

Editorial Note: ‘Pasts and Futures of Water’

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Water is a basic necessity for all forms of life on earth. Regarding human activities, a reliable water source is essential not only to supplying drinking water but also to sustaining agriculture, energy production, trade and transport – the foundations of economically and culturally thriving societies. However, as the number of people inhabiting our planet increases, all these activities have more and more serious impacts on human health, the environment and the overall quality of life and wellbeing. Due to pollution and water quality deterioration, diminishing supplies, extreme phenomena brought about by climate change, and serious gaps in service delivery, issues related to water governance become ever more important.

The above considerations were extensively discussed at the 5th International Water History Association (IWHA) Conference ‘Pasts and Futures of Water’, held in Tampere, Finland 13–17 June 2007. The Conference was co-hosted by the Environmental History Research Group (EHRG) of the Department of History, University of Tampere, and the Capacity Development of Water and Environmental Services (CADWES) research group of Tampere University of Technology. The conference was attended by 260 participants from 38 countries (Fig. 1). The sponsorship of various national and international foundations, such as UNESCO’s IHP programme, made it possible to support the participation of altogether 36 delegates from developing and transition economies as well as

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FIGURE 1. Delegates of the 5th IWHA Conference, 13–17 June 2007 in Tampere, Finland (Photo: P. Pietilä).

21 doctoral students based in Baltic, Nordic and South-East Russian universities. President Martti Ahtisaari, Nobel Peace Prize Laureate of 2008, acted as patron of the conference.

The conference consisted of three keynote speeches, seven parallel sessions including altogether 38 two-hour sessions and three round-table panels. The keynote lectures were delivered by Professor Martin V. Melosi (University of Austin, Texas), Dr. Jose Esteban Castro (Newcastle University, UK) and Adjunct Professor Esko Kuusisto (Finnish Environment Institute, Helsinki, Finland), touching respectively upon the issues of water privatisation, water and citizenship, and water and climate change. The general theme of the conference 'Pasts and Futures of Water' aimed at inviting papers not only from water history oriented experts but also those interested in futures research. This aim was achieved successfully, as the papers presented at the conference represented a variety of academic disciplines including history, archaeology, anthropology, political science, sociology, economics, geography, civil and environmental engineering, and hydrology.

This theme section of *Environment and History* comprises four cross-cutting synthesis articles based on papers presented under the four major conference themes: (i) water, health and sanitation; (ii) water, food and economy; (iii) water

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and the city; and (iv) water governance and policy. The papers were compiled by selected theme rapporteurs based on the session rapporteurs’ reports on each session or panel. The four synthesis papers were co-authored by recognised experts involved in the planning and organisation of the conference as organising or scientific committee members, session chairs or session rapporteurs. Some of the key findings of the conference were also discussed in the post-conference research workshop and these have been taken into account in the synthesis papers. On the whole, even though the points of interest raised in the synthesis papers have naturally been chosen by their respective authors, we believe that they are a fairly accurate representation of the key findings of the conference sessions. The synthesis articles make reference to the texts presented on the conference CD. While much of the session material remains unpublished, further details of the presentations and their authors may be found in the Book of Abstracts, which is available at <http://www.cadwes.org/>.

The first synthesis paper, by Rautanen, Luonsi, Nygård and Vuorinen, summarises and discusses the contents of the conference presentations on the theme of Water, Health and Sanitation. The authors remind us that removing human excreta and other waste from densely populated urban areas is as ancient a challenge as the urban environments themselves. They argue that sanitation planning and wastewater management interventions and policies should be integrated within the broader perspectives of urban and environmental/river basin development, even into water resources management. In their view, such holistic thinking could result in the most effective infrastructure, control, incentives, interventions and allocation policies.

The second synthesis paper, by Vinnari and Frederiksen, introduces and discusses the presented papers pertaining to the theme of Water, Food and the Economy. In addition to summarising the content of the papers, the authors provide a critical appraisal of some of the fallacies in current thinking, policies and popular viewpoints. The authors point out that comprehensive historical research on water resources management, without pre-conceived views, should be the starting point of every investigation, consideration of new undertakings, and formulation of new policies at every level of government. They argue that developing countries suffering from water scarcity cannot afford to experiment with novelties that are not based on proven successful water management, stewardship and services.

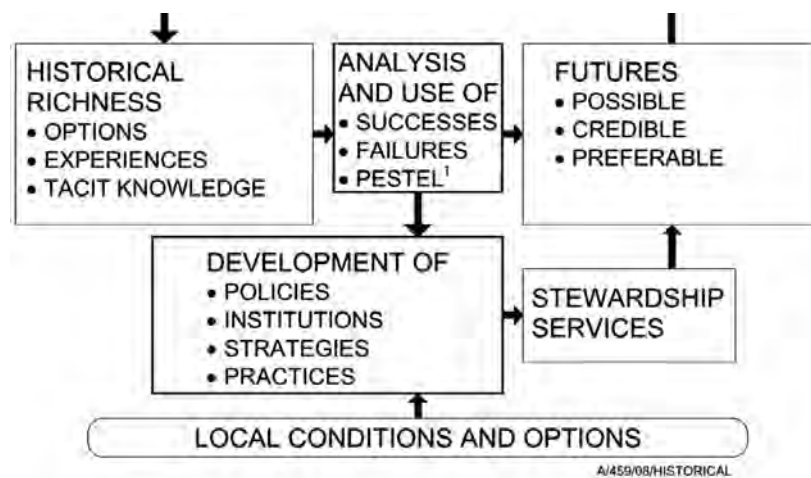
The third synthesis paper, by Katko, Juuti and Tempelhoff, focused on the theme ‘Water and the City’ while also dealing with urban and rural interactions. Historically the growth of urban centres has been a continuous trend, and in recent decades most of these centres have been located in developing economies. The authors remind us that decisions about and management of water resources and services over the long-term are to a large extent public by nature. As water systems and water use have expanded continuously, we have entered an era where humankind has to strive for more efficient water management. This

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requires thinking of viable options, while understanding of the pasts is also a basic requirement for identifying preferable futures.

The fourth synthesis paper, by Hukka, Castro and Pietilä, summarises the content of the conference papers on water policy and governance. The authors point out that water is no longer a purely economic commodity or a purely social good. Therefore, solving the 'World Problematique' concerning water governance is extremely difficult. The authors conclude that good governance requires that transparent and responsive political, organisational and administrative processes produce consensus on effective and efficient, equitable and inclusive measures and practices for safeguarding and sharing our common heritage, i.e. both national and international water resources.

As editors of this theme section, we wish to highlight the fact that both the pasts and the futures of water resources and water services management are complex and very challenging, characterised by both diversity and plurality (Fig. 2). The pasts, intentionally in the plural, can include invisible, hidden, un-recognised, recognised, non-accepted or accepted factors, reasons, events, practices, principles and strategies. The pasts of water management may often



¹ Political, economic, social, technological, environmental and legal factors

FIGURE 2. Interrelations between pasts and futures and a suggestion for analysing experiences and using them in policy development and implementation as well as in stewardship and services (© T.S. Katko).

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contain various types of path dependencies of negative or positive nature in long-term perspectives.

There is thus a need for research-based knowledge and understanding of water governance and management in long-term perspectives. As for water history, it is a veritable challenge to convince water utility managers, state and local authorities and other decision-making bodies of the necessity of gaining a wider understanding of these questions, and the crucial role of research results as a basis for understanding past decisions and their impact on the present, as well as for planning the future. Sometimes, unfortunately, state and local decision-making, and even the views of civil servants and donor representatives, are based on fads or fashions instead of sound thinking and verified arguments. We feel it appropriate to bear in mind the often-cited and time-tested observation by George Santayana (1863–1952): ‘Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it’.

NEW FROM THE WHITE HORSE PRESS

Stefania
Barca

Enclosing Water

*Nature and Political Economy in a Mediterranean Valley,
1796–1916*



Enclosing Water is an environmental history of the Industrial Revolution, as inscribed on the Liri valley in Italy's Central Apennines. Amid forces of revolution and empire, and Enlightenment discourses of 'improvement' and Political Economy, the Liri's natural wealth - water-power - generated sweeping changes in its landscape and working and living environments. This book tells the story of how defining water as property - both materially and discursively - led to the emergence of an industrial riverscape, and of a concomitant new ecological consciousness; to heightened environmental risks and awareness of those risks. A dramatic century in the Liri's socio-environmental history, with its cast of new industrial bourgeoisie, engineers and civil servants, illuminates how material developments and ideological currents completely reshaped the relationship between society and nature at the periphery of 19th century Europe. By integrating Political Economy into the narra-

tive of European environmental history, this pioneering book offers a critical new view of discourses of water disorder and environmental politics in the Mediterranean region.

Stefania Barca is a researcher at the Centre for Social Studies of the University of Coimbra in Portugal. Her previous publications include *Storia dell'ambiente. Una introduzione* ('An Introduction to Environmental History', co-authored with Marco Armiero, 2004) and *Elettrificare la Puglia. Impresa, territorio e sviluppo in prospettiva storica, 1900-1945* ('The Electrification of Apulia', 2001)

'Barca has a very rich and exciting set of concepts that she has developed to interpret the unfolding of the events in the Liri Valley: Enclosing Water; disorder of water; ecology of waterpower; liberating nature; industrial riverscape; the machine in the river; the tragedy of enclosure; seeing like an engineer; the unimproving state; industry and disaster. These concepts are unique to Barca's highly creative interpretation of environmental history and are what are going to put her stamp on the field'.

Professor Carolyn Merchant, University of California, Berkeley.



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