

**Christian Wenkel, Eric Bussière, Anahita Grisoni, Hélène Miard-Delacroix, eds.** *The Environment and the European Public Sphere: Perceptions, Actors, Policies.* Cambridgeshire: White Horse Press, 2020. 358 pp. \$90.00, cloth, ISBN 978-1-912186-14-3.



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As a space between state and society, the public sphere fulfils important functions in democratic societies: it ensures transparency, forms opinions and collective identities, holds authorities and governments to account, and offers criticism and alternative actions to reach a certain goal—a current example being the climate protests that have emerged across the globe. According to the editors of *The Environment and the European Public Sphere: Perceptions, Actors, Policies*, this contemporary climate protest is “part of a long-term evolution, marked by the emergence of a new environmental consciousness within the European public sphere,” which began at the end of the nineteenth century and is a still-ongoing process characterized by an institutionalization of environmental movements, environmental agenda setting, and “the formulation of environmental policies, following a growing convergence of debates within this European public and politic sphere” (p. 1). Indeed, Christian Wenkel, Eric Bussière, Anahita Grisoni, and Hélène Miard-Delacroix argue that it “seems possible to invoke

the emergence of Europe through the perception of environmental problems and the suggested solutions” (p. 9).

During the last decades, a growing amount of literature has brought new insights on the role of international organizations and social, often transnational, movements in the emergence and development of environmental awareness and policies, as well as on the history of European integration, European institutions, and Europeanization, including the role of societal actors. Whereas much of the literature of European integration focuses on its institutions, the present volume intends to reverse “the perspective on the decision-making process” (p. 2) and to unveil “its long-term dynamics” (p. 2) by putting the rather neglected public sphere at the center. With this approach, the editors aim to advance the history of Europeanization, as it allows analysis of institutional Europeanization (economic, legal, political level), structural Europeanization (transport, communication, migration, perceptions, representations, discourses, and values), and the interde-

pendence between these two. Furthermore, by focusing on the influence of “convergences” of perceptions and debates on agenda setting and on policy formulation, the editors strive to renew the field of international relations.

Thus, although the contributions offer several new perspectives on European environmental history and environmental politics and advance these fields, the volume presents itself first and foremost as a contribution to the history of Europeanization. It uses the cross-border character of environmental pollution, consciousness, movements, and policies to entangle European public sphere(s), and as a lens for writing a holistic European history of Europe as a distinct sphere between national, regional, and international developments and independent from geopolitical and geographical divisions. This focus is justified by the editors’ basic premise that the emergence of the European public sphere and the emergence of the environment as a policy field across Europe happened simultaneously (p. 9). While the editors emphasize that the 1970s were formative years for European integration, environmental politics, and the media landscape, the volume, however, aims at enlarging this period to stress the “importance of the long-term phenomena” (p. 10).

The volume is structured into four thematical sections that follow the process of the European public sphere from its emergence to its impact, and which are written by noteworthy gender-balanced array of early career and well-known scholars, representing a wide range of disciplines, including history, political science, law, and sociology. The interdisciplinarity of the volume is also reflected in the seventeen chapters’ different methodological approaches, stretching from theoretical to empirical, and from national over comparative to transnational perspectives.

Part 1 examines the emergence and development of what is called a “European communication sphere” on environmental issues, characterized by a convergence of perceptions and debates.

Starting at the end of the nineteenth century, Charles-François Mathis shows, this European communication sphere on environmental issues first evolved around landscape preservation for which the 1909 First International Congress for the Protection of Landscapes can be seen as “one of the most visible manifestations of this internationalization” (p. 21). Mathis argues that the success of the 1909 Congress was enabled by a European public sphere of international coordination, for which a shared ideology, personal contacts, and joint activities were decisive. Moving from this transnational community concerned with national nature protection of the early twentieth century to the postwar period, Michel Dupuy examines this “pan-European communication sphere” (p. 12) of notions and perceptions of environmental degradation in Eastern and Western Europe. The contribution shows how different Western European media, such as newspapers, radio, and television, were instrumentalized by East European environmentalists for information dissemination across the Iron Curtain. Dupuy convincingly argues that the “environmental movement in the East was able to extend beyond borders and create a European public sphere to raise awareness of the true state of its environment” (p. 87) in the East, by passing on information to the West. These already existing connections between East and West European communication spheres, however, “did not immediately trigger the emergence of a specific European public sphere” (p. 11.) following the Chernobyl accident of 1986. Rather, Chernobyl was important for the long-term development of a European public sphere on modern risks in general, as Karena Kalmbach’s contribution proposes. This European public sphere of risks is also connected to the European “risk culture(s),” whose long-term cultural history is examined by François Walter, who argues that a European “risk society” emerged during the 1970s.

The second part deals with the shaping and use of the European public sphere by transnational activists and movements across national bor-

ders and in relation to European institutions. Emphasizing the importance of cultural and historical linkages as well as of individuals for these environmental movements, the contributions in the second part diversify and broaden the map of a geopolitical and institutional Europe. Unraveling the intellectual and historical roots of the European Green Belt, Astrid Mignon Kirchhof argues convincingly that “ideas and concepts of pioneering GDR nature conservationists were instrumental in the emergence of environmental consciousness in Europe” (p. 92). Kirchhof shows that the emergence of a European environmental conscience depended on single actors who have played a key role as mediators, inspiration, and promoters of ideas, and as initiators of European-wide networks that stimulated international debates beyond the East-West division. Such a porous Iron Curtain was equally important for the cross-border cooperation between Hungarian and Austrian environmentalists campaigning against the hydro-electric dam projects in Gabčíkovo-Nagymaros and Hainburg, which is the focus of Daniela Neubacher’s contribution. Arguing that this transnational environmental activism was a “Europeanization from below,” Neubacher shows that this cooperation both built on a shared regional history and contributed to a regional integration independent from institutional European integration and Cold War division by promoting a distinct, regional identity of Central Europe. This aspect of regional identity as distinct to Europe and European institutions is equally prominent in the contribution by Andrew Tompkins, which challenges the European character of the antinuclear movement in the French-German border regions by showing that the antinuclear activists’ perception of Europe was “for the most part non-institutional” (p. 143). Yet while many environmental activists opposed the very idea of European integration and its institution, the European Community, Europeanization was a reciprocal process resulting in environmental organizations adapting to the European sphere in

order to lobby for environmental policies but also in a reconsideration of their values and principles, as Liesbeth van de Grift, Hans Rodenburg, and Guus Wieman thoroughly illustrate by the example of Greenpeace International.

Part 3 is concerned with the role of Green parties and parliamentarians in environmental agenda setting and thus focuses on the link between the public and the political sphere. The sentiment of European integration as an anti-democratic and capitalistic project that was shared by many in the various environmental movements also shaped the initial years of the West German Green Party, which, as Silke Mende demonstrates, was not necessarily anti-European but promoted a “Europe from below” to be achieved by strengthening direct democracy. Over the course of the 1980s and 1990s, however, both the West German Greens as well as other European Green parties have become profoundly pro-European, a development that is analyzed in detail in Giorgio Grimaldi’s contribution. Grimaldi’s argument on the limited influence of the Green parties on European politics is supported by Emilie van Haute, who, scrutinizing the existence of a “Green party family” since the first direct election of the European Parliament in 1979, proposes that while the collaboration of the Green parties has “contributed to a supranational European public sphere” (p. 166), the absence of a shared voter sphere proves an obstacle to European-wide campaigns and a greater impact of the European Green Party. The importance of national specifics as detrimental to a European public sphere is also reinforced by Eva Oberloskamp, who, by means of a comparative analysis of parliamentary debates in France, the United Kingdom, and West Germany, concludes that “a European discursive space regarding the link between energy and environment did not exist on the parliamentary level” (p. 219).

The fourth and final part explores the Europeanization of environmental policies by ex-

ploring the simultaneous agenda setting at national levels, and by focusing on the connections between the European and national public sphere(s) and the supranational level in European institutions. Exploring “the link between the (European) public sphere and European environmental policymaking” (p. 225), Jan-Henrik Meyer unveils how the European environmental movement cooperated transnationally to impact the European and national public spheres at the same time in order to increase attention and the likelihood of successful agenda setting. By means of three different examples, Meyer convincingly advances the argument that the European public sphere decisively shaped European environmental policies by influencing the policymaking process at its various stages. These European environmental policies and in particular the European Action Programs were also important components in the development of European environmental law prior to the Single European Act of 1987. Sophie Baziadoly explores this development of European environmental law under the auspices of the European Commissions, and proposes that this process was driven by internal forces, such as public awareness and engagement, and external forces, such as the global nature of environmental pollution and international developments. Another convergence, that of European energy and environmental policies, is at the center of Christopher Fabre’s contribution. Exploring the roots of the 2008 EU energy and climate change package, Fabre points to different structural constraints as an explanation for the diverging French and German nuclear programs following the 1970s oil crises. Using the International Commission for the Protection of the Rhine as a case, Marjolein van Eerd and Duncan Liefferink argue that environmental governance is increasingly depending upon actor interaction, information communication, and informal channels of exchange. Similarly, Anthony R. Zito, whose contribution analyzes the implementation of environmental policy, iden-

tifies a shift toward increasing use of economic instruments within environmental policies.

In its entirety, the volume provides a complex and diverse picture of Europe and the public sphere(s). Where Europe started and where it ended depended decisively on the context, the narrative, and the perspective. The analysis of the debate about “Chernobyl’s ‘Europeanness’” (p. 54) shows vividly how the definition of *Europe* changed depending on whether it was defined as a geographical, political, or cultural entity (Kalmbach). Moreover, in several cases Europe was rather a “Europe of regions” and a Europe of networks, which built on a shared history and culture, which was defined by geographical proximity and a regional identity rather than European institutions, and whose connections transcended both geographical as well as geopolitical constructions of Europe (Dupuy; Kirchhof; Neubacher; Mathis). For many environmentalists and politicians of emerging Green parties, the European project was the epitome of an antidemocratic, capitalistic, and technological organization, the fundamental contrast to their values, ideas, and principles (van de Grift/Rodenburg/Wieman). This explains why environmental organizations often framed their protest within international rather than European terms. At the same time, environmental activists and Green parties promoted alternatives to European institutions: a “Europe of struggles” or a “Europe of regions” as a decentralized, pacifist, and ecological alternative to European institutions (Grimaldi; Mende; Tompkins).

Nevertheless, environmental organizations used the possibilities of the *public sphere* to influence European environmental agenda setting and the development of European environmental policies. A central mediating position in this process was held by the European Parliament, which “itself [was] a European public sphere of assembly” (p. 241) toward the European Commission (Meyer). Yet, as this volume defines the European

public sphere as “a possibility whose future contours are perceptible through a multitude of public spheres, at different—especially cross-border—levels, or even communication sphere, which together foster an increasing conference of debates” (p. 2), the contributions demonstrate the diversity of communicative, pan-European, political, and supranational European public spheres, in which single actors and organizations acted as mediators. Despite its focus on the 1970s as a “bridge” (p. 3) between earlier nature protection movements and current European environmental policies, the contributions of the volume cover more than a century, from the late nineteenth century to the early twenty-first century, thereby showing that (a) European public sphere(s) is to be found both in relation to and independent from European institutions.

The volume is at its strongest when it manages to critically address these two key concepts, their complexity, diversity, and plurality. Unfortunately, due to the varying and partly peripheral engagement with “Europe” and “public sphere” in the different contributions, the volume does not always succeed in its ambition to revise the position of the public sphere in the historiography of European integration and decision-making, which has tended to consider it “only as a secondary factor” (p. 2). For the same reason, it does not always succeed in “reveal[ing] European characteristics” of environmental perceptions and “identify[ing] the parameters of a specific European environmental consciousness” (p. 9). Furthermore, the volume’s coherence would have benefited from a stronger editorial synthesis around the concept of public sphere(s), the scope and understanding of Europe, the defined turning point of 1979 as “a key moment, both for the construction of Europe and for the institutionalization of environmental movements” (p. 1), and the term “convergence,” which receives prominent use but no conceptualization in the introduction.

Moreover, although the volume shows that the definition of *Europe* is connected to diverse perceptions, imaginations, and narratives, possible to define along geographical, geopolitical, and institutional terms, the Europe presented in this volume is mainly characterized by the French-German region as a paradigmatic European public sphere. While this geographical bias might be explained by the origin of this volume, which is the result of among others an international conference organized by the German Historical Institute in Paris and the Research Center of Excellence entitled “Ecrire une histoire nouvelle de l’Europe” at Sorbonne University, France, it unfortunately leads to entire regions, such as northern, southern, and southeastern Europe, being neglected, which arguably would have constructively contributed to the volume’s aim of a “European history that is not confined to any division” (p. 9).

Despite these critical remarks, the volume contributes to the debate on the existence of a European sphere by demonstrating that (a) European public sphere(s) was shaped by shared European experiences and identities. By focusing on the European public sphere, the volume is furthermore a valuable contribution to current endeavors of diversifying the history of European integration. As such, the volume illustrates the analytical potential of the European public sphere and provides a comprehensive analysis of European environment movements and policies, and the European public sphere, worth reading not only for historians of European integration but also for environmental historians.

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