

Changing Local Environments: Perspectives on Baltic Environmental History

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History as a discipline added important impulses to ongoing discussions in Baltic Environmental Humanities, but has not been in the leading role. Although the environment has been described as a factor in Baltic (i.e. Estonian and Latvian) history in various writings (Liiv 1938), environmental history has only recently been introduced as a new methodological approach (Raudkivi 2010). In the paper I will reflect upon 1) why Environmental History has had difficulty gaining ground in Baltic history writing; 2) what could Environmental History add to present day Baltic historiography as a new way of writing local/regional history in global context, and 3) some topics of Baltic Environmental History that could enrich Baltic Environmental Humanities.

Narratives and political axioms pre-form our thinking and writing about culture in general. There are different possibilities how to combine, to continue or to break, common national approaches toward Baltic culture and history with Environmental History and its own narratives (Winiwarter 2003). I suggest Baltic Environmental History as a chance to recast into new formulations and approaches toward the culture of the region stressing Baltic trans-cultural experiences in colonial and entangled history (Plath 2008; Plath 2009; Plath 2011). Baltic history of gardening and food culture opens the perception of everyday local life, and discovers the entangled constructions of and changes between human and natural environments in a wider regional and global context (Plath 2010).

Theses:

1. Environmental history adds global aspects to the new form of Baltic transnational history writing
 - 1 a) Narrative concepts of how to speak about Baltic history in a global context have to be sampled
 - 1 b) Concepts of “us” and the “others” have to be re-thought (i.e., questions such as: How to think about Baltic colonial experience? With whom do we wish to be comparable?)
2. Case studies on Baltic environmental history add experiences of doubled colonization to EH stressing complex man-nature relationships (colonial-colonized, national-transnational, peripheral-remote insider perspective)
3. In global context, we have to choose carefully between the concepts of cultural comparison, the history of transfers and/or entangled history.
4. The history of Baltic gardening and food culture combines changes in private life and local cultural and natural settings with (global) changes in religion, politics, society and economics. Thus, these topics (and lots of others) can deal as case studies for a new environmentally entangled Baltic history.

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