BERLIN-BRANDENBURGER COLLOQUIUM FÜR UMWELTGESCHICHTE

SOMMERSEMESTER 2026

Montag, 18.05.2026	Siegfried Evens (Linköping) & Per Högselius (Stockholm): ***Book Launch - Meet the Editors:*** **The Nuclear-Water Nexus (MIT Press)**
Montag, 01.06.2026	Frieda Ottmann (München): **Still Waters Run Deep: European Water Pollution Policies and Various Streams of Integration, 1970–2000**
Montag, 15.06.2026	Mario Bianchini (Potsdam): **Knowledge is Power: The Binary Logic of Energy and the Black Boxing of Modernity in Divided Germany**

Ort:	**ONLINE on ZOOM:** https://hu-berlin.zoom-x.de/j/65558796751?pwd=U3hkYVMzTDkrc3lGdk5nekdGL2l6Zz09 Meeting-ID: 655 5879 6751; Passwort: 264162
Zeit:	**18:00 – 20:00 Uhr**
Kontakt:	**Astrid M. Kirchhof** astrid.m.kirchhof@hu-berlin.de **Jan-Henrik Meyer** meyer@zzf-potsdam.de

BERLIN-BRANDENBURGER COLLOQUIUM FÜR UMWELTGESCHICHTE SOMMERSEMESTER 2026

Leibniz-Zentrum für Zeithistorische Forschung Potsdam

Montag, 18.05.2026 Siegfried Evens (Linköping) & Per Högselius (Stockholm):

Book Launch - Meet the Editors:

The Nuclear-Water Nexus (MIT Press)

Abstract:

Splitting atoms is a water-intensive business. To operate efficiently and safely, a standard nuclear reactor needs around 50 cubic meters (13,000 gallons) of water _per second—_equivalent to the flow of a mid-sized river or large irrigation canal. In _The Nuclear-Water Nexus, Per Högselius and Siegfried Evens bring together 25 authors from 12 countries to explore the resulting entanglements between society, technology, and nature, to show how nuclear energy's dependence on water has shaped the atomic age in decisive ways. Water has been the key factor in forging a global nuclear geography, as the water needs of nuclear facilities require them to be located near the sea, major rivers, canals, or lakes. As an unintended consequence of such locations, nuclear facilities have become vulnerable to droughts, floods, erosion, and climate change—with much higher stakes than most other energy installations. Consequently, the "wet" geography of nuclear energy translates into threats to the wet environment, in the form of both radioactive contamination and thermal pollution. Water has, over the years, generated social conflicts—and cooperation—between nuclear energy and other water-intensive activities, such as agriculture, fisheries, navigation, military activities, hydropower production, drinking water supply, landscaping, leisure and tourism—and even fossil fuel extraction. In The Nuclear-Water Nexus, we examine these processes through a set of in-depth case studies.

Short biographies:

Per Högselius is professor of history of technology at KTH Royal Institute of Technology, Stockholm. He holds an MSc in engineering physics, a PhD in innovation studies, and a Docent (Habilitation) degree in the history of science and technology. His teaching and research span the history of energy (in its multiple forms), natural resources, and technological infrastructures, with a particular focus on transnational aspects. His English-language publications include the award-winning Red Gas: Russia and the Origins of European Energy Dependence (2013), Europe's Infrastructure Transition: Economy, War, Nature (co-authored with Arne Kaijser and Erik van der Vleuten, 2016), Energy and Geopolitics (2019), and The Soviet Nuclear Archipelago: A Historical Geography of Atomic-Powered Communism (2024, with Achim Klüppelberg). He led the ERC project NUCLEARWATERS: Putting Water at the Centre of Nuclear Energy History (2018–2024).

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Siegfried Evens is a historian specialising in technology, energy, (environmental) risk, and disaster. In the last few years, he has worked on several research projects on nuclear energy and reactor safety. He is currently a Visiting Fellow at SPRU at the University of Sussex, as well as a postdoctoral researcher at Linköping University in Sweden and a Guest Professor at the University of Hasselt in Belgium. Between 2024 and 2025, he was a postdoctoral fellow of the Research Foundation Flanders (FWO) based at KU Leuven. In 2024, he obtained his PhD from the KTH Royal Institute of Technology in Sweden. As part of the ERC project NUCLEARWATERS, he researched the role of water and steam technologies in nuclear safety governance. Evens worked with various (nuclear) policymakers in Sweden, France, the US, and Belgium. Previously, he has also published on mining and fire risks.

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Montag, 01.06.2026 Frieda Ottmann (München):

Still Waters Run Deep: European Water Pollution Policies and Various Streams of Integration, 1970–2000

Abstract:

The presentation will summarise the findings of the recently completed PhD thesis. The thesis analyses the emergence and development of the new environmental policy field and its reciprocal impact on European integration. The evolution of water pollution policy, in particular, reflects key themes in the history of the EC/EU, such as market integration and the competition between institutions, with member states, as well as other international organisations for regulatory power. At the same time, the EC framework both enabled and constrained the development of a common water policy. In turn, water regulation served as a laboratory for shaping institutional dynamics on the European continent. Through water negotiations, the EC gained a dominant position among other European organisations. EC/EU institutions defined their internal standing, and member states shaped their relations with third states, including Central and Eastern European countries. The lens of water policy, thereby, provides a new perspective on the ripple effects of European integration and their reflection in specific policy areas. The presentation will focus more deeply on a specific chapter that discusses the role of societal actors in European environmental policymaking.

Short Bio:

Frieda Ottmann recently submitted her PhD thesis, which was part of the DFG-ANR-funded research project ELEMENT, a cooperation between the LMU Munich and Sorbonne University led by Prof. Dr Kiran Klaus Patel and Prof. Dr Laurent Warlouzet. Her research explores the history of environmental regulation within the EC/EU, specifically focusing on the evolution of water pollution policies. Her work examines the contested nature of European environmental governance, highlighting the friction between institutional objectives, industrial interests, and environmental interest groups.

Recent publication: Ottmann, Frieda: Navigating Europe's Waters: The Struggle of Greenpeace and the TiO2 Industry to Chart Strategic Courses for Shaping Water Policy, *Journal of European Integration History* 32:1 (2026): 35-53.

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Montag, 15.06.2026 Mario Bianchini (Potsdam):

Knowledge is Power: The Binary Logic of Energy and the Black Boxing of Modernity in Divided Germany

Abstract

This presentation is part of a larger book project that interrogates the construction of "energy knowledge" not as a static repository of scientific facts, but as a fluid, politically charged reductionist framework that mediates the relationship between modernity, power, and the public sphere. By examining the German Democratic Republic and the Federal Republic of Germany, I argue that both ideologies, despite their rhetorical opposition, converged on a shared "energo-political" logic that prioritizes the maximization of work and productivity over the flourishing of life or ecological integrity. Furthermore, I argue that energy functions as a "black box" within these systems, where complex socio-technical realities are systematically reduced down into politically advantageous and sanitized visualizations. These reductions serve to obscure the material grit of extraction and the environmental costs of consumption, effectively transforming the finite nature of resources into an illusion of infinite availability through market imaginaries and technological optimism.

More specifically, this presentation explores how the representation of energy infrastructure acts as a binary logic gate. Depending on the prevailing political or economic imperative, energy knowledge acted as a switch that toggled between two contradictory states: a "0" position framing energy as clean, limitless, and infrastructurally visible, and a "1" position framing it as scarce and precious, requiring conservation, rendering infrastructure invisible. The paper posits that the black boxing of energy knowledge as two separate, but equally impenetrable vaults prevented deeper questioning of energetic modernity, resulting in a public understanding of energy that was detached from ontological reality and deeply entangled with the imperatives of industrial growth. Ultimately, the larger project that this presentation stems from suggests that the crisis of the Anthropocene is rooted not merely in technological failure, but in the epistemological structures of modernity that render the biosphere invisible in favor of the continuous circulation of commodities and the relentless drive for efficiency.

Short Bio:

Mario Bianchini is Wissenschaftlicher Mitarbeiter at the Zentrum für Zeithistorische Forschung Potsdam. His work focuses on the utopian promises of technology, with a current focus on the creation and dissemination of "energy knowledge." He holds a PhD in the History and Sociology of Technology and Science from the Georgia Institute of Technology. His first book, *Real-Existing Utopia*, examines how the GDR leveraged the promise of a future technological utopia to preserve the status quo and is currently under review with the MIT Press.