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Interview with Kristin Poling, author of Germany’s Urban Frontiers: Nature and History on the Edge of the Nineteenth-Century City

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In an era of transatlantic migration, Germans were fascinated by the myth of the frontier. Yet, for many, they were most likely to encounter frontier landscapes of new settlement and the taming of nature not in far-flung landscapes abroad, but on the edges of Germany’s many growing cities. Germany’s Urban Frontiers: Nature and History on the Edge of the Nineteenth-Century City (University of Pittsburgh Press, 2020) is the first book to examine how nineteenth-century notions of progress, community, and nature shaped the changing spaces of German urban peripheries as the walls and boundaries that had so long defined central European cities disappeared. Through a series of local case studies including Leipzig, Oldenburg, and Berlin, Kristin Poling reveals how Germans on the edge of the city confronted not only questions of planning and control, but also their own histories and futures as a community.

(Source: New Books Network)

In this episode of New Books in German Studies, Steven Seegel interviews Kristin Poling, author of Germany’s Urban Frontiers: Nature and History on the Edge of the Nineteenth-Century City.

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- Sealing the Land: Recognizing Urban Developments in Past and Present Göttingen
Will you describe the choice of the Goettingen region to examine urban development?

The Goettingen region was selected because it offers a unique and comprehensive case study for examining urban development. The city's rich history and varied landscape provide a rich tapestry of natural and human-driven changes over time. By focusing on this region, we can analyze the factors that have shaped the city's growth and evolution, from the early days of urbanization to the contemporary challenges faced by modern cities.

What were the major findings from the research?

The research revealed several key findings. Firstly, the impact of industrialization on the city's natural environment was significant, leading to the loss of green spaces and the fragmentation of wildlife habitats. Secondly, the city's infrastructure development created both opportunities and challenges for urban sustainability. While new transportation systems improved accessibility, they also contributed to increased traffic and pollution. Lastly, the study highlighted the importance of community engagement in shaping urban policies and the need for a balanced approach that considers both economic growth and environmental conservation.

What are some of the initiatives that have been implemented to address these challenges?

To address these challenges, several initiatives have been implemented. These include the establishment of green corridors to reconnect fragmented habitats, the introduction of sustainable transportation systems like bike lanes and public transit, and the implementation of green roofing and other green building practices to reduce energy consumption. Additionally, community engagement programs have been created to involve local residents in decision-making processes, ensuring that their needs and perspectives are considered in urban development plans.

What role do you believe urban planning and policy must play in future urban development?

Urban planning and policy play a crucial role in shaping the future of urban development. They must be centered around sustainability, ensuring that growth is both economically viable and environmentally responsible. Policies should prioritize the protection of green spaces, the enhancement of public transit systems, and the promotion of energy-efficient buildings. Additionally, effective urban planning requires the active participation of local communities, who can provide valuable insights into the needs and desires of the urban population. By prioritizing these goals, urban development can contribute to a more livable and sustainable future for all residents.

Websites linked in this text:

- https://newbooksnetwork.com/germanys-urban-frontiers