

ECONOMIC- AND ECOHISTORY. INTRODUCTION FOR SPECIAL ISSUE ON HISTORY AND SUSTAINABILITY

Why publish a special issue on history and sustainability in this journal of economic and environmental history? Because the rapidly expanding field of »sustainability studies« is directly concerned with the relationship between economic development and the environment. When policy makers, scholars, and the public mention sustainability, they usually mean forms of economic production that are compatible with the preservation of healthy and resilient ecosystems and societies. Examining this important link between economy, environment, and society lies at the heart of this journal's scholarly mission.

Even though sustainability by definition implies continuation over time, the modern study of sustainability is too often ahistorical, too often focused on the immediate present and on short-term futures. Through this collection of essays, we hope to demonstrate why historical perspective is valuable and crucial when considering sustainability questions today. Even the concept of sustainability itself has a historiography, as contributors Caradonna and du Pisani each explore in this volume. All the essays collected here show how history and sustainability are as inseparable as economics and the environment.

This volume appropriately reflects the diversity and interdisciplinarity of historical and sustainability studies. Topics include agriculture, mining, tourism, governance, law, ecological change, the history of ideas, and the history of international development policy. For example, Thomas's essay evaluates whether the sustained livelihood success of certain island villages in the South Pacific can be attributed to conscious or unconscious applications of environmental conservation policies, or whether more material factors like population, technological sophistication, and resource use efficiency determined sustainability outcomes. Kah examines the environmental problems and social/political conflicts arising from illegal encroachment on a forest reserve in Cameroon by local villagers seeking food, shelter, and livelihood sufficiency. He argues for more participatory reforms in the governance of the reserve as a possible solution. Barry et al., focus on the sustainability of food and farm systems in northern Croatia in recent decades and propose a blueprint for improving the sustainability and livelihood sufficiency of family farms in the region. Zorn et al., examine 500 years of mercury mining and its associated pollution in the Idrija River Valley of Slovenia. They also trace the rather remarkable recent transition of the region into a tourist destination and nature protection area. Gross and Winiwarter examine the transition over 200 years from a more or less sustainable agrarian regime in the Damüls alps region of Austria into an unsustainable energy and capital intensive winter ski resort economy.

The diversity of topics is matched by a diversity of approaches. Some contributions in this volume emphasize theoretical approaches while others take a more empirical approach. Some contributions are primarily descriptive of historical changes and sustainability challenges while others offer critical evaluation and moral argumentation. The geographical scope of this collection is extensive, too, with studies focusing on Europe (Croatia, Slovenia, Austria), Africa (South Africa and Cameroon), North America, and Oceania. The ecosystems examined here range from coral atolls to river valleys, fertile plains, montane forests, and alpine peaks. Chronologically there is great diversity too. One study ranges back 2,000 years while another covers the last 200 years and another focuses on the period from the 1970s to the present. Taken together, this collection of essays from scholars around the world highlights the vibrancy, diversity, and relevancy of the historical study of sustainability.

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