

# Political Economy of Natural Resources and Environmental Change

Summer School | 18–20 June 2026 | University of Tübingen

The “Political Economy of Natural Resources and Environmental Change in History” summer school will take place at the University of Tübingen from **18 to 20 June 2026**. It brings together scholars working on the historical relationships between natural resources, institutions, and socio-environmental change in an explicitly interdisciplinary setting.

From a Lockean perspective, natural resources possess value independent of human action and therefore have no natural owner. Rights over resources are thus often politically contested, and the workshop welcomes scholarly analysis of this process, particularly how governance, conflict, labour, and technological change have shaped the extraction, use, and transformation of natural resources across time and space. Recent scholarship has highlighted how political and institutional contexts shape access to and control over natural resources, from sea-floor minerals and forests to fossil fuels. At the same time, historians have emphasized the role of conflict and coercion in enabling extraction, particularly in colonial and wartime settings. Studies of energy transitions and common-pool resources further demonstrate the feedback between resource regimes and socio-environmental change. These historical processes continue to inform contemporary debates on environmental justice, inequality, and sustainability.

The program combines academic paper sessions and keynote lectures with hands-on workshops. One workshop introduces participants to machine learning and natural language processing tools for analysing historical data on resource conflict and institutional change. The second focuses on communicating research to broader audiences, with a particular emphasis on Science Slams and public engagement. Together, these sessions aim to equip participants with both conceptual and practical tools for studying and communicating the political economy of natural resources over time.

The summer school welcomes contributions from economic and social historians, environmental historians, political economists, and scholars of institutions and development. While each of these perspectives has yielded important insights, none alone provides a complete picture. In the context of rapid environmental change, a fuller historical understanding of these dynamics is increasingly urgent. The event therefore seeks to bring together complementary approaches in an interdisciplinary forum.

## Themes and Topics

We invite paper proposals that examine the political economy of natural resources across different periods and regions.

Topics of interest include, but are not limited to:

- Governance, property rights, and institutions of resource management
- Conflict, coercion, and extraction
- Labour, technology, and resource regimes
- Colonialism, slavery, war, and natural resources
- Indigenous peoples' rights, sovereignty, and systems of resource governance
- Energy transitions and environmental change
- Common-pool resources and sustainability
- Historical perspectives on environmental justice and inequality

Contributions engaging with global and underrepresented geographies, alongside diverse sources and methodologies, are particularly encouraged.

## Keynote Speakers

Ann Carlos (University of Colorado Boulder)

Stefania Galli (University of Gothenburg)

## Submissions and Funding

We invite submissions from PhD students, early career and senior scholars.

Approximately 20 participants will be selected.

Please submit a **500-word abstract** and a **two-page CV** to [ehtuebingen@gmail.com](mailto:ehtuebingen@gmail.com) by the **23rd of February**.

There are **no registration fees**. **Lunch will be provided on all days, and one conference dinner is included**. Limited funding for travel and accommodation is available. Funding will be reserved for PhD students and non-permanent academics who are within 6 years of receiving their PhD. If receipt of funding is essential for your participation, please note this when applying, along with a short justification.

## Organising Committee

Thomas Benfey (University of Tübingen)

Sarah Ferber (FAU Erlangen-Nürnberg)

Louis Henderson (London School of Economics)

Moritz Kaiser (University of Tübingen)

Urvi Khaitan (Harvard University)