Editorial Issue 3 2017

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This third issue of 2017 of *Water History* highlights the many approaches that water histories can take. The first essay in fact focuses on this; Paula Schönach provides a thematic overview of river histories of the past two decades. She argues that work on European and North American rivers during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries has evolved in terms of its methodology, particularly in interdisciplinary breadth and comparative approaches. Her thematic analysis shows the complexity of temporal, spatial, and power-related dimensions on rivers.

The next two papers provide interesting examples of these dimensions. Marianne Dudley focuses on recreational conflict and rights of use of British rivers. She argues that even though rivers have historically been spaces of recreation, legal definitions of rights of use have not kept up with the growth of recreational river use. The paper explores this gap for anglers and canoeists in the twentieth century and how small-scale organized groups re-conceptualized river spaces.

Jennifer Schiff takes us to governance issues of one of the most famous rivers studied for such a topic: the Rhine river. As a transboundary river, the Rhine pushed riparian stakeholders to balance their own interests against those of their neighbours. The paper shows how riparian actors created governance frameworks. In contrast to claims that are often made, Schiff argues that in the Rhine basin an environmental crisis was not the key factor leading to shared riverine governance. Rather, it was longer-term historical collaboration that allows effective crisis coordination.

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In the fourth paper, Adam Sowards continues with the theme of governance, but shifting to the scale of larger watersheds. He discusses the Water Resources Research Act (USA, 1964) and the Idaho Water Resources Research Institute. Discussing the different research activities by the Institute over time, Sowards explores how legal, political, and economic concerns shaped scientific research agendas, a very useful reminder for all scholars – both for studying historical cases as shaping current scientific practise. Science has never been independent of politics.

The fifth paper, written by Sarah Wolfe, introduces the theme of language – by analyzing the emotional content of historical speeches about water and water policy. The paper links sub-conscious and conscious emotions and supposedly rational decisions on water resources management and governance. Based on an analysis of nine speeches (1960–2004) on water using 17 indicators, the paper shows that negative emotions are more prevalent in environmental speeches. Understanding how water policy related to the social coding of emotions about water problems and priorities opens new directions for understanding the history of policies.

The final paper of this issue discusses how language was mobilized to create and defend ideas of progress. Christine Bichsel introduces metaphors and poetry in Soviet irrigation literature between 1950 and 1980. She asks why and how authors writing on irrigation development chose to alternate between factual prose, metaphors and poetry, addressing both specialist and general Soviet audiences. She argues that metaphors and poetry were important in both scientific and popular literature for portraying the large-scale water-related landscape transformations in the Soviet Union. Although these specific forms of language were used in an attempt to reinforce scientific rationality and technological progress, the paper shows that those same forms created options to deconstruct and undermine those claims of rational progress.