

Environmental History in Poland: Research projects, recent events and publications

Interest in environmental history in Polish academia is of relatively recent origin. At the same time, there is a very strong presence of historical geography (related to strong 19th-century traditions and to the *Annales* School), as well as environmental archaeology and palaeoecology. This creates a situation in which there is large potential for starting new conversations that will be inspired by the ways in which the field of environmental history has developed in other countries. However, as a result of this situation, there are still relatively few publications that engage directly with the questions that are characteristic of research in environmental history. For those interested in the historical geography of Poland, we recommend Jan Tyszkiewicz's recent textbook *Geografia historyczna. Zarys problematyki* (Warsaw, 2014). Regarding environmental archaeology and archaeobotany, we recommend the website of the Polish Society for Environmental Archaeology (<http://www.geoinfo.amu.edu.pl/sas/>). The following overview offers information on work that is currently being carried out in a number of research centres in Poland, listed alphabetically.

Białowieża

Studies within the framework of environmental history of Białowieża Primeval Forest (BPF) were started in the early 2000s at the Mammal Research Institute, Polish Academy of Sciences by Bogumiła Jędrzejewska (with the help of Tomasz Samojlik) and are still being carried out. The main aim of research is to answer questions about how the forest has changed in the last several thousand years and what impact human activities had on those changes. The principal topics studied have been: localisation and chronology of ancient and mediaeval settlements in the forest (together with the Institute of Archaeology and Ethnology, Polish Academy of Sciences); traditional, multifunctional utilisation of BPF in the 'royal period' (14th–18th centuries) and quantification of its impact on forest ecosystems; the history of fires in BPF (together with the Swedish Agricultural University and Forest Research Institute); the history of vegetation changes of BPF using palynological material (project led by Małgorzata Latałowa, University of Gdańsk); the impact of cattle pasturing in BPF on the forest during the last 500 years (ongoing project). The following articles summarise the main results of this research at Białowieża:

Samojlik T., Fedotova A., Kuijper D. P. J. 2016. 'Transition from traditional to modern forest management shaped the spatial extent of cattle pasturing in Białowieża Primeval Forest in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries'. *Ambio* 45(8): 904–918.

- Samojlik T., Rotherham I., Jędrzejewska B. 2013. 'Quantifying historic human impacts on forest environments: a case study in Białowieża Forest, Poland'. *Environmental History* **18**(3): 576–602.
- Latałowa M., Zimny M., Jędrzejewska B., Samojlik T. 2015. 'Białowieża Primeval Forest: A 2000-year interplay of environmental and cultural forces in Europe's best preserved temperate woodland'. In: K. Kirby and C. Watkins (eds), *Europe's Changing Woods and Forests: From Wildwood to Managed Landscapes* (CABI), pp. 243–264.

Białystok

The University of Białystok has long been known for innovative research in economic history of Central Europe. Recently, economic historians from Białystok, led by Piotr Guzowski, started collaborating with an environmental historian from Krakow, Adam Izdebski, and the palaeoecology group from the University of Poznań, and obtained major funding for a project exploring the environmental and economic history of Poland (within the framework of the prestigious National Programme for the Development of Humanities). The project combines historical and paleoecological approaches and promotes interdisciplinary collaboration. Although both historians and paleoecologists are interested in the past, their discursive practices in describing it vary considerably as do their genres of scientific writing. One of the main objectives of the project is therefore to generate some universal tools of data analysis that can be used by both groups to narrate the past. Apart from historical research, this project applies methods of the natural sciences (e.g., pollen analysis and non-pollen palynomorphs analysis) to a number of lakes and peat bogs in NW Poland. Such methods will be juxtaposed with archival information from the 16th to the 18th century contained in surviving economic sources from the great estates located in the immediate vicinity.

Krakow

The Institute of History of the Jagiellonian University in Krakow is the only place in Poland where regular teaching of environmental history has been taking place for several years, thanks to the interests of a number of staff members, in particular, Adam Izdebski, Rafał Szymyka and Andrzej Chwalba, together with Krzysztof Zamorski. This group, with support from colleagues across Krakow, has been developing an experimental BA programme in environmental history (advertised as 'Biohistory'). The same group organised a major conference on the environmental history of Poland and Central Europe in September 2014 (with ESEH support), gathering almost 40 participants from Poland and beyond. Most of the speakers later submitted their articles to the special issue of the well-known national journal *Historyka. Methodological Studies*, which are now been published as volume 46 (2016). Edited by Krzysztof Zamorski and

Maciej Salamon, *Historyka* has in fact become a major Polish outlet for publications in environmental history, featuring several important articles since 2013 (see www.historyka.edu.pl)

As well as teaching, historians working at the Jagiellonian University also focus on research projects. From 2012 to 2015, Adam Izdebski carried out a project about Byzantine environmental and climate history, with the key results appearing as a series of multi-authored articles in a special issue of the *Quaternary Science Reviews*, volume 136 (2016). Izdebski had earlier published a monograph on late antique and medieval environmental history, *A rural economy in transition. Asia Minor from Late Antiquity into the Early Middle Ages* (Warsaw, 2013). Another project directed by Izdebski and co-hosted by the Institute of History of the Polish Academy of Sciences, explored the potential of palynological data for the study of economy and society of the pre-industrial era (several articles in *Explorations in Economic History* and *Historyka*). Last year, a group of historians and an archaeobotanist from Krakow, Poznań and Wrocław initiated a project on the environmental history of Krakow, funded by the National Science Centre. Their goal is to investigate the roots of the current ecological crisis of the city while developing a new, *longue-durée* approach to environmental history of European cities. The results will appear as a book in Polish, along with a series of articles in English.

Poznań

Environmental historical perspectives in Poznań have been gaining ground in recent years, being reinforced by ecocriticism, post-human and animal studies, which have a significant tradition in Poland and internationally. This research is conducted mostly in faculties of history, Polish studies, geography and anthropology, and has been promoted in such conferences as ‘Memorials in the Age of Anthropocene’ (October 2014) and ‘New Humanities. Taking Positions, Negotiating the Autonomy’ (November 2016). A special subject of historical investigation for historians and anthropologists from Poznań has been the forest. Kazimierz Ilski, Agnieszka Jakuboszczak and Agata Konczal have all taken up the forest in their projects, with Konczal winning the prestigious Diamond Grant for Young Researchers for her work. Ilski has also edited the multi-authored animal history, *Człowiek w świecie zwierząt — zwierzęta w świecie człowieka* (Poznań 2012). The first conference in Poznań dedicated to environmental history, *sensu stricto*, took place in April 2016: ‘Not just Chernobyl. The Ecological Dimension of the History of Communism’. Research in environmental history at the Faculty of History in Poznań is mainly carried out by Ewa Domańska nad Małgorzata Praczyk.

Praczyk’s ‘Ecologizing history: Polish contemporary historiography and its approach to nature’ discusses contemporary Polish historiography and points out that environmental questions are rare subjects for most Polish

historians (see *Historyka*, 2015). Another article by Praczyk, ‘Econquest of Fortress Kostrzyn: After-war history of the site’, concerns processes of natural succession in the fortress Kostrzyn that was devastated by World War II. Such successional processes have led to the creation of a very special space that goes beyond a mere division of culture and nature.

Toruń

Toruń is the leading Polish centre for historical climatology. Rajmund Przybylak and his group at the Faculty of Geography have been collaborating for many years with other European groups focusing on documentary and early instrumental data for reconstructing historical climatic change. Przybylak edited the major collaborative monograph, *Polish Climate in the European Context* (Springer 2009). His group has also been working closely with historians, such as Piotr Oliński, who organised a conference on the environmental history of Poland that gathered scholars from across the country, with the proceedings scheduled to appear in 2018. Oliński, Rajmund Przybylak, Waldemar Chorążyczewski and Wiesław Nowosad are currently working on reconstructing the climate of the 15th and 16th centuries of the South Baltic region.

Warsaw

Despite being one of the largest research centres in Poland, Warsaw has not yet developed a strong group in environmental history. There is nonetheless growing interest in this field at the University of Warsaw’s Faculty of Artes Liberales. Jan Kieniewicz, Jerzy Axer and Marek Konarzewski have been offering a seminar on man and nature for several years now, and have also invited supplementary lectures by Betty (Vasilliky) Smocovitis from Florida and Adam Izdebski from Krakow to provide additional perspectives on environmental humanities at this university. In addition, Warsaw is becoming an important hub for historical geography thanks to the Department of the Historical Atlas of Poland which is based at the Taudeusz Manteuffel Institute of History of the Polish Academy of Sciences, an important recipient of funding from the National Programme for the Development of the Humanities. The aim of the atlas is to present cartographically the Polish lands as they existed in the second half of the 16th century. Each volume of the atlas is dedicated to one province and consist of two parts. One part includes the main map (scale 1:250,000) and detailed maps (1:500,000), to include settlements, land uses, forests, parochial networks, state and church districts, roads, and plans of selected cities. The other part presents descriptions of primary sources, methods applied for the preparation of the volume, key historical issues and indexes of places and names. Each volume is complemented by an electronic edition of land tax registers from the the 16th century (free online access).

Key pre-2010 Polish works related to environmental history

(assembled by Małgorzata Praczyk, Igor Rosa and Adam Izdebski)

- A. Walawender, *Kronika klęsk elementarnych w Polsce i w krajach sąsiednich w latach 1450-1586* [*Chronicle of natural disasters, epidemics and subsistence crises in Poland and neighbouring countries, AD 1450-1586*], introduction by F. Bujak, Lwów 1932 & 1935.
- J. Hładyłowicz, *Zmiany krajobrazu i rozwój osadnictwa w Wielkopolsce od XIV do XIX wieku* [*Landscape change and settlement development in Greater Poland from the 14th until the 19th c.*], Lwów 1932.
- M. Dobrowolska., *Przemiany środowiska geograficznego Polski do XV wieku* [*Transformations of Poland's geographical environment from the 15th c. until today*], Warszawa 1961.
- Ziemia i ludzie dawnej Polski, studia z geografii historycznej* [*People and land in Old Poland. Studies in historical geography*], ed. A. Galos, J. Jańczak, Wrocław 1976.
- Wisła: monografia rzeki* [*Vistula: a monographic study of the river*], ed. A. Piskozub, Warszawa 1982.
- J. Tyszkiewicz, *Ludzie i przyroda w Polsce średniowiecznej* [*People and nature in medieval Poland*], Warszawa 1983.
- Z. Kuchowicz, *O biologiczny wymiar historii: książka propozycji* [*Biological dimension of history: an exhortation*], Warszawa 1985.
- A. Samsonowicz, *Łowiectwo w Polsce Piastów i Jagiellonów* [*Hunting in Piast and Jagiellon Poland*], Warszawa 1991 (2nd edn 2011).
- M. Kuli, *Ekologia humanistyczna* [*Humanistic ecology*], Warszawa 1999.
- J. Tyszkiewicz, *Geografia historyczna Polski w średniowieczu. Zbiór studiów* [*Studies in the historical geography of Poland in the Middle Ages*], Warszawa 2003.

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