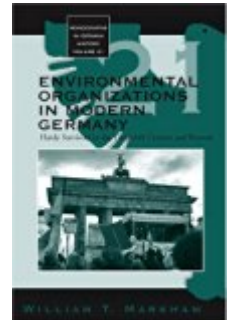


**William T. Markham.** *Environmental Organizations in Modern Germany: Hardy Survivors in the Twentieth Century and Beyond.* New York: Berghahn Books, 2008. xiii + 407 pp. \$95.00, cloth, ISBN 978-1-84545-447-0.



**Reviewed by** Jeffrey K. Wilson

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**Commissioned by** Benita Blessing (Oregon State University)

William T. Markham has produced an intriguing study of the German environmental movement spanning the past century. A sociologist, Markham focuses on the challenges faced by nature protection organizations in their efforts to remain relevant against a sometimes wildly changing social and political backdrop. He is particularly concerned with the ways in which such groups structured themselves internally, acquired resources, and related to the public, other environmentalist organizations, business interests, and the state.

Markham's work is roughly divided into two parts. Following the introduction and a chapter on methodology, five chapters cover the development of environmental organizations. Markham's analysis begins before the First World War and is taken through the present, with a separate chapter detailing East German developments. This straightforward and readable narrative--written on the basis of secondary sources--includes Markham's incisive analysis of the issues at the end of each chapter. The early chapters center on

his examination of the Bund Heimatschutz (League for Homeland Protection), the Naturfreunde (Friends of Nature), the Bund für Vogelschutz (League for Bird Protection), and the Bund Naturschutz in Bayern (Bavarian League for Nature Protection). All of these groups flourished in the imperial and Weimar eras, faced coordination (or in the case of the Naturfreunde, abolition) at the hands of the Nazis, then re-emerged after the Second World War to continue their efforts. The major turning point in their histories comes less with Nazi persecution than with the popular upheavals of the late 1960s in West Germany. In the Federal Republic, the Bund Heimatschutz and the Naturfreunde, clinging to older organizational models and ideological ties, saw a significant decline as the public demanded more confrontational approaches to rising environmental threats, including nuclear energy. The Bund für Vogelschutz and the Bund Naturschutz in Bayern, meanwhile, incorporated themselves into larger organizations, the Naturschutzbund Deutschland (German Nature Protection League) and the Bund für

Umwelt und Naturschutz Deutschland (League for Environment and Nature Protection), respectively. Other groups that better represented modern concerns joined these organizations, such as the German branches of the World Wildlife Federation and Greenpeace. In East Germany, both the state-run Gesellschaft für Natur und Umwelt (Society for Nature and Environment) and grassroots environmental groups that emerged under church auspices in the 1980s did not weather the collapse of their society in 1989/90, and were (partially) absorbed by their western counterparts.

The second half of the book--based on Markham's archival research, surveys of the press and environmental literature, and interviews with environmental leaders--details the challenges faced by the four major German nature protection groups at the end of the twentieth century. The confrontational spirit of the environmental movement in West Germany ebbed by the late 1980s; in East Germany the transition to German unity overwhelmed it. In place of demonstrations and site occupations, the environmental movement has increasingly sought to negotiate with government and industry. At the same time, the volunteer, democratic, and local basis of these organizations has been supplanted by growing professionalization and centralization in national headquarters. To support this more expensive, professional operation, nature protection groups have turned to direct-mail fundraising, sometimes accepting business or state support. All of these elements have, to some extent, alienated the activists who had joined these movements in the 1960s and 1970s, and pose a neat existential dilemma: how should each group balance their memberships' demands for a more grassroots, confrontational stance with the now dominant, professional, and cooperative approach?

This narrative of the rise and repeated adaptation of the German environmental movement to a variety of social and political contexts is a fascinating one, and relies on much of the standard

historical literature of the field. My only reservation comes with Markham's discussion of the early twentieth century, where he describes the Bund Heimatschutz and other middle-class nature enthusiasts as reactionary. While the nature protection movement of this period had significant conservative overtones, much of the recent literature on the period (which Markham cites) has moved against this outmoded view, stressing instead the modernity of the movement.[1] Fortunately, this oversight does not interfere with his overall argument.

Ultimately, Markham's sociological analysis of German nature protection organizations proves readable and engaging. He makes significant efforts to write a broadly accessible work. Discussions of sociological theory are limited to a methodological chapter and part of the conclusion; otherwise, his prose is clear and highly organized. This book therefore would make an excellent introduction to the history of German environmentalism.

#### Note

[1]. See for instance Celia Applegate, *A Nation of Provincials: The German Idea of Heimat* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990); William H. Rollins, *A Greener Vision of Home: Cultural Politics and Environmental Reform in the German Heimatschutz Movement, 1904-1918* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997); and John Alexander Williams, *Turning to Nature in Germany: Hiking, Nudism, and Conservation, 1900-1940* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007).

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