

Environmental history of the occupied and post-war Warsaw (1939–1947)

DESCRIPTION FOR THE GENERAL PUBLIC

During the war and post-war period, the urban space contained images characteristic of the rural yard: cows and goats, among other animals, were grazing among the ruins. The increase in the number of allotment gardens and urban tillage during the war is pronounced when compared to the previous period. The occupied Warsaw was termed a “city-vegetable garden”. The opposition between what is urban and what is rural took on a slightly different meaning, which provokes the question about the definition of urbanness. The occupational ruralisation of Warsaw was progressing, making it similar to rural areas, and there were environmental changes: in gardens, parks, at squares, cemeteries, that were destroyed due to military action and overexploitation.

The objective of the works undertaken in the project is to analyse the environmental history of the occupied and post-war Warsaw in 1939–1947. The subject matter of the environmental history includes natural components, shape of terrain, soil, water, air, vegetation, atmospheric conditions, climate, environmental relationships between the world of people and animals. It studies such phenomena as natural disasters and human-caused disasters, environmental pollution, tree stand devastation, hunger, disease and epidemics.

I pose the question: to what degree, in a situation when the cultural order is redefined, is the environmental order in a city changed as well? My postulate is that the war transforms to the same degree both the social life and the natural environment. During the war, it was subject to devastation just like selected aspects of the social life. Focusing on these issues lets us better know and understand the reality of war. Main research objectives will consist in studying changes of spaces, impact of military activities and people on the natural environment in the city, impact of the natural environment on human experiences. It is also important to study mutual relations and links between the world of people, plants, animals in relation to environmental changes in the occupied city and the living environment.

Work on the project will be split into several stages. First, an analysis of the literature and methodological papers from the field of environmental history in studies from the English-speaking cultural sphere, as well as in Polish, will be conducted. Next step will be to analyze papers concerning the cultural and social history of the occupation and the post-war period in Warsaw (1939–1947). An inquiry will be made into published and also unpublished source materials in Warsaw archives: press, administrative documents, photos, literature of personal documents – journals, diaries, memoirs, reports. During the final stage of the works, a critical analysis and interpretation of the collected materials will be conducted. After drawing conclusions, the results of studies will be prepared in the form of a typescript of the scientific monograph on the environmental history of the occupied and post-war Warsaw (1939-1947).

The main reason why this research topic was chosen is the fact, that the project will enrich environmental studies, which are still a developing field in Polish humanities, and contribute to the popularization of the research field of environmental history. Moreover, to date in Poland there has been no paper in this thematic area, tackling the city and war in a systematic manner. The project would introduce environmental issues into the dominating narration about World War II. Such research would enable us to modify the traditional image of the war and occupation and show them in a wider context. The project would fit the latest trends in global humanities while taking the domestic cultural context into consideration.