

POSITIONING QUÉBEC IN GLOBAL
ENVIRONMENTAL HISTORY.
INTRODUCTION

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The starting point for this volume was a colloquium, held at McCord Museum in Montréal in September 2005, titled “Positioning Québec in Global Environmental History.” Organized by McGill University’s Québec Studies Program, the Canada Research Chair in the Environmental History of Québec from the Université du Québec à Trois-Rivières, and the migratory workshop *Quelques arpents de neiges*, the colloquium brought together historians, geographers, anthropologists,

sociologists, political scientists and natural scientists. It invited experts in the study of Québec – its history, society, landscape and ecology – to initiate a dialogue and articulate an analytical framework for positioning Québec in global environmental history. The speakers specifically tackled the following topics : approaches in environmental history, imperialism and global environmental problems, First Nations and land use in the North, ecosystem dynamics, and urbanization and industrialization.¹

Taking into account the wealth of research in environmental history carried out in Europe and the United States and the relevance of the many projects presently under way worldwide, the colloquium strove to

1. The full program is available at http://www.cieq.uqtr.ca/crc_hec/activites_conf.php. The proceedings were published in "Penser l'histoire environnementale du Québec. Société, Territoire et Écologie," *Globe*, Vol. 9, Number 1 (2006), pp. 11-255.

enrich Québec historiography on the exploitation of natural resources, transformation of the landscape, urbanization and industrialization, and land use. The conference organizers felt that this historiography needed to be rounded out with research on changing representations of natural phenomena in relation to environmental transformations, whether man-induced or not. While certain studies focus on the relations between society and nature and examine such mutual links from a diachronic perspective, they could benefit from innovative approaches in environmental history. The environment ceases to be a set of physical characteristics providing a backdrop to social and economic change, and becomes an object in which social change and the transformation of bio-geophysical environments mangled. As such, it offers fresh points of view for defining contemporary issues regarding environmental change, understanding recurring conflicts on the allocation and protection of resources, and grasping the

complexity and historicity of social uses and representations of the environment.

This volume of *Globe* includes three articles which discuss new issues and new methods for interpreting a relationship as fundamental as that between society and the environment. The first two articles provide a survey of works on the history of Québec and the North American east coast. In the first article, Stéphane Castonguay (Université du Québec à Trois-Rivières) indicates the relevance of Québec studies – in historical geography, economic and social history, urban studies and the natural sciences – for environmental historians. He shows that these studies include sources and research problems closely related to contemporary issues in the field, such as consumption and the relationship between the body and the environment. In the second article, Richard Judd (University of Maine) examines the experience of the North American east coast's population and land, which was overlooked when environmental

history started to take root. Observing the predominant influence of the American west's experience on environmental awareness and the development of the field, Judd comes to pertinent conclusions for the study of Québec environmental history. In the third article, Steven Pyne (Arizona State University), an expert in the history of fires throughout the world and the ages, bases his study of Québec on forest fires and the institutions set up by the provincial government not only to control them, but also to resolve the social and political tensions affecting access to and the protection of forest resources.