

Damned by Dams– Artefacts of Modernization and Conflicts of Transformation

Call for Abstracts

Since their inception, large-scale hydroelectric dams have been controversially debated. On the one hand, they represent ideas of climate change mitigation, low-carbon energy production and economic development. On the other hand, they have continuously been at the centre of various political, social and cultural conflicts. In many cases, these conflicts are based on contradictory objectives, interests and strategies: For example, the relocation of indigenous and vulnerable populations, the destruction of delicate ecosystems and biodiversity or cultural heritage is set off against economic growth, energy sovereignty and the need for “green” development. Across the globe, there are both striking similarities and interesting differences between the various big dam projects. In developing as well as developed countries respective conflicts often emerge from cooperation challenges: Between for-profit and not-for-profit agents, between international organizations, such as World Bank and IMF, and national or local organizations, and between various groups of actors within states. These challenges are linked to bigger questions of the twenty-first century, such as development, climate justice, the interaction of global and local institutions, and the role of corporations in the governance of the world.

Whereas dam projects sometimes seem to mainly demonstrate cleavages between local populations and a coalition of corporations and international institutions, a closer look often shows that things can be more complicated: For example, in Brazil, it was Lula’s Workers’ Party (Partido dos Trabalhadores), a force often associated with the rise of the new left and emancipatory alternatives to corporate globalization, which actually put the dam project of Belo Monte into practice. Or in Ethiopia, the Gibe III dam is also viewed as a regional integration project in a conflict-prone area delivering electricity to neighbouring countries, like Sudan, Kenya and Djibouti, and to local people who have never lived with electricity before.

This workshop will address a variety of issues around conflict and cooperation in hydroelectric dam projects. It will particularly focus on reflecting on the different conflicts of modernization and transformation that emerge in the context of these large-scale development projects and how these can possibly be addressed. The workshop sets out to do so from a comparative and interdisciplinary perspective: While history and cultural studies can tell us a lot about the symbolic power of huge dams as projection screens for various visions of development since the New Deal era, social science can analyse the interaction of dam proponents and counter-movements. Philosophy, in turn, can help us to disentangle the conflicting claims and recourses to norms such as human rights, which are at stake in those conflicts. Therefore, we welcome contributions from these and other disciplinary backgrounds which look at hydroelectric dam projects with a focus on conflict and cooperation in the context of transformation processes.

Possible questions include, but are not limited to the following :

- What are contemporary practices and politics of large-scale dam projects?
- Which conflicting values, visions, interests, relations of power and challenges of cooperation are related to them?
- How can we understand dams in terms of their 'material politics' but also as representations of wider contradictions related to capitalist development and discourses of modernity?
- What are possible alternatives to large-scale hydroelectric dam projects?
- How can hydroelectric dam projects be planned and implemented in a more participatory way, respecting the rights and livelihoods of affected groups and actors, such as indigenous peoples and at the same time protecting delicate ecosystems and biodiversity?
- In which way can we resolve resource conflicts that emerge in the context of large-scale hydroelectric dams?

We particularly welcome papers that have their empirical basis in field research on one of the large-scale hydroelectric dam projects around the world, such as Narmada in India, Belo Monte in Brazil, Gibe III in Ethiopia or Itoiz in Spain.

The workshop will take place on **26th and 27th October 2017** at the University of Duisburg-Essen, Germany.

If you are interested in participating in the workshop, please send an abstract of no more than 500 words to Kristine Avram (avram@gcr21.uni-due.de) by 30/03/2017. You will be notified by 30/04/2017 whether your paper has been accepted for the workshop. Full papers will have to be submitted by 13/10/2017 in order to allow enough time for the discussants to prepare commentaries.

Our objective is to envisage a common publication, such as a special issue or an edited volume, using selected workshop papers.

Convenors

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