within what he calls a 'para-corporatist framework', remained a feature of the USA between the Progressive Era and the 1930s (pp. 157–179). Only in the late 1930s and early 1940s – with Raymond Tucker's initiatives as Commissioner of Smoke Regulation in St. Louis, Missouri, and the adoption of similar policies in Pittsburgh – did a new approach emerge. The policy makers began to focus on long-term prevention through the reduction of smoke. In Germany, by contrast, the practice of building high chimneys continued during the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s. Uekötter shows that this practice was a result of institutional and cultural mindsets, rather than neglect.²⁹

²⁷ Hugh Hecló, 'Issue Networks and the Executive Establishment', in Anthony King (ed.), *The New American Political System* (Washington, DC: AEI Press, 2nd ed., 1990), 87–124; Grant Jordan and Klaus Schubert, 'A Preliminary Ordering of Policy Network Labels', *European Journal of Political Research*, 21 (1), (1992), 7–27; Frans van Waarden, 'Dimensions and Types of Policy Networks', *European Journal of Political Research*, 21 (1), (1992), 29–52.

²⁸ Paul A. Sabatier, 'An Advocacy Coalition Framework of Policy Change and the Role of Policy-Oriented Learning Therein', *Policy Sciences*, 21 (1), (1988), 129–168, at 139.

²⁹ For this view, see Jürgen Büschendorf, *Flüsse und Kloaken: Umweltfragen im Zeitalter der Industrialisierung, 1870–1918* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1997).

Looking ahead to the 1950s and 1960s, which some see as a time of unthinking consumption, Uekötter demonstrates how political perceptions of the smoke problem changed in both countries. In the USA, a public agitated by smog in Los Angeles and elsewhere thought that the time for local solutions had passed, and that larger-scale solutions should be sought. However, it was not until the passage of the Clean Air Act of 1970, which created the Federal Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), that American authorities finally made a break with past practices (p. 333).

No such breakthrough took place in the Federal Republic of Germany during this period, although the principle of prevention emerged there as well, especially in the heavily industrialized Ruhr in North Rhine Westphalia. Uekötter believes that new policies were, by and large, symbolic. However, perceptions did change. Human health and nature preservation, rather than single-minded considerations of profit, became objects of policy. Still, it was only when the concept of the 'environment' emerged in political discourse that it became possible in Germany to combine the technical problems and their solutions into one debate (p. 514).

This book is a major achievement. It has much to offer environmental historians, and also those working on the functions of government in Germany and the United States. Uekötter has mastered masses of archival material, without losing sight of his main arguments. He uses concepts drawn from sociology and political science to enhance our understanding of environmental policies. Not least, his sceptical view of modernization theory is welcome.

There are, inevitably, shortcomings. Some sections are rather long-winded and overly pedagogical. One also misses a systematic discussion of the impact of federalism on decision-making. Changing political contexts are not adequately discussed. We learn very little, for example, about either the corporatism of the New Deal, or about the status of 'the environment' in the National Socialist regime. Most important, one is left wondering whether the break with past practices in the 1970s was not greater than Uekötter suggests. By looking at only a single issue, and solely from an administrative-history perspective, he cannot grasp the totality of change in perceptions about 'the environment' during the 1960s and 1970s. Only then did the public begin to see the environment as a whole, rather than as separate matters of air, water, soil, and 'nature'.

Unfortunately, Uekötter does not tell us enough about how this came about.³⁰ The debate is far from over.

THE POLITICIZATION OF THE 'ENVIRONMENT'

Kai Hünemörder's book describes the interaction between public opinion, scientific discoveries, and policy-making in the Federal Republic from the 1950s to the 1970s. He surveys governmental and public perceptions of 'the environment', and describes how the 'environment' became a focus for decision-making in the Federal Republic. Throughout, he focuses on the role of North Rhine-Westphalia and the parallel role of international organizations in shaping 'the environment' as a political issue. Using the concept of 'policy diffusion',³¹ he treads a methodological median between intellectual history and the history of science, on the one hand, and the history of decision-making, on the other. He tells how networks of government and scientific experts in the early 1960s made possible the 'discovery of the environment' in the 1970s.

Following North American usage, the term *Umweltpolitik* (environmental policy) was first used in Germany in 1969 by the Federal Minister of the Interior, Hans-Dietrich Genscher, who created a Department for Environmental Protection in his Ministry.³² Like Uekötter, however, Hünemörder is sceptical about seeing the 'environmental revolution' as a phenomenon unique to the 1970s. He highlights several precursors in the 1950s and 1960s, especially in

³⁰ Uekötter has reiterated his views in a more recent book and article on nature protection. See Uekötter, *Naturschutz im Aufbruch: Eine Geschichte des Naturschutzes in Nordrhein-Westfalen, 1945–1980* (Frankfurt/Main: Campus, 2004); and Uekötter, 'Wie neu sind die neuen sozialen Bewegungen: Revisionistische Bemerkungen vor dem Hintergrund der umwelthistorischen Forschung', *Mitteilungsblatt des Instituts für soziale Bewegungen*, 31 (2004), 109–131. For a perspective on social perceptions of the environment, see Franz-Josef Brüggemeier and Jens-Ivo Engels (eds.), *Natur und Umwelt in Deutschland nach 1945: Probleme, Wahrnehmungen, Bewegungen und Politik* (Frankfurt/Main: Campus, 2004).

³¹ K. Kern, 'Politikkonvergenz durch Politikdiffusion – Überlegungen zu einer vernachlässigten Dimension der vergleichenden Politikanalyse', in Lutz Mez and Helmut Weidner (eds.), *Umweltpolitik und Staatsversagen: Festschrift für Martin Jänicke zum 60. Geburtstag* (Berlin: Edition Sigma, 1997), 270–279; Ortwin Renn, 'Individual and Social Perception of Risk', in Urs Fuhrer (ed.), *Ökologisches Handeln als sozialer Prozeß* (Basel: Birkhäuser, 1995), 27–50, esp. 28.

³² Hans-Peter Vierhaus, *Umweltbewußtsein von oben: Zum Verfassungsgebot demokratischer Willensbildung* (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1994), 104–107.

North Rhine Westphalia.³³ Yet, he also emphasizes the novelty of *Umweltpolitik* (p. 88). Increasingly, politicians recognized the international dimensions of the problem, especially with regard to the importation of polluted air (p. 73). From the early 1960s, the decline of fish stocks in the Rhine was inversely proportional to the increase in environmental awareness (pp. 121–126), and much discussed in the literature.³⁴ The media also played an increasingly prominent role in dramatizing environmental problems (pp. 159–171). Political parties were forced to respond. By the late 1960s, co-ordinated regional strategies began to emerge. Nonetheless, if there were a ‘revolution’ in environmental policy-making during the 1970s, Hünemörder suggests, it came only in the form of gradual and incremental change.

Apart from its meticulous account of West German debates, the book’s contribution lies in what it says about the influence of international organizations on West German policy. Such bodies included the International Union for the Protection of Nature (founded under UNESCO’s auspices in 1948), the United Nations, the European Economic Commission, and the OECD.³⁵ Among the most important agencies was the Committee for the Improvement of Environmental Conditions, formed within NATO in November, 1969. Equally significant events were UNESCO’s international conference on the biosphere in 1968 and the UN environmental conference in Stockholm in 1972. Given all this international attention, it was inevitable that environmental policy would become an adversarial issue during the Cold War (pp. 194–198, 262–267). The Warsaw Pact states boycotted the Stockholm conference in retaliation against the Federal Republic’s policy of official non-recognition of the GDR (pp. 262–267). At the conference itself, the Chinese delegation and the Swedish Prime Minister Olof Palme both heavily criticized American environmental warfare in Vietnam (pp. 267–276).

However, it was only in October 1969 – with the inclusion of ‘nature protection’ in the agenda of the social-democratic Brandt

³³ As examples, compare Robert Jungk, ‘Muß der Fortschritt das Land verschandeln’, *Die Zeit*, no. 35, 25 August 1961; Kurt Düwell and Otfried Dascher (eds.), *Kabinettsprotokolle der Landesregierung Nordrhein-Westfalen 1954 bis 1958*, vol. 3. (Siegburg: Republica-Verlag, 1997), 49; Rainer Weichelt, ‘Silberstreif am Horizont: Vom langen Weg zum blauen Himmel über der Ruhr: Luftreinhaltepolitik in Nordrhein-Westfalen 1950–1962’, *Sozialwissenschaftliche Informationen*, 22 (3), (1993), 169–180, at 178.

³⁴ The *locus classicus* is Rachel Carson, *Silent Spring* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1962).

³⁵ For predecessors, cf. Anna-Katharina Wöbse, ‘Der Schutz der Natur im Völkerbund – Anfänge einer Weltumweltpolitik’, *Archiv für Sozialgeschichte*, 43, (2003), 177–190.

government – that the word *Umwelt* (environment) became a political rallying cry. Projections of the future, media reports, and new findings in the biological and medical sciences combined to increase the visibility of the issue.³⁶ These factors informed West Germany's response to the Club of Rome's study on the 'limits to growth', when it was released in 1972.³⁷ This famous challenge to the idea of progress brought to an end van Laak's era of planning approaches to environmental issues. 'Quality of life' now emerged as a new critical buzzword in political debates in Western societies (p. 230), and its multiple meanings played an important role at the UN conference in Stockholm. Increasingly, environment and development were seen as causally interrelated.³⁸ One of Hünemörder's most interesting findings concerns the process by which transnational developments helped forge national policy. In the run-up to the Stockholm conference, information exchange (enhanced by computerization) improved, allowing the *Land* and Federal bodies to cooperate for the first time (p. 253) – just as new environmental movements began to contribute to the debate (p. 285).

Hünemörder has used a wide array of sources, ranging from party, Federal, and *Land* archives, to newspapers and scientific reports. He has produced an admirably rich and connected history of environmental policies during the late 1960s and early 1970s. At times, the very richness of the material tends to obscure his argument. Still, it is a pity that he did not consult the relevant UN and NATO archives, which would have made his argument even more compelling. Hünemörder employs no clear analytical model, and he tends to regard published opinions as synonymous with public opinion. Diffusion theory may be too rough and mechanistic a tool to grapple with such issues. Moreover, Hünemörder fails to integrate his story with current debates about the history of the Federal Republic. He almost entirely neglects the question of nuclear power, which – as a powerful symbol of the ideology of progress – came under attack during the 1970s. Finally, his narrative stops too soon. We would have liked to know more about the impact of the oil crisis on German environmental thinking. Arguably, the

³⁶ Alexander Schmidt-Gernig, 'The Cybernetic Society – Western Future Studies of the Sixties and Seventies and their Predictions for the Year 2000', in Richard Cooper and Richard Layard (eds.), *What the Future Holds* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002), 233–259.

³⁷ Denis L. Meadows *et al.*, *Die Grenzen des Wachstums. Bericht [an] [d]en Club of Rome zur Lage der Menschheit* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1972).

³⁸ On previous perceptions, see David C. Engermann *et al.* (eds.), *Staging Growth: Modernization, Development, and the Global Cold War* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2003).

effects of the oil crisis were more influential than the Club of Rome in driving home the idea that there *are* 'limits to growth'.³⁹ Hünemörder could also have said much more about the role of environmental movements in framing these issues and assessing their impact.

COMPARATIVE HISTORY AND GOVERNANCE

All three books adopt a common approach, one that should be integrated into a new political history of Germany.⁴⁰ By questioning the idea of modernization as unilinear progress,⁴¹ they call for a history that tackles the problem of complexity. By highlighting the importance of perceptions of 'problems', they ask two central questions. How has government adjusted to social change? And how have environmental issues been turned into political problems? These studies show that environmental policies are not merely reactions to objective pressures or problems, as some historians would have us believe.⁴² Nor have environmental problems been simply issues that the media have cynically created.⁴³

On the contrary, we are coming to see that, from the 1960s onwards, West German politicians recognized 'the environment' as a political issue that needed their attention. Seen in this light, environmental history becomes a showcase for the ways in which complex and differentiated societies would come to manage their

³⁹ Compare Jens Hohensee, *Der erste Ölpreisschock 1973/74: Die politischen und gesellschaftlichen Auswirkungen der arabischen Erdölpolitik auf die Bundesrepublik Deutschland und Westeuropa* (Stuttgart: Steiner, 1996).

⁴⁰ Ute Frevert, 'Neue Politikgeschichte', in Joachim Eibach and Günther Lottes (eds.), *Kompass der Geschichtswissenschaft* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2002), 152–164.

⁴¹ For interpretations of German history that consider the 1960s as a turning point and regard political rhetoric as a reflection of reality, cf. Klaus Schönhoven, 'Aufbruch in die sozialliberale Ära: Zur Bedeutung der 60er Jahre in der Geschichte der Bundesrepublik', *Geschichte und Gesellschaft*, 25 (1), (1999), 123–145; and Ulrich Herbert (ed.), *Wandlungsprozesse in Westdeutschland: Belastung, Integration, Liberalisierung, 1945–1980* (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2003).

⁴² Joachim Radkau, 'Was ist Umweltgeschichte?', in Werner Abelshäuser (ed.), *Umweltgeschichte: umweltverträgliches Wirtschaften in historischer Perspektive* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1994), 11–28, at 27.

⁴³ Anthony Downs, 'Up and Down with Ecology: The "Issue-Attention Cycle"', *The Public Interest*, 28 (1), (1972), 38–50; S.K. Brookes, A.G. Jordan, R.H. Kimber, and J.J. Richardson, 'The Growth of the Environment as a Political Issue in Britain', *British Journal of Political Science*, 6 (2), (1976), 245–255; William A. Gamson and Andre Modigliani, 'Media Discourse and Public Opinion on Nuclear Power: A Constructionist Approach', *American Journal of Sociology*, 95 (1), (1989), 1–37.

affairs.⁴⁴ The politics of information and knowledge were crucial in this process – a factor to which these studies allude, but upon which they do not elaborate.⁴⁵ Uekötter and Hünemörder point out that effective communication on environmental matters became central to politics in the Federal Republic of Germany.⁴⁶

A similar approach could be applied to the ways in which the German people have reacted to environmental catastrophes.⁴⁷ Thus, Hünemörder and Uekötter re-frame one of the central problems of history-writing: the relationship between language and reality. They manage to steer a *via media* between a radical constructivism that regards nature as a product of discourses, and a radical realism that only encourages us to buy ‘a good set of walking shoes, [even if] we cannot avoid getting some mud on them.’⁴⁸

All three studies appear to suggest that the discovery of the ‘environment’ as a concept came precisely at the point when policy-makers and the public came to think that, thanks to science and planning, social change was possible.⁴⁹ However, it was only when the system was endowed with greater capacities for gathering and processing information about ‘the environment’ that governments could act. This happened in the 1960s and 1970s, when the West German government created advisory bodies, and *Land* and Federal

⁴⁴ Compare for Switzerland: Patrick Kupper, ‘Die “1970er Diagnose”: Grundsätzliche Überlegungen zu einem Wendepunkt der Umweltgeschichte’, *Archiv für Sozialgeschichte*, 43 (2003), 325–348.

⁴⁵ Margit Szöllösi-Janze, ‘Redefining German Contemporary History: The Concept of the Knowledge Society’, in The Research Council of Norway (ed.), *Bilanz eines Jahrhunderts: Bericht über das 10. deutsch-norwegische Historikertreffen in Bergen/Norwegen, Mai/Juni 2000* (Oslo: Research Council of Norway, 2001), 95–104; and Margit Szöllösi-Janze, ‘Wissensgesellschaft in Deutschland: Überlegungen zur Neubestimmung der deutschen Zeitgeschichte über Verwissenschaftlichungsprozesse’, *Geschichte und Gesellschaft*, 30 (2), (2004), 277–313.

⁴⁶ Frank Uekötter, ‘Die Kommunikation zwischen technischen und juristischen Experten als Schlüsselproblem der Umweltgeschichte: Die preußische Regierung und die Berliner Rauchplage’, *Technikgeschichte*, 66 (1), (1999), 1–31.

⁴⁷ Jens Ivo Engels, ‘Vom Subjekt zum Objekt: Naturbild und Naturkatastrophen in der Geschichte der Bundesrepublik Deutschland’, in Dieter Groh *et al.* (eds.), *Naturkatastrophen: Beiträge zu ihrer Deutung, Wahrnehmung und Darstellung in Text und Bild von der Antike bis ins 20. Jahrhundert* (Tübingen: Narr, 2003), 119–142; Jens Hohensee and Frank Uekötter (eds.), *Wird Cassandra heiser? Die Geschichte falscher Ökoalarme* (Stuttgart: Steiner, 2004).

⁴⁸ Donald Worster, ‘Appendix: Doing Environmental History’, in Donald Worster (ed.), *The Ends of the Earth: Perspectives on Modern Environmental History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 289–307, at 289.

⁴⁹ Niklas Luhmann, *Ecological Communication* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1989).

policies became increasingly linked.⁵⁰ Only by having better communication could the unity of the ‘environment’ be discovered.

The flipside of measuring ‘the environment’ was the re-discovery of ‘society’.⁵¹ As power is reinforced by knowledge, the selection and use of information created new spaces for decision-making. The West German government optimistically believed in progressive rhetoric and parliamentary democracy.⁵² But this – and this is Uekötter’s contribution – merely veiled traditional institutions and assumptions without changing them. Outside government, a different society had begun to emerge. Those in the environmental movements of the 1970s did not restrict their campaigns to specific issues. Fundamentally, they criticized the ways in which government dealt with crises. Coming from different directions, they regarded planning, especially in the key sector of nuclear power, as a threat rather than an opportunity. This critique united the motley coalition of local groups, conservative thinkers, and student protesters that formed the environmental movement. All were bothered by the lack of attention their concerns received from government. ‘Advocacy coalitions’ emerged, while government tried to sustain the traditional ‘issue networks’.⁵³ It was in this political context that a Tübingen environmental group claimed a ‘civil right to truth’ (as quoted in Hünemörder, p. 285).

Van Laak’s study reminds us that similar protests had occurred in British and German colonies long before the 1970s. During the 1930s and 1940s, for example, Gandhi mustered non-violent resistance against British rule in India by attacking the material values on which colonial rule was based (p. 207).⁵⁴ It was Gandhi’s opposition to planning that made his theories of

⁵⁰ Gabriele Metzler, *Konzeptionen politischen Handelns von Adenauer bis Brandt: Politische Planung in der pluralistischen Gesellschaft* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2005). Compare also Julia Moses’ (University of Cambridge) project on governmental perceptions of social welfare issues in Germany, Italy, and Britain during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.

⁵¹ Anja Kruke, ‘Der Kampf um die politische Deutungshoheit. Meinungsforschung als Instrument von Parteien und Medien in den siebziger Jahren’, *Archiv für Sozialgeschichte*, 44, (2004), 293–326; Paul Nolte, *Die Ordnung der deutschen Gesellschaft. Selbstentwurf und Selbstbeschreibung im 20. Jahrhundert* (Munich: Beck, 2000).

⁵² Gabriele Metzler, ‘Am Ende aller Krisen? Politisches Denken und Handeln in der Bundesrepublik der sechziger Jahre’, *Historische Zeitschrift*, 275 (1), (2002), 57–103.

⁵³ Claus Offe, ‘Challenging the Boundaries of Institutional Politics: Social Movements since the 1960s’, in Charles S. Maier (ed.), *Changing Boundaries of the Political: Essays on the Evolving Balance Between the State and Society, Public and Private in Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 63–105.

⁵⁴ On Gandhi, see Judith Brown, *Gandhi: Prisoner of Hope* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989).

direct action so attractive to West European protesters, and which lent a little studied anti-colonial dimension to the new environmentalism.⁵⁵

During the 1970s, the boundaries of the political were challenged not only from below, but also from without. It is a unique feature of environmental movements that they connect local issues with global problems.⁵⁶ By the 1970s, territoriality was neither the 'decision space' nor the 'identity space' that it had been for policy makers in the first half of the twentieth century.⁵⁷ Ideas of planning and management seemed to belong to the past. The emergence of the 'environment' could compensate for the apparent loss, by establishing a new point of reference.

In recent years, across the Western world, national histories have become more diverse in their scope and methodology.⁵⁸ These books demonstrate the fruits of this diversity. They also bring the 'environment' back to where it began. The term *Umwelt* (environment) was coined in Germany by Jakob von Uexküll (1864–1944), at a time when many modern nation-states were emerging.⁵⁹ The 'environment' became not so much an analytic category (like power, society, economy, and culture),⁶⁰ but a concept inextricably bound up with modern political and social processes, both imagined and real. Given the environment's central

⁵⁵ This aspect has been overlooked by most research on the 1960s. This author is currently preparing a comparative study of this connection. For some ideas, cf. Ingo Juchler, *Die Studentenbewegungen in den Vereinigten Staaten und der Bundesrepublik Deutschland der sechziger Jahre: Eine Untersuchung hinsichtlich ihrer Beeinflussung durch Befreiungsbewegungen und -theorien aus der Dritten Welt* (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1996). For a slightly tenuous argument on the nineteenth century, cf. Richard H. Grove, *Green Imperialism: Colonial Expansion, Tropical Island Edens and the Origins of Environmentalism, 1600–1860* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 486.

⁵⁶ For the United States in the 1950s, see Frank Uekötter, *Von der Rauchplage zur ökologischen Revolution: Eine Geschichte der Luftverschmutzung in Deutschland und den USA 1880–1970* (Essen: Klartext Verlag, 2003), 343.

⁵⁷ Charles S. Maier, 'Consigning the Twentieth Century to History: Alternative Narratives for the Modern Era', *American Historical Review*, 105 (3), (2000), 807–831. On the importance of territoriality for the first half of the century, see Jane Caplan and John Torpey (eds.), *Documenting Individual Identity: The Development of State Practices in the Modern World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).

⁵⁸ See, for example, Stephen Tuck, 'The New American Histories', *Historical Journal*, 48 (3), (2005), 811–832; and Benjamin Ziemann, 'Sozialgeschichte, Geschlechtergeschichte, Gesellschaftsgeschichte', in Richard van Dülmen (ed.), *Fischer-Lexikon Geschichte* (Frankfurt/Main: Fischer, 2003), 84–105.

⁵⁹ Joachim Radkau, 'Nachdenken über die Umweltgeschichte', in Siemann, *op. cit.* note 5, 165–186, at 180.

⁶⁰ This has been argued by Wolfram Siemann and Nils Freytag, 'Umwelt – eine geschichtswissenschaftliche Grundkategorie', in Siemann, *op. cit.* note 5, 7–20, at 12.

role in this interplay, it is essential that environmental history achieve greater prominence in future historical studies.⁶¹

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⁶¹ On this interplay see, for example, Oliver Zimmer, 'In Search of Natural Identity: Alpine Landscape and the Reconstruction of the Swiss Nation', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 40 (4), (1998), 637–665; and, more generally, Joachim Radkau, *Natur und Macht: Eine Weltgeschichte der Umwelt* (Munich: Beck, 2002).