

Call for Papers

Conference title: Sixth annual meeting of the Research Network Premodern East Slavic Europe: "War and Environment in Early Modern Eastern Europe and Eurasia"

Concept and organization: Julia Herzberg (Leibniz Institute for the History and Culture of Eastern Europe (GWZO)), Jan Kusber (Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz), and the Premodern East Slavic Europe Network

Location: Mainz, Germany

Date: 11–12 March 2027

Language: The Conference will take place in English, proposals may be submitted in English, Ukrainian, Russian, or German

Deadline: 15 October 2026

Contact: Prof. Dr. Julia Herzberg julia.herzberg@leibniz-gwzo.de; Prof. Dr. Jan Kusber kusber@uni-mainz.de

War is not only a social and political conflict but also an encounter with particular landscapes and environmental conditions. In wartime, relationships between humans and their natural surroundings change in significant ways: weather, climate, topography, animals, and natural resources shape military action, while warfare in turn transforms landscapes, ecosystems, and patterns of resource use. These reciprocal interactions are particularly visible in the premodern period, when military mobility, logistics, and warfare were deeply dependent on local environments and natural resources.

While the environmental dimensions of modern and especially industrialized warfare have received increasing scholarly attention, the relationship between war and environment in the premodern period remains comparatively understudied. This is particularly true for Eastern Europe and Eurasia. The conference seeks to address this gap by bringing environmental history into closer dialogue with the study of premodern warfare and by exploring Eastern Europe and Eurasia as spaces of diverse ecological, political, and cultural entanglements.

The conference will focus on six interconnected themes:

1. War in the Environment: Perception, Knowledge, and the Construction of Nature

Military actors encountered landscapes that they observed, interpreted, described, and appropriated. Contributions may examine how soldiers and other military actors perceived and represented unfamiliar or hostile landscapes, as well as the forms of knowledge about climate, terrain, vegetation, and natural resources that informed military decision-making. Of particular interest are the ways in which ideas of "wild," "inhospitable," or "civilized" landscapes shaped military strategies, territorial claims, and broader assertions of power.

2. War with the Environment: Climate, Terrain, Animals, and Resources

Environmental conditions were integral to premodern warfare. Weather, seasons, terrain, and distances could determine the feasibility and outcome of campaigns, sieges, and military movements, while rivers, forests, wetlands, steppes, mountains, and coastal areas could provide both opportunities and constraints. Contributions may explore the strategic significance of different environments, the military use of water, wood, food, pasture, and soil, and the role of horses and other animals in transport, communication, supply, and combat. We are also interested in cases in which environmental conditions were deliberately exploited or manipulated as part of military strategies.

3. War against the Environment: Destruction, Transformation, and Resource Use

Warfare could profoundly transform both natural and cultivated environments. Burning, deforestation, the destruction of fields and forests, damage to irrigation systems, and intensive resource extraction could produce consequences extending far beyond the immediate conflict. We therefore welcome contributions examining the destruction and transformation of forests, soils, waters, and landscapes, as well as the deliberate destruction or military overuse of resources such as wood, water, food, and pasture. Further questions concern changes in animal and plant populations resulting from warfare and contemporary perceptions and representations of environmental destruction.

4. Food and Health in Wartime

War, environment, food, and health were closely interconnected. The destruction of harvests, restricted access to water and pasture, shortages of natural resources, and the movement and concentration of people and animals could fundamentally affect living conditions during wartime. Contributions may address the relationship between warfare, food supply, and access to local resources, as well as the connections between environmental conditions, mobility, warfare, and the spread of disease and epidemics. We are particularly interested in contemporary explanations of and responses to hunger, disease, and increased mortality.

5. War, Migration, and Social Responses

Warfare transformed not only landscapes but also the spatial distribution of populations. Flight, displacement, captivity, and migration could alter established patterns of resource use and place new pressures on local environments. At the same time, environmental change, resource scarcity, and hunger could themselves intensify mobility and social conflict. Contributions may therefore explore how flight, displacement, migration, and military mobilization transformed landscapes and resource use, as well as the environmental consequences of population movements. We also welcome studies of local and transregional strategies for coping with war-related environmental and social crises.

6. After Violence: Restoration, Adaptation, and Long-Term Change

The environmental and social effects of warfare did not necessarily end with the cessation of hostilities. Devastated landscapes, destroyed infrastructure, altered property regimes, and depleted resources could continue to shape societies for decades. At the same time, communities adapted to changing conditions and restored, reused, or transformed affected landscapes. Contributions may examine the regeneration and reuse of war-affected environments, the long-term consequences of military infrastructure and resource mobilization, and the persistence of war-induced environmental changes. We are also interested in memories and representations of devastated landscapes and in the long-term impact of wartime experiences on the ways in which people perceived and used nature.

The conference is explicitly interdisciplinary and welcomes contributions from history, environmental and military history, archaeology, geography, literary and cultural studies, art history, the history of knowledge, and related fields. We particularly encourage comparative and transregional approaches as well as studies that bridge established boundaries between military, environmental, social, economic, and cultural history.

Please submit a proposal including a title, an abstract of approximately 300–500 words, and a brief biographical and institutional note. The conference will be held in English, while proposals may be submitted in English, Ukrainian, Russian, or German. We particularly encourage submissions from early-career scholars and from scholars who have been displaced or otherwise affected by war. Proposals should be submitted by 15 October 2026.

For further information about the Premodern East Slavic Europe Network, please visit the network's website: <https://www.leibniz-gwzo.de/en/transfer/formats/digital-expert-forums/premodern-east-slavic-europe-network>