

Environmental cooperation in 1970s helped ease Cold War tensions

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Scientific cooperation to address concerns about the environment helped to foster détente between the United States and the Soviet Union in the 1970s, NYU's Rachel Rothschild concludes in a newly published paper. Her research, which appears in the journal *Technology and Culture*, underscores the role scientific cooperation can play in easing tense relations between governments.

"Scientific partnerships, spearheaded by Norway, with Eastern Europe's Communist bloc in the 1970s served as a foundation for international cooperation on environmental pollution despite ongoing Cold War frictions," says Rothschild, an assistant professor at NYU's Gallatin School of Individualized Study.

The article is available [here](#).

Her analysis centers on the European-wide monitoring programme (EMEP), which was designed to investigate the pollutants causing [acid rain](#) and began operations under the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe in 1977.

In her work, Rothschild finds that the impetus for cooperating across the Iron Curtain on air pollution monitoring came not from Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev, as other historians have argued, but from a group of scientists and environmental officials in Norway working on acid rain in the early-to-mid-1970s.

Despite security concerns over disclosing power plant locations and resistance on placing pollution monitoring stations within the Soviet Union, the Scandinavian scientists were eventually able to secure the commitment of the Communist bloc to a European-wide environmental research program—a breakthrough that resulted in limited technological cooperation.

This development, Rothschild observes, helped foster subsequent political relationships, which took hold, in part, at the United Nations.

"Norway capitalized on the openings in the Iron Curtain provided by technological cooperation with the Eastern Bloc to begin earning their support for UN negotiations on acid rain," she writes. "Norway was then able to generate enough political capital to bring Western polluters to the negotiating table in the late 1970s, culminating in the 1979 UN Convention on Long-range Transboundary Air Pollution."

Rothschild notes that the creation of the EMEP is evidence of how addressing global environmental concerns can pave the way for easing geopolitical conflicts.

"EMEP's formation illuminates the importance of developing technological networks and international research projects on acid rain in furthering both détente among European countries as well as international research and policies for environmental protection," she concludes.

Provided by New York University

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