

Krakow: An Ecobiography. Edited by Adam Izdebski and Rafał Szmytka.

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Writing urban environmental histories has become increasingly important in the past couple of decades. Since the publication of William Cronon's seminal *Nature's Metropolis* it became one of the primary foci of U.S. environmental historians to study the relationship of towns and their hinterlands, towns and their green areas, and the co-existence of people with their environment. Urban environmental histories were written of a series of towns, from Chicago, through Seattle to Houston. Many of these works have been published in a book series of the university press of a famous industrial city, Pittsburgh. It is not by chance that it was the University of Pittsburgh Press that initiated a History of the Urban Environment series, however until now Europe, and especially the Central and Eastern part of Europe has been heavily underrepresented in the volumes of the series. The book reviewed along these lines attempts to partially fill this gap in the scholarship.

The *Krakow: An Ecobiography* is rather curious way to do that as in many ways it represents completely different traditions of doing environmental history than the volumes on U.S. cities published in this and other book series. It is important to note right at the beginning that the book originally was intended for a Polish audience and has been published under the same title in Polish in 2018. The English version of course is not completely identical to this one, but to a large extent is a translation of the articles that were published in that volume. Both the English and the Polish version have different focus than many of the urban environmental histories published before, most importantly, in that they focus just as much—or even more—on the pre-modern times (that is the period before the industrialization) than on the past two centuries. This makes it peculiar in the sense, that the volumes comparable usually start their discussions in the nineteenth century. Nonetheless the present

volume also addresses some aspects to the modern development of the relationship of the Cracovians and the environment.

The introduction to the volume is a well-written methodological outline in which the editors, Adam Izdebski and Rafał Szmytka sketch out the main trends in American and European urban environmental history, as well as provide the English-speaking (this issue I will come back to) readers with some background on Poland in general and the importance of Krakow in the country. The second chapter by Adam Izdebski and Konrad Wnęk is devoted to the climate history of the city, which while is important for the broader environmental context of the city, could have been treated in a couple of pages, especially as in many cases the chapter is rather a climate history of Poland than of Krakow. The next chapter (“Krakow and Its Rivers”) by Andrzej Chwalba however touches upon an issue crucial in the development of the city as well as was one of the most important influencing factors in the life of the townspeople, the town and its water resources. The constant fight of the Cracovians with the floods of the Vistula makes it evident why environment was a key factor in the town’s development.

Chapter three by Aldona Mueller-Bieniek looks at the plants in the city using archaeobotany as the primary source. This was the chapter in which a non-Polish—or non-Krakow dweller—like the author of this review could feel slightly lost, as the locations, the relevance of the different plant finds are presented in large density. The chapter while is a valuable contribution to the field of archaeobotany may have originally been intended for an other audience than those who will use this book. The next chapter by Piotr Miodunka was dedicated to the resource-use of Krakow, which—without actually mentioning the concept—uses the urban footprint model as well as von Thünen’s model to explain the town-hinterland connections. This is a very well thought out chapter which highlights the importance of Krakow in the land-use of large areas of southern Poland. Chapter five, written by Rafał Szmytka, looks at the history of pollution at Krakow. The author chose to focus on the early modern times which is supplemented by chapter seven on the problem of smog in the modern times.

The last three chapters (including the one on smog) are dedicated to the changing environmental conditions of the town in the age of industrialization and the formation of modern infrastructures, including sanitary measures. In chapter six, Ewelina Szpak shows the belated industrial development of the town and juxtaposes it with the Stalinist heavy industrialization, and the construction of the infamous Nowa Huta complex. The chapter points to the importance of the environmental concerns and the movements that arose in parallel and after the construction of the factories at Nowa Huta. Continuing along these lines the penultimate chapter, mentioned above, deals with the smog in the city and shows the impact of the industrial

activities on the air quality in the city and argues how sensitive the town's location is to air pollution in general. The last chapter written by Małgorzata Praczyk discusses how Cracovians attitudes to their green areas changed in the past two centuries, and contextualizes the development of the ideas of greening with special regard to parks and a rather unique urban meadow, Błonia.

The book certainly is a pioneering attempt. Very few monographs addressed the environmental history of European cities so far, and even less put emphasis on their pre-modern developments. The chapters are well argued, and most of them are enjoyable reads. While the book itself is nicely produced, the illustrations are often of poor quality that is a pity as they could have played a more important role considering the topics covered. It is also important that even the chapters that seemingly intended to reach a wider audience, the arguments are well supported by the endnotes, which make the book valuable to many scholars. The last and connected issue that is worth consideration with regard to the book is exactly this, the audience. For a reader like the author of the present review—a historian of the region, doing environmental history—it was an important book and a well-worthy read. This however is a rather narrow audience and it is rather questionable how much someone coming from Western Europe or the U.S. would take away from reading the book. The original, Polish version certainly intended to reach those who were interested in their own town. To them, specific street names, districts, etc., certainly says something, but not to others. In the English version the audience is certainly the latter group. Some of the chapters found a good balance in this respect, like the ones written by the editors, some however failed in that. Nonetheless for those who intend to gain some insight to the development of a Central European town in an environmental context the book is a must.

