

Human societies have always transformed the natural environments in which they lived, while at the same time they remained vulnerable to the changes that were constantly taking place in the natural world as a result of both human action and natural phenomena. Historians on both sides of the Atlantic have become aware of this fact already in the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> c., but it were the American historians of the 1970s and 1980s who developed a truly dynamic understanding of the links between the society and the environment, and made the changing nature part of our vision of the human past. Thus, during the past three or four decades a new discipline of historical research emerged in North America, and now environmental history has a strong presence at history departments across the continent, and it also became fully incorporated into university curricula.

This project aims at transferring the achievements of the American environmental historians into the context of the Polish historical writing, and, what is even more important, the Polish public debate. In order to achieve this aim, we decided to focus on a topic which not only is significant from the point of view of expanding our knowledge about Poland's past, but which is also directly relevant to the socio-ecological challenges currently faced by those who live in Poland.

We will, therefore, study the environmental history of Krakow, one of the most important Polish cities, which both today and in the past had to confront environmental problems, some which were close to becoming serious "ecological" threats to the city's development or even its very existence. Within the scope of this project, scholars coming from a variety of disciplines in the humanities and the sciences will study a wide array of problems that together will provide a comprehensive view of how the society and the environment interacted throughout Krakow's millennium-long history. These topics include local climate history; the role of the river Vistula, in particular the mutual links between the city's inhabitants and the river; the plants of the medieval and early modern city; the ways of managing the urban pollution in the pre-modern period; the role of industrialisation in the transformation of the links between man and the environment in the city; the impact of Krakow on the environment and landscape of its region; the imagined nature of Krakow and the cultural role of green areas for the city's inhabitants during the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> c.; finally, the environmental aspects of the WWII in Krakow (the city was the seat of the German occupation government in Poland).

In order to make it possible for the public to take advantage of our research, which is directly relevant to the "ecological debates" that are now taking place in Poland, and in Krakow in particular, the final book publication of our results will appear in Polish and will reconcile a rigorous scholarly methodology with a more accessible presentation of our research. We will do our best to make our results available and useful for the inhabitants of Krakow and its region, as we hope that they will help us all understand the nature of the problems that we now finally need to solve.