

Call for Papers – Session proposal
The Troubled Ecological Boundaries of a Deindustrialized World

Session proposed and coordinated by Renaud Bécot (LARHRA, UMR5190 – Lyon, France) and Alexandre Elsig (Fonds national suisse de la recherche scientifique, Berne)

For more than two decades, plant closures are in the spotlight in most of the European and North American countries. Far from meaning the end of polluting activities, deindustrialization is a phenomenon that contributes profoundly to reshape the ecological boundaries of contemporary societies. In industrialized countries, it leads to a transfer or to the containment of productive activities in peripheral territories. Within old industrial districts, company closures are impelling actors to assume a part of the management of the toxic legacies that question the boundaries between private property and public domain, while the spill of toxic substances blurs boundaries between human bodies and the ecosystem in which they live. Finally, the industrial approach to reduce production costs or to contain social and environmental regulations advocates the relocation of toxic production toward the Global South.

Deindustrialization studies have become a dynamic field of research in the wake of the book directed by Jefferson Cowie and Joseph Heathcott in 2003¹. Depending on the national contexts, different academic traditions have captured these issues. In 2017, an edited volume provided a progress report on the work carried out by English-written historiography. Authors mainly came from a social history background, while incorporating a very significant part of environmental historians². In the meantime, a large group of French economic historians published a collection of studies regarding economic origins of the decline of former European industrial districts³. Their interest for environmental history was much lower, although these authors were interested in the way in which elements of nature could be valued by the actors in order to engage an economic conversion of their territories. This approach is shared by authors of collective volumes bringing together researchers working on cross-border regions⁴.

Historians' concerns for these issues are also testified through a large set of monographs and case studies regarding specific territories or distinct industrial sectors. Based on the achievements done by social historians for twenty years, this session invites to think about how deindustrialization troubles all the borders that were seen as stabilized during the industrial era: administrative borders which prove to be inappropriate to manage toxic legacies or industrial relocations; but also ecological boundaries which are reshaped by the interruption or the displacement of productive activities. By shedding light on these changes, we want to explore the relevance of an environmental approach to deindustrialization.

In order to launch a stimulating discussion, this session will suggest two new perspectives in comparison to previous deindustrialization studies. In the first place, this call for papers welcomes papers focusing on the 20th and 21st centuries, but also encourages papers focusing on previous centuries. Indeed, deindustrialization is not only a contemporary phenomenon, as it is

1 Jefferson Cowie and Joseph Heathcott (dir.), *Beyond the ruins: the meanings of deindustrialization*, Ithaca, ILR Press, 2003.

2 Steve High, Lachlan MacKinnon, Andrew Perchard (dir.), *The deindustrialized world : confronting ruination in postindustrial places*, Vancouver, UBC Press, 2017.

3 Jean-Claude Daumas, Ivan Kharaba, Philippe Mioche (dir.), *La désindustrialisation : une fatalité?*, Besançon, Presses Universitaires de Franche-Comté, 2017.

4 Luigi Lorenzetti and Nelly Valsangiacomo (dir.), *Alpes et patrimoine industriel : culture et mémoire, 19e-20e siècles*, Mendrisio, Mendrisio Academy Press, 2016.

consubstantial to industrialization. Coal mines that were classified as less productive were abandoned even before the 19th century, leaving their ecological footprint on the territories. Secondly, "deindustrialization is not a story of a single emblematic place (...), it was a much broader, more fundamental historical transformation⁵". Social and environmental consequences of deindustrialization are global: it is not a phenomenon limited to industrialized countries. The extension of the perimeter of the capitalist economy by toxic offshoring leads to the displacement of the ecological impact of the territories enrolled in these productive activities.

Papers could address four main issues by questioning the different boundaries that are troubled by deindustrialization:

- Firstly, deindustrialization conflicts are challenging environmental history narratives because they often make visible a long-term contamination of ecosystems and bodies. Toxic substances may act as a telltale of long-term interpenetration between humans and non-humans. If these mobilizations take advantage of the rupture of the "implicit moral pact⁶" which bounded (former) employees to their employers, they are not only ephemeral mobilizations arising at the time of the crisis. Indeed, workers and inhabitants are frequently leading long-term conflicts. On the one hand, recognition of the occupational origin of pathologies is often a lengthy procedure and it can even be lengthened by controversies over the medical and scientific knowledge used by each group of actors. On the other hand, the duration of these mobilizations is also a cause for raising concerns about the relevance of specific modes of production and consumption.
- Productive conversion of territories also shifts ecological boundaries, especially when concerned societies are engaging themselves in "ecological remediation". Some territories may choose to radically erase their industrial past, in order to value elements of nature for tourism or for real estate transactions. This move is symbolized by the proliferation of building on American brownfield lands or European so-called « eco-neighborhoods ». In other places, the industrial past and its environmental heritage are turned into a resource allowing the territory to distinguish itself from other regions and based on cultural practices such as patrimonialization⁷. Like the fascination for (post)colonial ruins⁸, this attraction for the industrial heritage must be questioned regarding its political and economic effects. Indeed, these cultural practices can sometimes lead to hide health and environmental impacts on former workers and on the ecosystem.
- The closure of plants in industrialized countries never means a decline in global production, but rather a shift between continents. The production from closed factories is often transferred to countries in the Global South, whose environmental regulations can be more easily sidestepped by major companies. Several historians opened new historiographic paths to study this phenomenon, such as Christopher Sellers and Joseph Melling when they proposed the notion of « industrial hazard regimes⁹ », while others analyzed these

⁵ Jefferson Cowie et Joseph Heathcott (dir.), *Beyond the ruins: the meanings of deindustrialization*, Ithaca, ILR Press, 2003, p. 2.

⁶ Pascal Marichalar, « Dying for a Living. Economic and Moral Restructuring in a French Factory », *History of the Present*, forthcoming (2018); Pascal Marichalar, *Qui a tué les verriers de Givors ? Une enquête de sciences sociales*, Paris, La Découverte, 2017.

⁷ Xavier Daumalin and Isabelle Laffont-Schwob (dir.), *Pollution of Marseille's industrial Calanques : the impact of the past on the present*, Aix-en-Provence, REF.2C, 2016.

⁸ Ann Laura Stoler (dir.), *Imperial Debris. On Ruins and Ruinations*, Durham, Duke University Press, 2013 ; Alice Mah, *Industrial ruin, community, and place : landscapes and legacies of urban decline*, Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 2012

⁹ Christopher Sellers and Joseph Melling (dir.), *Dangerous trade: histories of industrial hazard across a globalizing world*, Philadelphia, Temple University Press, 2012 ; David Naguib Pellow, *Resisting global toxics: transnational*

relocations as a « toxic colonialism ».

- The abandonment of former industrial locations raises the question of their conversion, their remediation and their sanitation costs. It eventually addresses the question of historical responsibilities for the pollution. This history can then be either used or neglected by the stakeholders, which raise the question of the social role (and possible instrumentalization) of historians¹⁰. The latter must also often deal with a local memory bruised by the recent economic failure. In some cases, public and industrial actors may decide to turn these spaces into landfills for storing or recycling waste from the industrial period¹¹. The management of these polluted soils questions the boundaries of environmental justice, as it must be emphasized that the treatment of the industrial heritage often leads to exposing specific social groups to toxic effects¹².

Proposals (300 to 500 words) must be send before the 25th October 2018 to Renaud Bécot (renaudbecot@gmail.com) and Alexandre Elsig (alexandre.elsig@gmail.com).

As the number of participants in each session is restricted, we invite you to send your proposal as soon as possible.

Papers and talks will be given in English.

movements for environmental justice, Cambridge, MIT Press, 2007

¹⁰ Craig Colten, « Creating a Toxic Landscape: Chemical Waste Disposal Policy and Practice, 1900–1960 ». *Environmental History Review*, 18/1, 1994, p. 85-116; Scott Frickel and James R Elliott (dir.), *Sites Unseen: Uncovering Hidden Hazards in American Cities*, New York, Russell Sage Foundation, 2018.

¹¹ Andrew Hurley, « From Factory Town to Metropolitan Junkyard: Postindustrial Transitions on the Urban Periphery », *Environmental History*, Vol.21/1, 2016, p. 3-29.

¹² Geneviève Massard-Guilbaud and Richard Rodger (dir.), *Environmental and Social Justice in the City: Historical Perspectives*, Cambridge, The white horse Press, 2011.