

Water and Public Health

Historical Perspectives from the Nineteenth to the Twenty-First Century

Institute of History
Institute for the History of Medicine

Friday 5th of June, 2026

Saturday 6th of June, 2026

University of Bern, Mittelstrasse 43, Room: 216

Friday 5th of June

12:00 PM: Lunch
(Schanze, Parkterrasse 10, Bern)

1:30 PM: Welcome

1:45 PM: Panel I

Potable Water and Hygiene in the Nineteenth Century

Chair: Dr. Pascal Germann (Bern)

Dr. Louisa-Dorothea Gehrke (Mainz/Leipzig):
Between Colonial Hygiene and Local Tradition: Water Practices in the Dutch East Indies (1830–1920)

Émilie Pasquier (Paris):
Running Drinking Water in Suez: A Public Health Issue for a Strategic Port of the British Empire (1863–1936)

Dr. Salvatore Valenti (Venice):
The Meanings of Potable Water: Changing Knowledge and Infrastructure in Nineteenth-Century Italy

Discussion

4:00 PM: Coffee Break

4:30 PM: Panel II

Colonial Water Regimes and Public Health in the First Half of the Twentieth Century

Chair: Dr. Melina Teubner (Bern)

Dr. Adebisi Alade (Victoria):
Colonial 'Pure Water' Project in Early-Twentieth Century Lagos

Dr. Robert Pursche (Tübingen):
When and Where Does Health Become a Problem? Searching for Water between Necessity and Modernity

Discussion

7:00 PM: Dinner
(Zebra, Schwalbenweg 2, Bern)

Saturday 6th of June

9:00 AM: Panel III

Water, Disease, and Environmental Health

Chair: Dr. Peter Moser (Bern)

Andrea Graf (Basel):
Irrigation and Disease: An Environmental History of Bilharzia in Madagascar

Matthias Stettler (Basel):
"Vidanges de ville", "engrais flamand" or "Cloakendünger":
Human Excrements as a Resource in Swiss Agriculture (1850s–1860s)

Discussion

10:30 AM: Coffee Break

11:00 AM: Panel IV

Water Governance in the Age of (Human) Rights

Chair: Christiane Hoth de Olano (Bern)

Richard Schweizer (Munich/Geneva):
Water and the Human Right to a Healthy Environment

Naomi Denzer (Brig):
Who Pays for Poisoned Fish? The Discourse on Environmental Liability after the 1986 Sandoz Chemical Spill

María Ximena González-Serrano (Bogotá/Biel-Bienne):
Healing Water-Human Bodies: Socio-Legal and Artistic Practices of Environmental Justice in the Magdalena River (Colombia) and Lake Atitlán (Guatemala)

Discussion

1:15 PM: Joint Lunch
(Schanze, Parkterrasse 10, Bern)

2:30 PM: Final Discussion and Further Perspectives

Optional Group Visit to Bern
(for participants staying longer)