

Calculated Danger. Natural Hazards and Prevention in the 19th and 20th Century; Fellowship an der Washington University in St. Louis

Initiative: Postdoctoral Fellowships in den Geisteswissenschaften an Universitäten und Forschungsinstituten
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At all times, societal development has been preconditioned by man's protection from and mastery or overcoming of natural hazards. Yet, precaution and prevention are far more recent stances, which both gained importance at the turn of the 19th century. Similar to the creation of security, both of these concepts are variations of one and the same approach towards the future, which was now not merely accepted passively, but increasingly shaped actively. Premodern societies interpreted natural incidents mainly religiously and according to their everyday experiences. During the 19th and 20th century, this type of interpretation did not disappear, but was rather supplemented by more and more secular, science and engineering oriented response strategies. The development of modern forms of prevention became professional, and, at the same time, the expectations towards state regulatory measures and guarantees grew. Therefore, the relationship between man and nature realigned - which is one of the basic assumptions of this research. With the formation of the welfare state individuals' claims became more demanding, and their cries for protection from natural hazards louder. Gradually, people became convinced that unpleasant natural incidents could be 'prevented', 'calculated', and 'insured'. This project attempts to remove the term 'prevention' from the field of law and medicine and try to crystalize its analytic potential with the example of disaster prevention. Prevention is the anticipation of the future, a line of thought and action to optimize the present by organizing the future. But which authorities developed preventive ideas? How were they accomplished in practice? This study aims to examine the instable balance between nature's forces and humans' intervention on these powers.

Projektbeteiligte

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