



- CALL FOR PAPERS -

Workshop: 'Floods, State, Dams and Dykes in Modern Times: Ecological and Socio-economic Transformations of the Rural World'

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Bucharest (Romania), June 18-20, 2015

Convenors: Stefan Dorondel, Stelu Serban and Iuliana Armas

Background

At the beginning of the 21st century, the flood risk still represents a major world threat (60% of the natural catastrophes) and the climate warming might even accentuate this phenomenon in the future. Only in Europe, a rapid analysis of the flood situation after 1998 shows troubling statistics – more than 100 devastating floods until 2002. In 2002 and 2006 there were catastrophic floods along the Danube and Elba. In 2005 and 2009, other areas of the Central and Eastern Europe were seriously affected by disastrous floods. In Southeast Europe the situation is pretty much similar. Floods contribute to the highest percentage (41 %) of disasters in Romania whereas Bulgaria is also more prone to floods than any other hazards (30 %, see DRACE project by European Centre for Risk Prevention at the Council of Europe – www.drace-project.org). Other continents are also under huge stress from floods. Densely populated areas in China, India and Pakistan are heavily affected by floods causing annually thousands of casualties and millions of euro in material loss. However, as we know from the literature, various ethnic groups are differently affected by natural disasters. In Southeast Europe for instance, local politics excludes Roma population as “second hand citizens” and in some cases they may be more affected than other ethnic groups. In other areas of the world the poor are those who suffer the most from natural disasters. This approach raises the issue of vulnerability and risk for some particular groups in case of natural disasters (Blaikie). Thus, a special section of the workshop will focus on social vulnerability to natural hazards. The common understanding of vulnerability and the ability to measure it are considered the key for solving disasters through managing the consequences and setting targets (as Kaspersen *et al.* or Birkman 2006 have pointed out). Social scientists tend to view vulnerability as a set of

socio-economic factors determining people's ability to cope with stress and consider that social aspects are a product of inequalities. Natural scientists understand vulnerability in terms of the potential loss expressed in percentage in case of exposure.

Destructions and human losses have led states to issue large plans for mitigating the floods and taming (read making predictable) the rivers through river management plans. Thus, an analysis of the river flood management cannot be made unless we also involve in the equation dams, ditches, and dykes, which are 'thick human artefacts' (Bijker). Focusing on large state infrastructure which aims to tame the rivers draws attention upon the local and regional state officials and bureaucrats involved in the maintenance of such constructions (as Gupta or Isaacmans show). These constructions not only relate to human power but also prove the power of ideologies and ideas (Scott). Investigating state dynamics, politics, and ideologies which drive the state actions – from local to central level – represents a central issue in understanding changes suffered by rivers in modern times. We are interested in the environmental, economic, social, and political aspects of such large constructions and their effects on riparian populations.

How floods affect humans and how humans react to floods, what are the political and economic drivers of floods are subjects to be studied by environmental anthropology, political ecology, environmental history, social psychology, and social and cultural ecology. These disciplines are theoretically and methodologically intertwined, although the accent in explaining environmental problems may fall differently on social inequality, political economy, social struggle, or culture. More recently, anthropologists' focus on environmental disasters reflects a holistic approach in which physical, biological and socio-cultural systems interact in complex ways. Social scientists usually focus on natural disasters as a whole, floods being just one natural hazard among others, such as biological hazards, coastal storms, earthquakes, landslides, or volcano eruptions. Only recently scholars from various disciplines began to pay attention particularly to water, rivers and their social, economic, and ecological consequences (Mauch).

Objectives of the workshop

We intend to discuss topics such dam constructions, drainage, and other large initiatives undertaken by the state in order to mitigate floods and their social, economic, political and environmental consequences. We are equally interested in local perceptions, practices,

attitudes and imagination of the population living in flooded areas around the globe concerning floods mitigation. In this workshop we also intend to discuss vulnerability as integrated in the complex human-environment interaction. A special attention will be given to methodological approaches of developing index-based hierarchical social vulnerability metrics to natural hazards. Papers testing internal and external conditioning shaping social vulnerability patterns in relation to hazard intensity are welcome. The workshop seeks to engage with multiple perspectives on these issues coming from a wide range of social and humanities studies. The papers will be submitted in advance and will benefit from comments of a discussant.

Questions

Within the workshop we seek to address new questions and look for a refreshing view over the human-environment relationship in post-colonial and post-socialist states:

- 1) Floods – are they natural hazards or a hybrid between technology, political economy and local economic practices?
- 2) Which particular ethnic or social groups are affected in case of floods in various part of the world?
- 3) The ideology and politics of taming the rivers - to with what costs? Debates, contradictions, plans.
- 4) How states use the big constructions in the formerly flooded areas to enhance their authority and their legitimacy in the eyes of local people?
- 5) What are the effects of the socialist and colonial states constructing the large infrastructure (such as dams, dykes, or agricultural land which benefitted from drainage) on the rural population?
- 6) What are the effects of the new global ‘green ideology’ (nature restoration, biodiversity protection) on the riparian population?
- 7) What are the effects of the neoliberal governance around the world on the state large infrastructure and how this affects rural population?

Confirmed Keynote speakers:

- Christof Mauch (Ludwig Maximilians University Munich)
- James C. Scott (Yale University)
- Sue Tapsell (Middlesex University London)

Expected publication

The papers of the workshop will form the basis for a special issue to be published in a peer-reviewed international indexed journal in English language.

Important deadlines

January 15th 2015 Submission of paper proposals (500-1000 words) to Stefan Dorondel (dorondel@yahoo.com), Stelu Serban (steluserban@yahoo.com) and Iuliana Armas (iulia_armas@yahoo.com; iuliaarmas@yahoo.com)

February 15th, 2015 Invitation of papers to be presented at the workshop

May 15th, 2015 Submission of papers to workshop organizers

June 18-20, 2015 Workshop at the New Europe College, Bucharest