

The case of Eduard Brückner - a lesson for the contemporary debate about climate change?

At the turn of the 19/20th century, the eminent geographer Eduard Brückner engaged himself in a detailed analysis of climate variations during the past millennium, and on the societal impacts of these changes. Differently from others, he recognized the climate as a non-stationary system, which undergoes secular variations. Thus, he differentiated between anthropogenic climate change, which was in those days understood as being initiated by deforestation, and natural climate variability. He also studied the impact of such climate variations on economy and society. He identified several relevant items, such as the power balance (related to agricultural production), health (related to changing ground water levels) and transport (related to the freezing of rivers). The analysis of these impacts was adequate for the time of the analysis; however, the analysis turned out to be outdated within a few years, simply because of the dynamical development of economic and social change.

The discussion during Brückner's time were rather similar to the contemporary debate. This debate was not limited to scientific circles, but certainly on a much smaller scale than the present one.