

M U N I
S C I

01 Introduction into environmental history

Lukáš Dolák, MSc, PhD

Content

1. Environmental history – basics
2. Beginnings of environmental history
3. Environmental history in the world and state of the art
4. Societies, journals and representatives

Environmental history – basics

What is environmental history?

- A complex transdisciplinary discipline explaining the **relationship** between **human society and the environment**
- A distinct discipline initially developed in response to the **environmental problems** of post-industrial society in the USA
- A discipline that **fills the space** between the **natural and social sciences**

J. DONALD HUGHES

What is
Environmental
History?

Second Edition



Subject of study

1. The **evolution of the environment** in the historical period/
„environmental history“
 - historical ecology, landscape ecology, geobiology
2. The **relationship between human society** and the **environment**/the impact of production technologies on the changing relationship between humans and the environment
 - economic and social history, history of science and technology, historical geography
3. The **process of human interaction with nature**
 - cultural and political history

Differences in understanding of basic terms

- **Environment:**
 - environmental history (EH): an active factor influencing human history
 - classical historiography: static framework where history takes place
- **Human-environment relationship:**
 - EH: description of the history of this relationship from better to worse
 - classical historiography: description of the history of this relationship from worse to better

Differences in understanding of basic terms

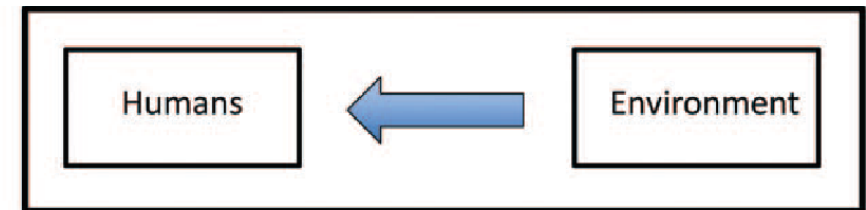
- In the interpretation of human history, **EH rejects** that:
 - human activities are independent of the environment
 - humankind is a special and superior species that stands apart from the rest of nature
 - the environmental consequences of previous developments are not relevant to the present
- **EH is not a history of the environment** and damages to the environment caused by humans (the earlier concept of historical ecology)

Beginnings of environmental history

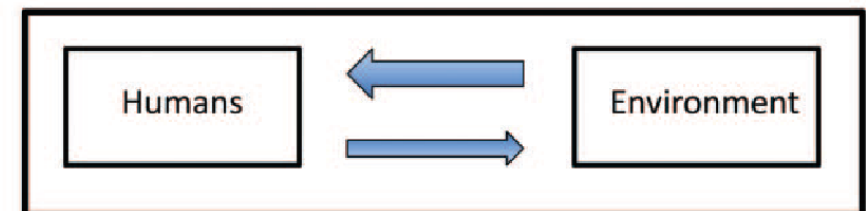
Origin of environmental history

- **The Epic of Gilgamesh** (2nd millennium BC)
 - the first literary work dealing with an environment modified by mankind
- **Hippocrates** (460–377 BC)
 - human character influenced by the environment
- **Charles Louis Montesquieu** (1689–1755)
 - the relationship between the environment and human cultures
 - environmental determinism

A. Environmental Determinism



B. Human Ecology

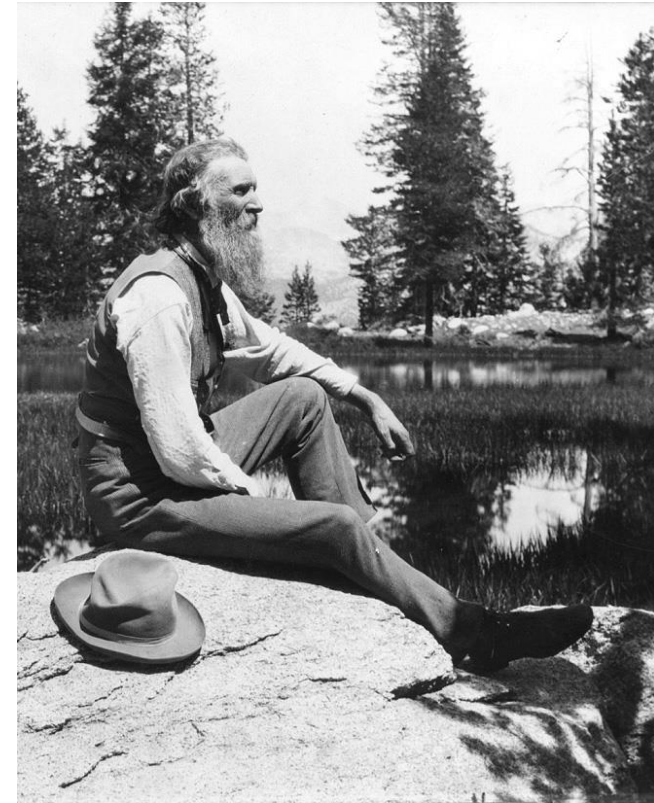


Causes of EH origin in the USA

1. „*frontier history*“ (a theory of a borderline) and the living historical memory of the „wild“ West
2. the influence of preservationism, conservationism and environmentalism on the historical development of the USA
3. the **birthplace** and influence of **ecology** and modern environmentalism
4. a **strong scientific background** and a wide range of research opportunities

Former concepts of EH

- **Preservationism** (John Muir):
 - the pursuit of **nature and landscape preservation** linked to an increase in quality of life
 - **aesthetic value** of nature
 - establishment of **national parks** (Yellowstone 1872; Yosemite and Sequoia 1890)
 - Sierra Club (1892), Sequoia Preservation League (1918) - lobbying in Congress



Former concepts of EH

- **Conservationism** (Gifford Pinchot):
 - conservation of landscape as a **resource for future mining**
 - establishment of the [Forest Service](#) (1905)
 - enforcement of **laws to protect the environment** (clean water and air, wilderness conservation, etc.)



Former concepts of EH

- **Anthropocentrism:**
 - **man as the master of nature**, for whom nature was created
 - nature has value only as a source of raw materials
 - origin in the Renaissance (influence of Christianity)
 - recent prevailing trend?



USA as the cradle of environmental history

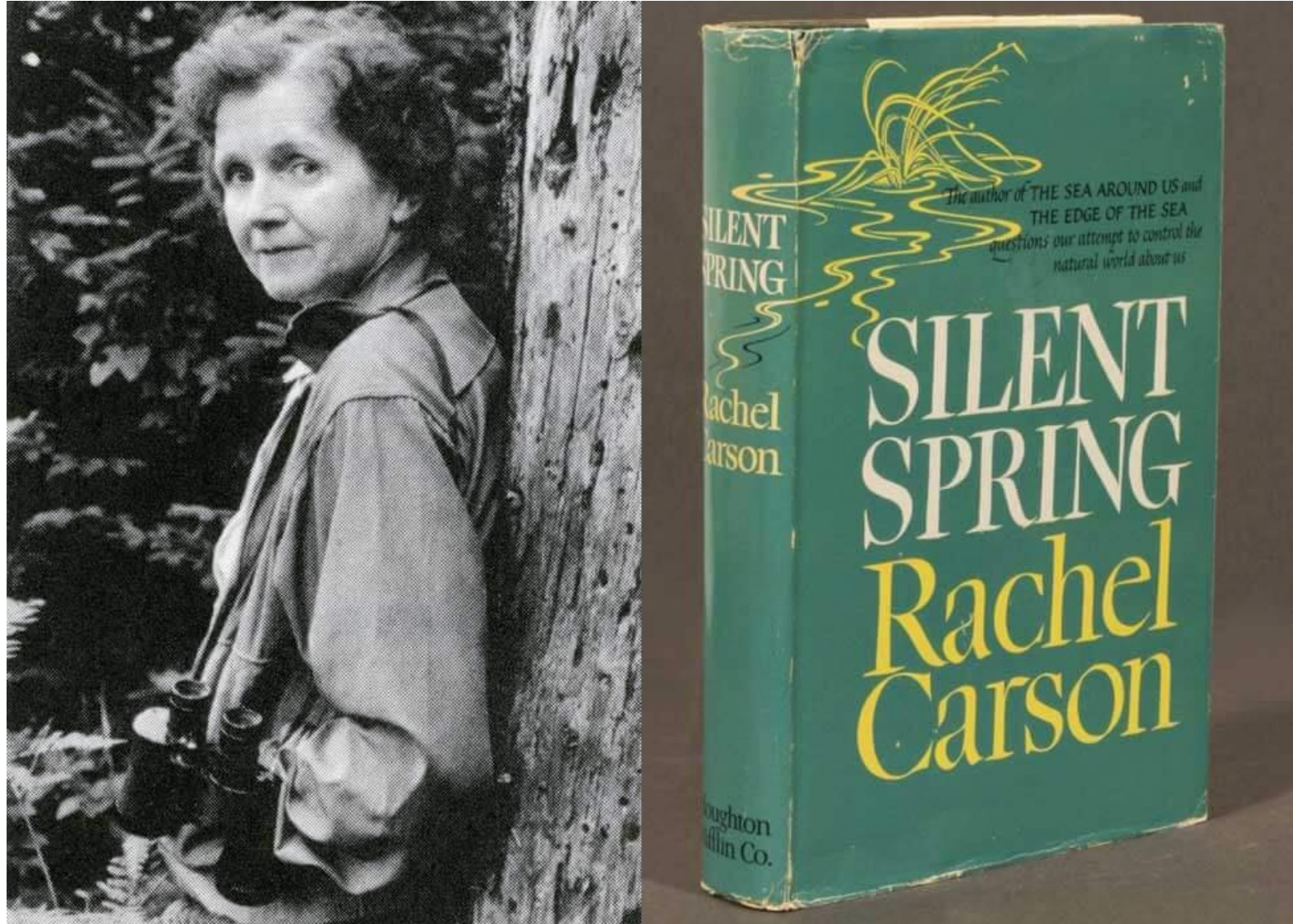
- Roots dating back to **the second half of the 19th century**:
 - preservationism, conservationism (anthropocentric trends)
- **19th/20th centuries**:
 - geographical and environmental determinism
- **The rise of environmentalism** after 2nd WW (1945):
 - increase in environmental pollution, overexploitation of mineral resources (USA), influence of globalization
- **1950s**:
 - geographers' efforts to join the environmental movement

USA as the cradle of environmental history

- **1960s:**
 - increase of local and regional environmental problems to the level of a **global environmental crisis**
 - environmental destruction by **modern capitalism**
 - popular/folk environmentalism and the growth of environmental movements
 - the **environmentalisation** of science, human thinking, politics and economics
 - efforts to save the remains of the environment and to live more sustainably with nature

USA as the cradle of environmental history

1962



USA as the cradle of environmental history

- **1970s:**

- 1st Earth Day (22.4.1970)

- **Roderick Nash** uses the term „*environmental history*“ (1970)

- environmentalism as a part of politics (Environmental Policy Act)

- establishment of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA, 1970)

- supra-ministerial powers, highly restrictive policy – success

- **UN Conference on the Human Environment** in Stockholm (1971)

- „*If each of us now has two countries to care about, we also have two histories to write, that of our own country and that of planet Earth.*“ Donald Worster

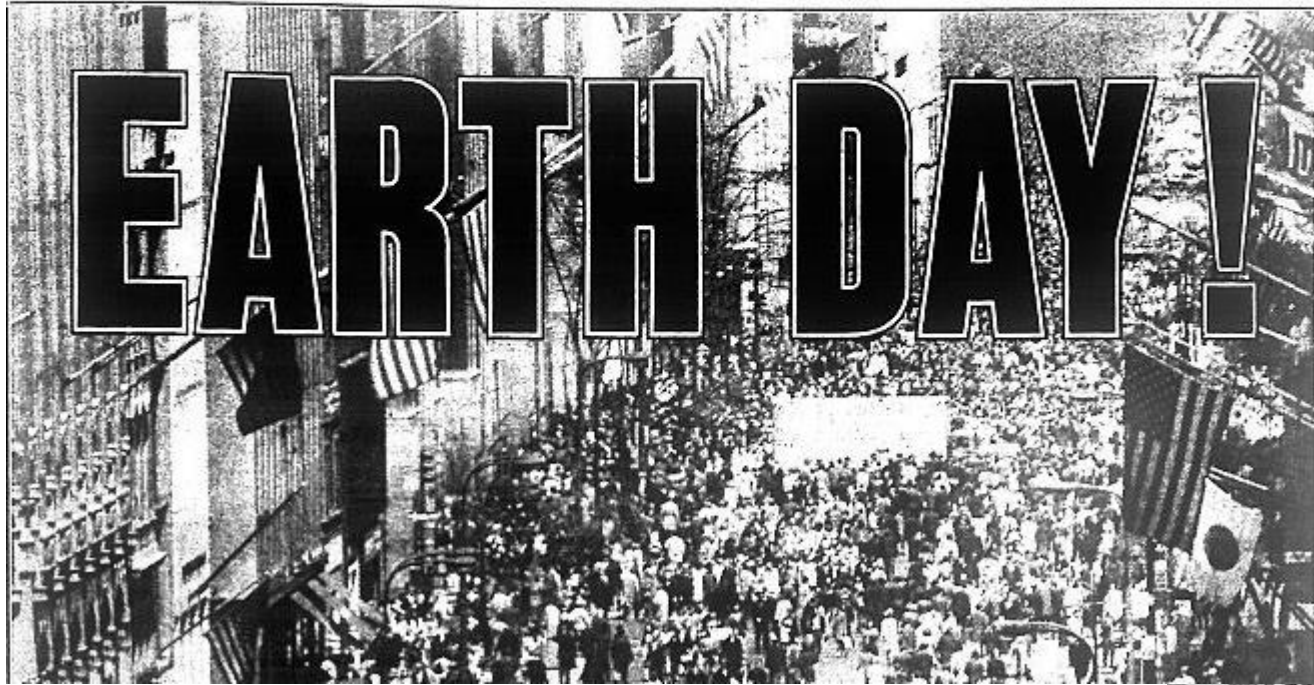
★★★★
FINAL

DAILY NEWS

NEW YORK'S PICTURE NEWSPAPER ©

8¢
10¢ OUTSIDE N.Y. AND SUBURBS

Vol. 51, No. 259 Corp. 1973 News Syndicate Co. Inc. New York, N.Y. 10017, Thursday, April 23, 1970* WEATHER: Mostly cloudy, breezy, mild.



Conference on the Human Environment (1971)



Document 1

DECLARATION OF THE UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE ON THE HUMAN ENVIRONMENT, 1972*

On June 16, 1972, the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment adopted a Declaration on the human environment consisting of a preamble and 26 principles.

By the preamble, the Conference proclaimed that the defence and improvement of the human environment—both natural and man-made—had become an imperative goal for mankind, to be pursued together with the fundamental goals of peace and of world-wide economic and social development. The achievement of this goal was the responsibility of citizens, communities, enterprises and institutions at every level. Although local and national governments would bear the greatest burden for large-scale environmental policy and action within their jurisdictions, international cooperation was also needed, both to raise resources to support the developing countries in carrying out their responsibilities in this field, and because a growing class of environmental problems were regional or global in extent.

By the preamble, the conference also, among other things, affirmed that in the developing countries most environmental problems were caused by underdevelopment, whereas in the industrialized countries they were generally related to industrialization and technological development. The Conference also declared that the natural growth of population continuously presented problems on the preservation of the environment and required the adoption, as appropriate, of adequate policies and measures.

The Conference then laid down the following 26 principles:

1. Man had the fundamental right to freedom, equality and adequate conditions of life, in an environment of a quality that permitted a life of dignity and well-being, and he bore a solemn responsibility to protect and improve the environment for present and future generations. In this respect, policies promoting or perpetuating *apartheid*, racial segregation, discrimination, colonial and other forms of oppression and foreign domination stood condemned and had to be eliminated.
2. The natural resources of the earth, including the air, water, land, flora and fauna and, especially, representative samples of natural ecosystems, were to be safeguarded for the benefit of present and future generations through careful planning or management, as appropriate.
3. The capacity of the earth to produce vital renewable resources was to be maintained and, wherever practicable, restored or improved.
4. Man had a special responsibility to safeguard and wisely manage the heritage of wildlife and its habitat which were now gravely imperilled by a combination of adverse factors. Nature conservation, including wildlife, was therefore to receive importance in planning for economic development.

* Extracts from Yearbook of the United Nations, 1972, Vol. 26, p. 319-21 and 330-31.

USA as the cradle of environmental history

- **1970s:**

- EH as a new direction of „*rebellious*“ American historians
- „*frontier history*“ as a paradigm of EH (F. J. Turner, 1894)
- **research:** settlement of the West, agriculture, land, water, ecological and geological impacts of dam building, history of deforestation
- **dissatisfaction with existing US policy:** emergence of environmental radicalism (direct action politics, Greenpeace – 1971)
- **late 1970s:** demand for „no solution“ to environmental problems – environment will take care of itself

USA as the cradle of environmental history

- **1980s:**

- **changes in research:**

- the retreat from „*history of environment*“ and the beginning of research on the human-nature relationship

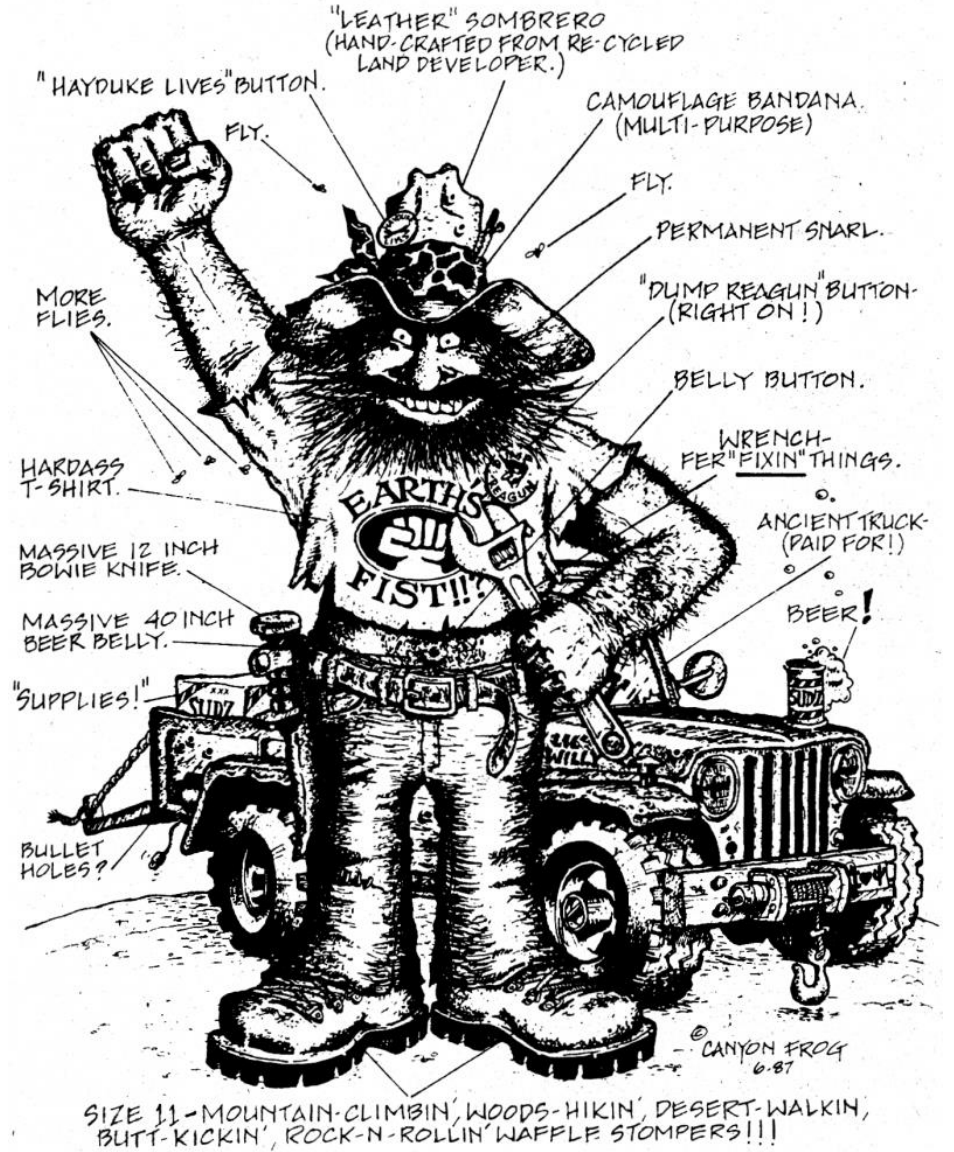
- „*frontier history*“ **replaced** by the concept of water as a limiting element

- **greater cooperation** with other **disciplines** (geology, social sciences, philosophy, sociology, political science ...)

- continued **radicalisation** of environmentalism: [Earth First!](#) (1980)



THE COMPLEET RADICAL ENVIRONMENTALIST



USA as the cradle of environmental history

- **1990s:**
 - geographers return to the question of environmentalism
 - **research:** the question of sustainable agriculture and ecology
 - EPA's restrictive policies threatened the US economy
 - withdrawal of the EPA's supra-ministerial status
 - shift from restrictions to agreements

Environmental history in the world and state of the art

Current research in the USA

- The role of women in environmental history
- History of environmental law
- History of environmentalist and environmentalist movements and their influence on politics

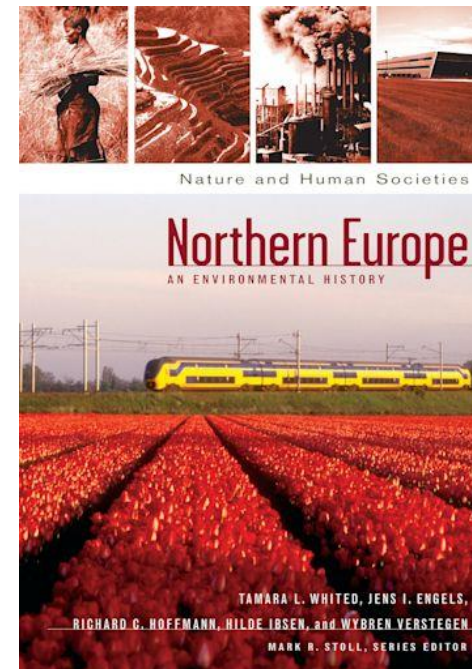
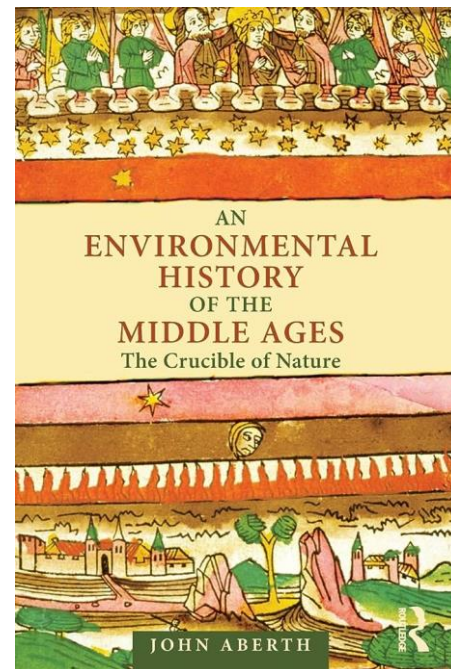


Environmental history in Europe

- The description of history in **post-communist historiography** from „worse to better“ – a possible cause of the slow development of EH in the Eastern Bloc
- The boom of EH in the **Western Europe** in the **1980s**
- **Rapid development of EH**
 - Annales school (social and economic history – agriculture, settlement and geographical themes, historical climatology – E. Le Roy Ladurie)
 - holistic approach to history

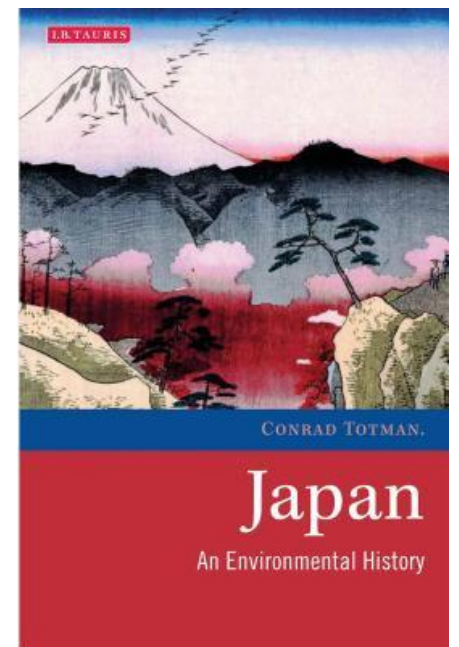
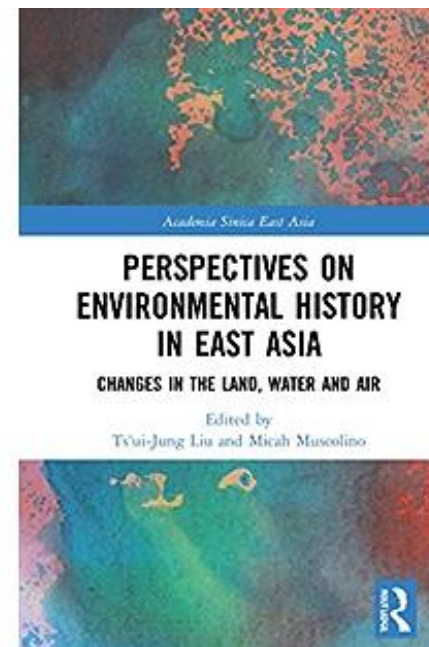
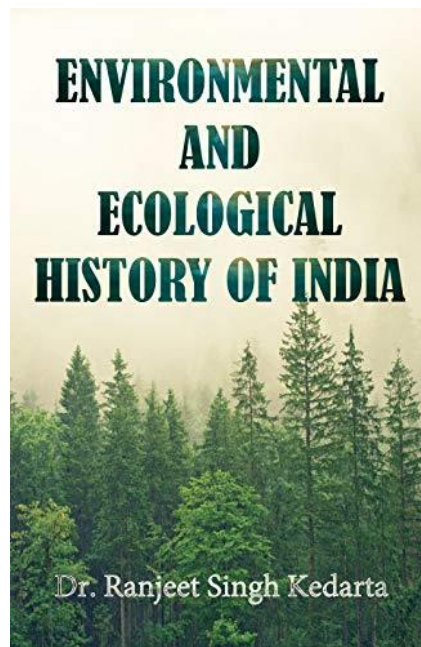
Environmental history in Europe

- **Current research:**
 - EH of cultural landscapes, urban, forest, agricultural EH
- [Rachel Carson Center for Environment and Society](#)



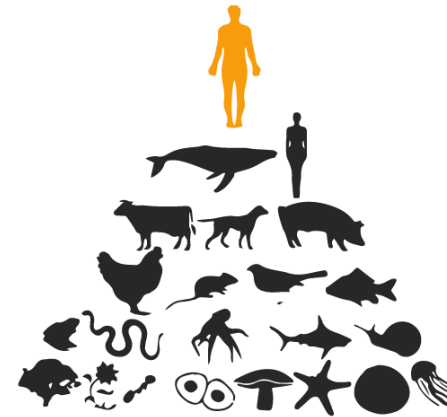
Environmental history in the world

- **Hotspots** of EH development in the world:
 - Japan, China, Australia, New Zealand, Brazil, South Africa
- ICHS Sydney 2005 conference – **EH accepted** as a scientific discipline worldwide

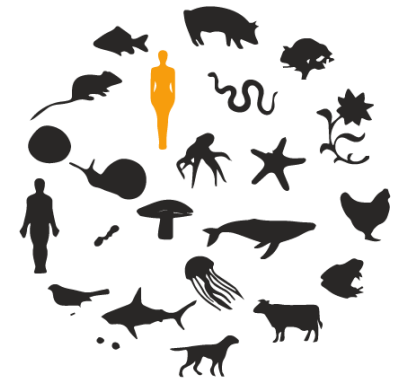


The current concept of environmental history

- **Biocentrism/Ecocentrism:**
 - man as part of nature, not its master
 - environment does not exist for man to plunder
 - intervention in the environment is harmful to humanity itself
 - a trend promoted by the current 2nd generation of American historians



Anthropocentric



Non-Anthropocentric

Anthropogenic factors influencing environmental change

1. Population pressure on land (territory)
2. Economy and its cycle
3. Technology and its innovation
4. Social structure and social relationships affecting the use and conservation of natural resources
5. Human mindset and attitudes contributing to change in the relationship - human society - environment

Societies, journals and representatives

International societies



- **American Society for Environmental History ([ASEH](#), 1977)**
 - over 1000 members
 - promotion and teaching of EH, collaboration with other disciplines and on a global level, dialogue between the natural and social sciences
- **European Society for Environmental History ([ESEH](#), 1989/2001)**
 - ca. 400 members
 - comparative EH research in Europe, teaching of EH at universities, communication and cooperation among scholars
 - conference open to all researchers interested in the human-environment relationship

International societies

- **International Consortium of Environmental History Organizations ([ICEHO](#))**
 - approx. 30 members (ASEH, ESEH, Forest History Society)
 - supporting its members and communication among them, organising congresses, emphasis on EH teaching, promoting EH to the public



Journals and data sources

- [Journal of Forest History](#) (1959, ASEH journal)
 - the oldest journal dealing with EH
- [Environmental history](#) (1990, ASEH journal)
- [Environment and History](#) (1995, ESEH journal)

- [The Environment & Society Portal](#)
- [EH Resources](#)

Main representatives

- Donald Worster (University of Kansas)
- Christian Pfister, Christian Rohr (University of Bern)
- Rudolf Brázdil (MU Brno, CzechGlobe)
- Péter Szabó (Institute of Botany CAS, MU Brno)
- ...



References

- JELEČEK, J. (2009): Environmentální dějiny: jejich vznik, konceptualizace a institualizace (USA, Evropa a svět). Annales historici Presovienses, 9.
- MCNEILL, J. R. and ROE, A. ed. (2013): Global environmental history: an introductory reader. London: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 449. ISBN 9780415520539.

Thank you for your attention