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**Civilizing by Draining:**  
**The Environmental History of Eastern European Mud**

Between 2018 and 2020 Poland experienced the worst droughts in the recorded history. How is it possible that a country, which as recently as in the nineteenth century was widely considered to be a territory of swamps, marshes, and mud, by the beginning of the twenty-first century has turned into something not too far from a desert? Using the tools of environmental history (supplemented by postcolonial and biopolitical theory) I will investigate what happened to make this environment disappear from a huge part of Eastern Europe. In other words, what were the deep cultural causes of the ongoing ecological crisis?

Although the policy of drainage accompanies the majority of civilisational projects (above all colonial ones), it occupies a central place in the Enlightenment civilisational discourses concerning territories stretching from Oder through Kujawy, northern Mazovia, Lithuania, Polesia, Volhynia, to the floodplains of the Dnieper River. Eastern swamps and marshes appear in the articles of French encyclopaedists, in Voltaire's historical books, in the adventures of Baron Münchhausen, in Frederick the Great's numerous remarks, and finally in Napoleon's legendary formula ("in Poland, I discovered the fifth element: mud"). In all these texts, the discourse of civilisation presents Eastern Europe as an available resource, a land rich in human and natural resources, but which needs to be properly regulated, Linnaean systematised, made legible to the apparatuses of modern bureaucracy.

The overarching goal of the project is to examine the influence of the Enlightenment paradigm in environmental policies in Eastern Europe between 1764 and 1939. I want to create a framework for examining the three particular Enlightenment ideas on draining policy and their effects: a) the concept of nature as an economic resource; b) new divisions between what is considered "civilized" and what is considered "barbaric"; c) the idea of Eastern Europe as the land of swamps and marshes. Current stage of research had shown that environmental policy in Europe since the late eighteenth century has differed strongly from analogous undertakings in the past and was highly influenced by the Enlightenment paradigm. However, it is not clear how this influence was shaped in the areas up to the eastern border of the former Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. The level of response of local communities to the new policies also seems to be particularly under-researched. My aim is to trace, at three levels of analysis, the influence of the three Enlightenment ideas on draining policies. Firstly, I will be interested what forms these ideas took in Polish lands and what influenced their changes during the periods under study (level of political discourse). Secondly, I intend to examine how these ideas materialized in the specific drainage policies (the level of practical solutions). Thirdly, I want to analyze the responses to these new policies by local societies and nature itself (social and environmental level). The project also aims to answer the question of how these three levels interacted with each other, for instance, how did the conflicts from the broader level of political discourse (literature, philosophy, visual culture) influence specific environmental policies? Or how did the social responses to new environmental policies affect the cultural images of nature?

What were the ethnic, cultural and ecological consequences of these policies? Using the tools of the analysis of the biopolitics, I will consider how the new environmental policy and the new population policy corresponded. To what extent does the draining of wetlands overlap with the process of unifying of the social and ethnic structures of modern state?

How did nature respond to these changes? Here I will examine, for example, the increasing flood risks as a result of nineteenth century regulation of the rivers or the rise of the epidemic threat in expanding cities or the deep social crisis as a result of plundering environmental policies in Polesia at the turn of the twentieth century. All these phenomena are evident in written sources.

How did local people respond to these projects? Although the new environmental policy brought emancipation to many social groups, broad spectrum of people came out against the processes of rivers' regulation or swamps draining: populations forced to low-paid and sometimes semi-slave labour in the draining, millers (on the occasion of liquidation of mills), inhabitants of villages flooded by new river beds, and finally all the common people who benefited from the natural diversity of the undrained wetlands and for whom the floodplains often constituted a part of commons protected by legal acts (servitudes).