

INTRODUCTION

Local livelihoods and global challenges. Understanding human interaction with the environment

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The first World Congress of Environmental History aims to explore human interaction between people and their environment on many different scales. Our baselines for research become challenged thematically, spatially and in time, also when visiting regions far away from home – or just across the Öresund. The Öresund is the name of the narrow waters between Copenhagen, Denmark and Malmö, Sweden.

Carved out by the ice melting away at the last ice age, the Öresund area and hinterland was soon an environment of bounty, probably exploited by humans as early as 12,000 years ago. While remains of the early cultures are scarce, the last millennium has witnessed a broad range of well-documented encounters between man and nature in this part of the World.

This booklet intends to present some examples of the local livelihood and interactions in the two countries that are hosting the congress, as well as their connection to global developments. By doing so we discover how patterns resemble each other but also how they differs between countries and continents, and we hope to contribute to the understanding of a region where two nation states are bridging, mentally and through modern engineering, the challenges of a deeply rooted common history situated in a shared environment.

This common environment consists of two parts – firstly the fertile soils in Zealand and southern Scania with good preconditions for agriculture, secondly the Öresund with rich fish catches and above all its

function as a maritime crossroad between Western and Eastern Europe but also between Zealand and Scania. These two major preconditions of human interaction in the region are highlighted in every chapter, along with common threads of issues of subsistence, energy and consequences of population growth.



Similarities and differences between the Danish and Swedish sides are in focus in Stefan Anderbergs article on *Industrialization and environmental development around the Øresund*. With a perspective stretching from the early stages of industrialization in the mid-1800s to the increasingly integrated economies of today, Anderberg looks at how pollution have changed over time, drawing conclusions that the development is in many ways similar to the experiences in other Northern and Central European countries. Important differences between the Swedish and Danish sides of the Øresund are visible in the development of the energy system and in food and agricultural policies.

A long-term perspective is provided by Carsten Jahnke, looking at the herring fisheries in the Øresund from 1200 to 1600. In *The European fishmonger*, Jahnke shows how the “fish without bones” became a new export commodity and contributed to the development of the Scanian markets. The ecological conditions permitted a constant catch of large quantities of herring, but there was also a more or less mythical awareness of overfishing. The Scanian markets were important transfer points of the medieval European trade, since they connected western and eastern market systems. In the fifteenth century, the Scanian markets began to decline and eventually ceased. The traditional explanation for this relates to depleted herring stocks, but Jahnke also points to newer research, which suggests that political and economical processes in Europe must be taken into consideration.

Fishing is also in focus in Johan A. Lundin’s article *Fishing in the Øresund and the Janus face of industrialism*. Lundin investigates material from the Scanian fishing villages Limhamn and Råå, the largest in southern Sweden at the turn of the twentieth century. The development of equipment and boats made the fishermen less dependent on weather and local conditions, but was also a target for criticism. Industrialization was an important part in the development of modern fishery, Lundin concludes, but could also have negative consequences, such as overfishing and pollution.

The industrialization of food production systems is also the topic in *The future is a sweet dream. Sugar production and environmental impact c. 1850-1950*. Here, Fredrik Björk examines how sugar beets were introduced in Scania and became a significant agent in the integration between agricultural and industrial systems. The beet sugar factories were some of the most criticized polluters of the late nineteenth century, responsible for dried-up lakes and rivers, dead fish and foul smells. At the same time, sugar was perceived as luxurious and modern, and supported by important political and financial interests.

In his article, *Environmental agency*, Bo Fritzboøger has an even longer time frame discussing examples of how forests have been used and perceived in Denmark from c.1500 until today. Taking his starting point in the historical interdependence between humans and the physical environment in the early modern multifunctional land use and discords over concepts such as underwood and overwood. The wood itself became an actor when the tenants preferred to use the underwood as coppices. This practice stops the maturation of the overwood, i.e. big trees of beech or oak, while instead a transformation of woods into underwood becomes apparent. With several examples like this Fritzboøger shows how, until today, the woods can be seen as actors in an interaction with human society.

The woodlands of Scania, on the Swedish side of the Öresund, resemble those in Zealand in Denmark. For centuries the city of Malmö had the same problems with scarcity of wood as many Danish cities. This in turn makes Malmö different from many other Swedish cities. In his article *When the ceiling was broken*, Per Eliasson explains how natural conditions made the pre-industrial city of Malmö suffer more from energy poverty than most Swedish cities. The arrival of British coal from the mid-1800s changed this situation dramatically. When this dependence on the local natural conditions for energy use was removed, the use of first coal and then oil and electricity created the modern city of Malmö

Industrialization in the Öresund region was closely linked to the introduction of fossil fuels, as Per Eliasson argues in his article. One of the consequences of this was that thick, black smoke filled the skies of the cities. In *Coal smoke pollution in industrial Malmö and Copenhagen*, Lars Berggren shows that there was a sharp increase in the amount of steam power used in Malmö's factories in the late 1880s. Eventually, complaints about coal smoke were made and investigations were started. However, Berggren suggests that the image of black smoke

coming out of a factory chimney was ambiguous, since it was seen as a sign of wealth and prosperity.

Pernilla Ouis' and Ebba Lisberg Jensen's article on cultural and biological diversity in present-day Malmö, "*I brought a hazelnut from Macedonia*", investigates how this complex relationship manifests itself in the allotment gardens of Malmö. Ouis and Lisberg Jensen also examine the debate on biodiversity in the Swedish context, where they argue that two distinct positions can be identified: either biodiversity is related to *variety* - of individuals, species and populations, or to *indigenous nature*.



The articles mirror the research work in environmental history at the Universities of Roskilde, Copenhagen, Malmö and Lund and the network that links it together. Since our Nordic Environmental History conference in 2004 in Copenhagen and Malmö this cooperation has been ever closer. Forest history, history of energy transitions, marine environmental history, consumption, migration and the processes and consequences of industrialisation have been key elements in this research. In this work the regional perspective is important as even the concept of a region changes over time with new technologies and the supply of energy.

It is our hope that these articles will give a presentation of some globally important questions that concerns us all and their regional development over time in our own local livelihood – the Öresund Region.