Silke Vetter-Schultheiß

12 Visualizing the Invisible: Communicating Europe’s Environment

Abstract This chapter explores the visual history of the Europeanization of conservation and environmentalism. It illustrates more general arguments by discussing stamps as historical visual sources, followed by a topical case study on several series of stamps issued by national institutions to celebrate the European Conservation Year 1970. Stamps become contact zones, and in this chapter they reveal the issues surrounding environmental and European concerns. I argue that producing, selling, and collecting stamps is what sociologist Andreas Reckwitz refers to as an “aesthetic practice”: a practice that focuses on stimulating aesthetic perception in order to shape society, in this case a European society.

Keywords Council of Europe; European Conservation Year 1970; European visual politics; stamps; visual history

In summer 1970, the editors of the journal Nature in Focus¹ addressed one single event: the European Conservation Year (ECY). Nature in Focus was the “Bulletin of the European Information Centre for Nature Conservation”, and its message was quite clear what this year was about: awareness had to be raised and political measures to be taken to preserve the natural heritage and the well-being of the people of Europe. The summer 1970 edition includes 28 pages of analysis, appeals, findings, and commitments concerning the future of European environment, together with pictures displaying heaps of litter, mountains of junk automobiles, chimneys evaporating heavy smoke, and forests killed by air pollution. This visual narrative of gloom is contrasted by pictures from Eastern and Western Europe depicting brown bears and pelicans as well as some young people cleaning up a dirty pond in Britain. This visual storyline displaying the fundamental tension between ecological disaster and natural beauty refers to a long-standing tradition in public relation work for conservation. Apart from initiating environmental programmes, drawing public attention to the issue also was essential during the commemorative year: “Only when every citizen is aware of the realities of nature conservation can we afford to be optimistic.”²

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The questions, however, remained: What did European nature look like? Apart from cuddly brown bears and paper-white egrets, what did European natural heritage consist of? What was meant by “European nature” was as vague and diverse as Europe. The year 1970 was surely a decisive year for Europe as the accelerating process of integration and unification of (Western) Europe met with heated debate over the state of its environment. How was this vagueness turned into images representing the aforementioned “realities of nature conservation”?

This chapter explores the visual history of the Europeanization of conservation and environmentalism. Broader arguments are illustrated by discussing stamps as historical visual sources. This will be followed by a topical case study on several series of stamps issued by national institutions to celebrate the ECY. There are many good reasons for taking a closer and analytical look at stamps when following a practice-centred approach towards European history. On the one hand, stamps condense a long process of identifying motifs and symbols that tell a complex story, which in turn have to be designed, approved, and printed. On the other hand, there are material phenomena attached to stamps that turn them into agents of activity. They are sold, bought, licked, and stuck on letters. They travel across borders. Philatelists collect and store them in sets and series in albums. They are available en masse, and people use them consciously or unconsciously during their everyday life. Stamps convey messages.

Stamps become contact zones, and in this chapter, they display issues surrounding environmental and European concerns. I argue that producing, selling, and collecting stamps is what sociologist Andreas Reckwitz calls an “aesthetic practice”: a practice that focuses on stimulating an aesthetic perception for the sake of shaping society, in this case a European society. In this sense, stamps represent decisions and interests of specific human actors within an arrangement of people and objects. After a brief introduction on visual history and on the significance of images for environmental history, I will focus on the potential that stamps offer as visual sources for a European environmental historiography. This is followed by the presentation of the ECY as a historical moment in which cross-border conservation and environmentalism came to be visualized. By taking a closer look at the stamps issued for that event and focusing on the small differences and nuances in the production of images and thus in their meaning, the visual analysis might help to overcome the criticism that environmental movements have limited their visual scope to either idyllic images or horror scenarios.
1 Picturing Environmental History

Visual history sees images not only as images but also as causes for historical change and thus as independent sources. Images are imbued with their own aesthetics, which co-determine the way we look at an issue. This chapter defines images as representations of an imagination. A visual medium and its motif turn thoughts into visible and thus tangible items. Not only these imaginations but also the corresponding types of visualization and the motifs used have been changing in the course of history. With regard to the visual history of conservation and environmentalism, the visualization of these two movements’ agendas and issues have followed certain patterns. The environmental historian Anna-Katharina Wöbse speaks of a three-step process. The initial depictions of natural beauty (1) at the beginning of organized nature conservation around 1900 were soon supplemented by images of damage (2), for example oil-covered waterfowls or destroyed spots of natural beauty. Later, activists involved with saving animals or sites (3) were incorporated into the visual narratives. According to environmental historian Finis Dunaway, this sequence of images of beauty, damage, and activity was extended through the creation of diagrams and detailed portraits of individual activists. The cultural geographer Dennis Cosgrove speaks of a shift in the framing of iconic images, from picturesque landscapes to living organisms. Social debates on conservation and environmentalism have always been fostered by image motifs and media. Such an aesthetic practice – connecting thinking and acting of people with material objects – has been part of society’s struggle over what is considered to actually “be” nature or the environment and what is worth being protected. Pictures show how their creators perceive nature and the environment and how they visually translate their ideas into images for everyone to see. Thus, historians can approach the subject both through the actions of individuals and through the visual sources handed down.

Pictures provide a quick overview and are emotionally connectable. They achieve their persuasive power by combining emotional appeal with rational arguments. As “eco-images”, they can also be charged politically. However, as they are always snapshots, it is often difficult to depict long sequences or complicated contexts.

The period between 1950 and 1990 in particular saw fundamental changes in perception. This was initially true for the Western industrialized nations. Their visual traditions formed the basis, for example, of the national eco-labels that began to emerge around the world in the 1970s and especially in the 1980s and 1990s. In contrast to traditional conservation – which focuses more on individual species, landscapes, or picturesque features – environmentalism devel-
oped a specific imagery. People began to look through an “ecological lens”. New actors excessively used pictures and designs to emphasize their more radical approach towards environmental politics, as environmentally themed images played an ever-increasing role in drawing attention to worldwide calamities and the depletion of the earth’s resources.

Stamps serve to refine this language because their small size forces designers to condense information to the extreme. The motifs of the stamps issued by the countries in the context of the ECY represent the entire spectrum of the development mentioned above. This chapter combines two historical approaches to analyze stamps. On the one hand, it examines their iconography and focuses on the motifs that visually expressed human ideas about European conservation. It is similar to the stamp collector’s view of defining a collection field and categorizing stamps according to various criteria. On the other hand, it draws on written archival sources to reconstruct the creation process of the West German stamp series, which can be considered an exemplary case. The history of the West German process shows how people fought to create “their” stamps and how they made arguments using international references. Most of these debates are hidden, though not necessarily recognizable when looking at the final motifs.

2 Europe, Stamps, and the Environment

Stamps have evolved from a highly elaborated system of negotiation between stakeholders, politicians, and bureaucrats – at least in most democratic countries. Already in the 1930s, the first stamps displaying nature parks (or even earlier, animal, plant, and landscape motifs) appeared worldwide. Countries as diverse as the United States, Argentina, and Japan, as well as various colonies such as Southern Rhodesia and the Belgian Congo, had used the iconic settings of their national parks for stamp collections. The aims of such stamp campaigns were to popularize nature parks and to create an awareness of the vulnerability of nature. Stamps have also served conservationists as visual material objects, marking “the other” in the sense that Raf de Bont argues (see chapter 3 by de Bont). In this way, conservationists have positioned themselves and their goals in this worldwide network of symbols. After 1945, European conservationists referred to each other on both sides of the Iron Curtain, making use of the transnational prestige attached to postal presentation. Stamps and their inscribed international system of reference thus functioned at this time as aesthetic arguments for conservation, as both an excluding and including element.

The German case can serve as a telling example of the complex processes of the successful or failed attempts to turn ideas into stamps. Following 1949, the
founding year of the Federal Republic of Germany, citizens were invited to propose subjects to be designed on special stamps. As the Federal Ministry of Postal Services issued only about 35 stamps per year, people had to provide good arguments for their proposals. In the beginning, the Federal Ministry of Postal Services was the institution responsible for the design. In 1954, the Art Advisory Board (Kunstbeirat) was established to improve the graphic quality of the stamps. The board consisted of graphic artists as well as members of the parliament and administrative officials from the German Federal Post Office (Deutsche Bundespost). In 1972, the ministry established an additional committee, the Programme Advisory Board (Programmbeirat), which classified the incoming proposals according to topics. Throughout the process, the ministry also approached graphic artists with the request to submit a stamp design on a specific topic, like the ECY. The returning drafts were discussed anonymously, and the winning design was then printed by the Federal Printing Office (Bundesdruckerei) or another printing company commissioned to carry out a test print. The Art Advisory Board, the Federal Minister of Postal Services, and the graphic artists discussed this proof with the printing company until it was finally approved and afterwards printed. The produced stamps had to be transported to the post offices, from where the customers would buy them. The consumers decided on a motif that they could use for franking or for putting in their scrapbook. Franked postcards, letters, and parcels travelled through the country where they were issued and even across borders. Postal workers and postmen, as well as recipients, came into contact with the stamps and could enjoy the motifs and reflect on the subject displayed. The entire collector’s market – with its specific infrastructures and rules, a cosmos of its own – was another important group of consumers engaged in receiving and discussing stamps. Considering the many contact zones that stamps crossed, there are many opportunities to examine this aesthetic practice involving people and material items. Following these little paper ambassadors allows us to track an evolving European nature conservation debate and its visual representation.

Beside the motifs, the discussions held in the run-up to the official development process as well as the reactions to published stamps (which are documented in the federal archives) are of interest to historians. In West Germany, various stakeholders discussed what functions were inherent in these “little works of art” and what extra value could be attributed to them in addition to the postal one. Stakeholders included not only members of the Federal Ministry of Postal Services, the government, and the parliament but also private individuals and representatives from a wide variety of non-governmental organizations. Representatives from the field of conservation and environmentalism approached the Federal Ministry of Postal Services to use stamps to promote their ideas.
In regard to the example discussed here, two issues in particular were intensely debated in the recorded correspondence and meetings: Could the abstract and complex topic of nature conservation be presented at all in such a small format? Which motifs were suitable for publicizing the protection of landscapes, animals, and plants? These two questions act as a background for the motif analysis in a European context. How could stamps visualize cross-border European conservation?

Since 1956, the idea of a peaceful Europe has been visualized on stamps. In the 1950s, the then six member states of the European Coal and Steel Community, founded in 1952, created the so-called EUROPA stamps. The annually issued stamps were and still are committed to the European idea, which is represented not only by the EUROPA logo but also through common themes. Since 1974, each participating European country has been designing its own motifs on an overarching theme. The annually changing theme refers to social and cultural similarities that symbolize peaceful coexistence, as well as a shared past and common goals and values. From 1960 to 1992, the EUROPA stamps were developed with the support of the European Conference of Postal and Telecommunications Administrations (Conférence Européenne des Administrations des Postes et des Télécommunications, CEPT), an umbrella organization of regulatory authorities in the field of postal and telecommunication services. With the liberalization of postal transport, joint stamp issues since 1993 have been dealt with by PostEurop, a European trade association for postal services. Ever since the idea of EUROPA stamps took shape, these stamps have focused on six different themes related to nature and environmental protection: “Conservation and Environmentalism” (1986), “Nature Conservation Parks” (1999), “Water – A Natural Treasure” (2001), “Forests – International Year of Forests” (2011), “Ecology in Europe – Think Green” (2016), “National Birds” (2019), and “Endangered National Wildlife” (2021).¹ Since it is relatively rare for an issue to appear within a short period of time on the stamps of a country or of a community of states, environmentalism seems to be becoming increasingly important for Europe. This is indicated by PostEurop’s comments on the themes for 2019 and 2021. These comments highlight how the world has faced environmental challenges such as climate change. Stamps, especially with bird motifs, have helped to raise awareness of a sustainable future: “Birds are not only amazing creatures that graze the sky, they also play an important role in monitoring our planet’s ecosystem”. EUROPA stamps also have helped “to promote the European Ornithology which reflects the magnificent biodiversity that we have throughout Europe”.¹ Bird thus illustrate the joint responsibility of European states towards environmental commons (see chapter 2 by Anna-Katharina Wöbse).
The first time European nations jointly commemorated conservation on stamps was in 1970, when the first ECY was proclaimed by the Council of Europe (CoE). The initiative was intended to popularize the idea of cross-border conservation and was regarded as the birth of a European environmental policy that had previously been limited to nation-states. In addition to various activities around the theme “Man in his environment”, stamps were considered a suitable means for visualizing this “first European-wide environmental campaign” for a broader mass.

3 The ECY and its Visual Features

In 1949, ten states founded the Council of Europe. The United States had inspired this initiative not least because of the circumstances and experiences concerning the Second World War. Since its founding, the aim of this first European organization of states has been to cooperate across national borders, to promote democracy and human rights, and to preserve the common heritage. Furthermore, the CoE has aimed to encourage cooperation between the participating states in economic, social, cultural, and scientific fields. The two main bodies are the Committee of Ministers, which takes political decisions, and the Parliamentary Assembly, which has a consultative function. Although the CoE cannot pass laws, it can draw up conventions and agreements, which are binding for its members. In the context of these transnational aims, the European Nature Conservation Committee, a commission of experts, began in the early 1960s to look into potential European conservation schemes. A European debate on nature conservation began to evolve in an era that in environmental history is still considered an epoch of planning and technology euphoria. In 1963, the European Nature Conservation Committee of the CoE took up the suggestion of the British conference series “The Countryside in 1970” (which was launched in the same year) to convene a ECY and started the first preparations.

The commemorative year – 1970 – proclaimed by the CoE coincided with other international events concerning environmental protection, such as the environmental programme implemented by the US president Richard Nixon and the first Earth Day in the United States. Lastly, the aim of the ECY was no longer to frame national and European environmental problems separately but to discuss them in a wider European context. Educational programmes were to involve the population, thus creating awareness among members of the society of the destruction of the environment. The European Environmental Statement, as a framework recommendation, was not legally binding, and no binding convention was signed. The statement contained proposals both in general and at inter-
national, state, and regional level, including industry and individuals, on how to shape a common European nature. Nevertheless, this political expression of a coordinated will stimulated public debates and generated a moral impetus.\textsuperscript{24} The decision to issue national stamps displaying the European idea also specifically served this goal of transferring environmental protection awareness to politics and society. The stamps issued for the ECY, acting as the sources and framework for this analysis, visualize the emerging European environmental awareness at a certain point in time (in 1970) and translate it in nationally distinct ways. The initiative started a process in which individual nations actively tried to not only identify European elements to be displayed but also use the opportunity to situate themselves as a European nation. Part of this process was to find out if and how other nations issued their own stamps to mark the occasion.

In the commemorative year, delegates from all 17 member states of the Council of Europe attended the “European Conference on Nature Protection”, held by the CoE from 9 to 12 February 1970, which kicked off the ECY. Ten more countries from Europe, North America, and even the Eastern Bloc countries also took part.\textsuperscript{25} Thirteen member states issued postage stamps to mark the event. Greece’s membership was suspended by the CoE between 1967 and 1974 due to its dictatorial regime. This nation did not attend the conference but nevertheless issued stamps. Denmark, Malta, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom attended the conference but did not issue stamps. The annual programmes of the ten non-member states show how differently national postal departments commemorated the international events at that time. Finland, Yugoslavia, and Liechtenstein participated in issuing stamps. These countries were members of the CEPT and also attended the opening conference. The remaining members of the CEPT did not issue any stamps in 1970 on the occasion of the ECY and did not attend the opening conference, although Monaco issued conservation stamps in 1970. None of the stamps of the remaining participants made any direct references to the ECY. However, while Portugal, Spain, and Czechoslovakia did not issue any conservation stamps at all, other participating countries took up the environmental issue but without referring to the event as such. Israel chose national parks, Canada decided on the large-scale project called the International Biological Programme, and the United States chose natural history as well as nature conservation and environmental protection. Romania issued the most nature stamps, with 20 motifs on national flora and fauna.\textsuperscript{26} All in all, 17 nations issued a total of 40 stamps with 37 different motifs. West Germany began issuing stamps as early as June 1969, some seven months before the ECY officially began. Turkey and Finland issued their stamps in early February 1970. This coincided with the European conference. The remaining countries followed suit over the year.\textsuperscript{27} Most issued sets with two or more stamps, whereas others decided to issue just a sin-
gle stamp. Like the number of stamps, the printing methods also varied from country to country. Most of the countries used halftone photogravure or offset. Those who opted for a more elaborate procedure like intaglio usually put fewer stamps into circulation. It seems that this technique gave greater weight to the individual stamp. The commemorative year induced member states to present their own attitude towards conservation in a European context and, in that way, triggered a “European moment”. By comparing the ways in which member states of the CoE made use of emblems, phrases, and images, the various approaches to European environmentalization and conservation can be analyzed.

One of the central design elements that can be found on the stamps is the logo of the commemorative year. A logo in itself is the outcome of a complex process condensing meanings and images. This is also true for the emblem the CoE chose. The logo merges the nature conservation policy of the CoE with the objectives concerning future cooperation. Originally, the logo was created in the mid-1960s for the so-called European Diploma (in full, the European Diploma for Protected Areas of the Council of Europe), an award developed for promoting public awareness of a shared natural heritage. The CoE established this diploma in 1965 to acknowledge the exceptional character of remarkable protected areas in Europe. The award places landscapes, nature reserves, and national parks of European importance under the auspices of the CoE. By 1970, ten sites had received the diploma. Accordingly, the logo started to travel across Europe and seemed a suitable icon for labelling the ECY.

The original logo uses both the circle of stars of the CoE flag, introduced in 1955, and an archetypal symbol of nature in general and conservation in particular, the tree. The 12 stars of the flag, arranged in a circle, symbolize Europe as an ideal community of equal partners in an eternal union, irrespective of the changing number of the CoE’s members. The flag stands for unity and peace in Europe, as well as for its identity and values. Thus, the symbol refers to a common (political) project intending to unite all Europeans, regardless of their (national) differences. The tree consists of three roots, a strong trunk, and a symmetrical crown of branches with 18 leaves. Similar to the number 12, the number three not only symbolizes perfection and unity but also means the search for an alternative path. At the time the logo was developed, 18 countries were members of the CoE. The logo represents European nature as well as its conservation policy. Since its creation, it has helped to draw public attention to this topic and to construct and propagate the idea of common European nature. The tree represents a carefully chosen symbol that, however, has its own specific history in iconography. Trees embody protection; they root deep in the earth, and their crowns reach up into the sky at the same time. The roots symbolize a stable base from which everything grows. The leaves represent vitality. Additionally,
the tree itself can be interpreted as a meta sign. It not only stands for itself as a specific tree somewhere on the earth but also has gained a further, overarching cultural level of meaning. Similar to water or the colour green, it symbolizes the cycle of life.\textsuperscript{34} Within the visual framework of the European Diploma logo, its meaning even reaches beyond that of the archetypical tree of life. The tree became an icon – according to Gisela Parak, one could speak of an “eco-image”. In this case, it stands for both the subject who intends to protect – the CoE – and the object to be protected – nature.\textsuperscript{35} On the stamps for the commemorative year, the tree can be found in three variations. First, it is a part of the official emblem for the conservation year. Second, countries used a tree symbol for their own national logo or used it to tell a story of destruction and/or of the future. Third, some countries showed a tree species that was typical for the country’s nature. The tree, however, could be presented and depicted in very distinct ways, as the three samples of trees used on stamps issued by Switzerland, Ireland, and Italy reveal.

\section*{4 Designing Environmental Stamps}

\subsection*{Switzerland}

Switzerland (see figure 1) features the official logo of the ECY quite prominently on its stamp. The one and only Swiss stamp that was designed for the occasion is framed by the phrase “Year of Nature 1970”, printed in the three official languages of the country. In contrast to other countries that presented the symbol in just one colour, Switzerland kept it colourful. The blue background and the yellow stars emphasize the juxtaposition of the logo with the European flag, while the colours of brown and green emphasize a strong, vibrant tree.

Using colours evokes moods and emotions. Further levels of meaning can arise from their main associations; they culturally depend on the experiences or basic knowledge of the people. Blue stands for the sky and/or water across cultures. Here, it symbolizes the sky, which spans not only all of Western Europe but also the whole earth. Yellow indicates the life-giving sun and warmth. Green in Western culture is regarded as a symbol for nature, vegetation, and growth. Brown stands for soil.\textsuperscript{36} In 1914, Swiss stamps achieved a milestone in European stamp design as their motifs, for the first time, marketed the Alps as both a tourist attraction and a national identity. Switzerland, which is still famous for its nature stamps,\textsuperscript{37} made a commitment to Europe and the CoE’s nature conservation activities by deciding to place the official emblem prominently and using a striking colour scheme.
Ireland

Like the Swiss stamp, the Irish ones (see figure 1) display a logo. The Department of Lands, part of the Irish government, commissioned the Kilkenny Design Workshops to design a national logo. The Kilkenny Design Workshops was a state-supported institution that existed from 1963 to 1988. It created visual awareness of Irish design among the population and across national borders. The Irish artist Damien Harrington, who established the graphic design department in the Kilkenny Design Workshops in 1968, created the logo.38 This emblem was used by stakeholders to label activities connected to this event.39 Two roots coming from different directions taper off into a trunk or stem consisting of two strands. It could symbolize the lower part of an arrow or different paths joining and finally pointing in one direction. These two strands in turn expand to form a circular structure of four quadrants. Each quadrant consists of two forms reminiscent of (water) drops. Two of the drops unite to form a heart. A stylized bird emerges from the heart-like formation in the left quadrant. This figure could be interpreted in two ways: either as a blossom or as a treetop on which a bird sits. Three of these heart-shaped quadrants might also refer to the Irish national symbol of the three-leaved clover, which the bird finally expands into a four-leaved one – a symbol of happiness. The Irish logo cites the meaning of the European symbol (the tree with its leaves) and combines it with its own national, Irish motif (cloverleaf) to represent nature in a wider context: flora (tree, flower, and cloverleaf) and fauna (bird), as well as the life-giving water (drops) forming an entity (tree of life and life cycle). This entity – the stamp seems to suggest – is well rooted and stable; it can flourish. Translated into a message, the stamp conveys the assumption that acting at the national and the European level, respecting the environment, and caring for fragile nature would eventually lead to a harmonious and happy way of life for all – humans, flora, and fauna.

Italy

Italy (see figure 1), too, makes use of the visual centrepiece of the European Diploma logo: the tree. However, this is embedded in a completely different motivic context. The stamp shows a stylized landscape destroyed by man.40 An industrial and urban complex threatens green meadows. Smoke rises from two chimneys and apparently causes the death of a leafless tree. The last letter of the phrase “Annata Europea per la salvaguardia della natura” (ECY) touches a hill that cannot be clearly defined (rock, waste dump, or supply of raw materials). The lettering – which, like the houses, chimneys, and smoke, appears in red or blue-grey –
seems to absorb the poisoning of the surroundings and to bring nature back to life. The phrase also limits the growth of the buildings as well as an even greater spread of the smoke. It suggests that the activities of the commemorative year will bring nature back to life and will improve the living environment of people.

Trees feature on the stamps of many national sets. Two of the three Turkish stamps (see figure 1), for instance, portray desertification and forest fires with withered shrubs in a desert landscape and a charred tree trunk in the middle of a sea of flames. Even if countries such as Belgium (see figure 1) or Greece (see figure 1) chose the simplest option of depicting a particular tree species of national importance to represent the issuing country and its natural environment, it still evokes the tree of life. Thus, a tree could indicate a utopian future in which solutions to problems could be found or in which a community could be built. Oppositely, a dead tree could warn against a dystopian future in which the lives of all living things would be threatened. However, all these different modes of representation have one thing in common: the tree provides identity across borders.

**The European Diploma**

As mentioned before, another reoccurring motif on stamps is the European Diploma awarded to landscapes of European significance. Some countries that had already held it highlighted this award and visualized those sites. The strategy supporting the CoE’s diploma programme has been the creation of a future network of outstanding protected areas, providing a spatial equivalent to the common values and heritage of the continent. The commemorative year extended this idea. With the help of national and international activities and events coordinated by the CoE, not only would a “mental map” (Frithjof Benjamin Schenk) evolve but also the active process of being integrated into an “imagined community” (Benedict Anderson) would be fostered. Wöbse calls the European Diploma logo the visual prelude to a history of consolidating European nature conservation relations, a theme that had the power to be considered universally valid and to construct a common identity among European citizens.

The European Diploma is a weak device, as it is associated neither with any financial assistance or legal standing nor with any binding standards or legal texts. Its significance lies rather in its representational power and the ritual of awarding it. It is mainly about symbolic politics. This does not necessarily make it unattractive. On the contrary, the representatives of the nations and regions that have applied for the diploma want to place their sites within a European context and to emphasize the transnational dimension. They thus declare
their commitment to Europe. The European Diploma has helped to create a European identity and – at the same time – drawn attention to cross-border nature conservation. The European Diploma lacks legal power, but it radiates normative authority. Moreover, it exudes the aura of European integration. The focus of the award is on nature reserves that have already been granted official and governmental protection. Some of reserves awarded the diploma are literally icons of the nature conservation movement of the early twentieth century, such as the French Camargue or the Krimml Waterfalls in Austria. Analyzing stamps issued on the occasion of the commemorative year allows us to take a closer look at these two reserves.

**France**

France (see figure 1) acknowledged the significance of the Camargue National Nature Reserve (Réserve Naturelle Nationale de Camargue) and showed its national devotion to its local and European importance by designing a prestigious stamp. This single stamp is of high quality, being printed in multicoloured intaglio. The French officials responsible for coordinating the stamp design made sure that all possible visual symbols that the CoE provided to celebrate the commemorative year would be on it. Only France incorporated all representational items. The stamp uses the logo and the phrase “Année européenne de la nature 1970” (ECY 1970), as well as the picture and the name of an animal species that is iconic for nature conservation in France: pink flamingos (*flamants roses*). The graphic artist placed an individual bird at the centre of the stamp, displaying its lifelike colours of pink, grey, and white shades. In the background, one can see flying and wading flamingos in a lifelike representation referring to the habitat of a breeding colony. The image of the birds is framed by green, which contrasts the shades of pink of the bird. The logo and the lettering announcing the ECY are kept in green as well.

Flamingos have always been a rare sight in Europe, breeding only in a few places along the Mediterranean coast. In France, the impressive wading birds live beside many other wetland species in the lagoons of the Rhone delta. Throughout the twentieth century, the bird population had been continuously under threat by reclamation schemes in the marshy landscape. Due to the rich bird species in the area, the Camargue turned into an Eldorado for ornithologists and wildlife photographers. In 1927, a private organization, the National Society for the Protection of Nature (Société Nationale de Protection de la Nature), managed to establish the Camargue National Nature Reserve. This reserve, representing one of the most important hubs for migratory birds in the Western Palaearc-
tic, is displayed in the background of the stamp, being just as iconic as the flam-ingsos.

The lagoons of the Camargue had been under constant pressure from neigh-bouring development schemes and had turned into one of the most controversial areas in France and Europe in terms of conservation. In 1966, the very first year the European Diploma was launched, the Camargue National Nature Reserve received the European Diploma and was placed “under the sponsorship of the Council of Europe”. It was this European award that helped to defend and save the reserve at the national level in the longer run. In 1970, when an expert sent by the CoE assessed the status of the reserve to grant a renewal of the diploma, he emphasized that “those, responsible for the Reserve and the Park still have many difficulties to face”. He assumed that any “action likely to sustain them in their efforts is welcome. The renewal of the European Diploma is one such step.” After just four years, the European Diploma had turned into an instrument used by local environmental actors to strengthen and legitimize their activities.

**Austria**

Austria (see figure 1) uses a similar approach to its stamp, though less obvious. It also issued only a single stamp showing an area awarded the European Diploma. However, the stamp does not represent the flora and fauna living there but depicts an outstanding landscape as such: the upper part of the natural monument Krimml Waterfalls. The Austrian stamp focuses on the European mountains par excellence, the Alps (see chapter 9 by Aschwanden et. al.). The waterfalls have a long history of being a popular tourist destination. Travelers, especially from the United Kingdom and the United States, have been visiting the site ever since the beginning of the nineteenth century. With the emerging production of electricity through hydropower, conflicts between the touristic and the economic use of the falls arose at the end of the nineteenth century. Over the decades, these disputes had been repeatedly decided in favour of the natural spectacle. The resulting obligation concerning all Austrians “not only for the future but also for the past” to protect the falls was invoked by the botanist and nature conservationist Gustav Wendelberger in the 1950s. This “heart” of the planned Hohe Tauern National Park could not be sold because a park “without its most beautiful jewel would be meaningless”. In 1983, the picturesque falls were finally included as a “crystallization point” in the Hohe Tauern National Park, the largest protected area in the Alps and at the time the largest national park in Central Europe. Wendelberger’s ambition to secure one of the
most traditional “cardinal points of Austrian nature conservation”\textsuperscript{48} for the future was thus fulfilled.

These impressive waterfalls received the European Diploma in 1967. Although there are no legal requirements attached to the diploma, it comes with moral obligations. The drive of such “symbolic policy”\textsuperscript{49} is evident in the ceremonial speeches on the occasion of the first awarding of the diploma, in 1967, which refer to the European Diploma and its obligations to protect the site.\textsuperscript{50} The environmental political and aesthetic quality attributed to the waterfalls is also reflected in the chosen method of manufacturing the stamp. While most countries opted for a less expensive printing process and a series of stamps, the Austrians, like the French, opted for a single stamp and also chose a particularly high-quality intaglio printing process, which was keeping with the country’s tradition of stamp production and motifs. Among philatelists and designers, this printing technique is considered the most refined.\textsuperscript{51} In their own way, the two nations showed the importance attributed to the depicted subject matter: France, through the natural and iconic colours, and Austria, through the elaborate, detailed, and large-scale depiction. The Austrian graphic artist used neither the logo nor the geographical name, but only the phrase. “Europäisches Naturschutzjahr 1970” (ECY 1970) serves as a headline advertising the event as well as the site. In both countries, the subject shimmers in the colour of nature conservation or life as a whole: green. In contrast to France, which chose a striking shade of green, Austria opted for a uniform, more muted green. From an aesthetic point of view, Austrian’s graphic artists decided to present the motif in an engraving-like style. In the tradition of early nature conservation, it emphasizes the grandeur and sublimity of the natural monument. As the examples of France and Austria show, the same idea – the European Diploma or the printing process – could be expressed very differently.

**Liechtenstein**

There were many ways to interpret and present European nature and the ECY. Each country followed its own approach to the commemorative stamp production in general and to the chosen motif in particular. Liechtenstein (see figure 1) issued a series of four displaying flowers. However, it was the only country that called for nature conservation merely by presenting (endangered) native plant species. This set can not be traced back to the commemorative year with the help of the stamp motifs. Nevertheless, it was the start of a three-year series on flowers in Liechtenstein.\textsuperscript{52} Before these stamps, however, it had already demonstrated environmental ambitions when it issued in 1966 a special series on
conservation with positively connoted symbols for the topics “Healthy Earth”, “Clean Air”, “Clean Water”, and “Protection of Nature”. The West Germans, in contrast, had to wait until 1973 to see any stamps with such themes. The West German stamps were inspired by the 1970 environmental stamps of the United States, which display the famous blue marble in connection with the phrase “Save our...”, in conjunction with soil, cities, water, or air. The United States also issued a conservation stamp with a bison symbolizing the country in 1970 – the year marking the world’s first Earth Day as well as the commemoration year in Europe.⁵³

**West Germany**

Like Liechtenstein, West Germany (see figure 1) issued a set of four stamps without using the logo or the phrase. The German commissions and individuals responsible for discussing the motifs to be chosen opted to display landscapes like some other countries did. Norway, Sweden, and Austria presented landscapes that were famous for their scenery (see figure 1). West Germany, in contrast, chose to present stylized and idealized sceneries that did not really exist but summed up “typical German landscapes”, like lakesides, low mountain ranges, high mountains, or river landscapes. The choice rested on the assumption that landscape motifs were very popular among representatives of nature conservation and the general public. As Germany was still divided, the West German Federal Ministry of Postal Services refrained from presenting real sceneries. The images on the stamps are subtitled with a brief and imperative phrase: “Schützt die Natur” (protect nature). The German stamps issued for the ECY thus combine a rather neutral image with a direct appeal to the citizen. The series combines intaglio and offset printing, giving the stamp a refined and prestigious note, which in a way contrasts the straightforward request. The messages on the stamps address the consumer and plead for his or her involvement with the greater cause of conservation.⁵⁴ Delving deeper into the history of these stamps, however, might reveal a less than clear-cut history of their genesis. In the case of West Germany, stamps were not produced especially for the commemorative year. Neither did the stamps appear in 1970 nor did any motif or phrase highlight this event. However, this is exactly what corresponding publications of the Federal Ministry of Postal Services referred to. The unusual context in which the stamps and their motifs were created can only be traced on the basis of the archive files. The national authorities of the commemorative year had no influence on the design and issue date of the stamps. Nevertheless, these small visual postage receipts were an integral part of the ECY. The CoE,
in Strasbourg, took note of their release, and both the Federal Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Forestry and the German League for Nature and Environment (Deutscher Naturschutzbund) used them to stamp their correspondence. Apart from the history of the commemorative year, these stamps also tell their own story, which sheds light on the issuing policy of the Federal Ministry of Postal Services concerning conservation and telling motifs. The planning for the series had begun long before the commemorative year celebrating Europe’s nature, that is to say in 1955. It took some 14 years until the stamp series could eventually be put on envelopes and postcards. There were various requests by non-governmental organizations that asked for stamps displaying conservation and protection issues. The ministry was hesitant, even actively hindering such initiatives. In 1965, for instance, it refused a request by the Society for the German-Luxembourg Nature Park Echternacherbrück to dedicate a stamp at the same time as Luxembourg to celebrate the first cross-border European nature park, founded in 1964. This would have been the first joint issue of two European countries celebrating a conservation topic. Even with the positive attitude of the Luxembourg postal administration, the support of the leading official of the region of Trier and the chief postal officer of the city could not change the ministry’s mind. Apparently, a single event or occasion was not enough to convince the ministry of the importance for issuing a stamp. Rather, it needed a more general setting or political debate to actually start the process, in this case growing environmental concern in Europe. The example of the history of the German conservation series of 1969 highlights the process in which the different interests of the various stakeholders and institutions competed with each other. Sometimes, in their deliberately vague generality, stamps subsequently covered a subject as well as other topics related to conservation.

**Stamp Motifs Cross Read**

It is noteworthy, too, that the United Kingdom did not issue any postage stamps referring to the event at all, even though it had played a decisive role in declaring the commemorative year. There is no evidence that international postal organizations such as the CEPT or the Universal Postal Union asked national postal service ministries to issue stamps for this event. In 1972, for example, the Universal Postal Union asked for stamps highlighting the first environmental conference in Stockholm. During the ECY, however, the organizers of the commemorative year, being on their own, depended on the goodwill and structural framework of the individual postal service ministries. In 1970, they could not
make use of the already institutionalized EUROPA stamps because there was still a single transnational motif.

As a result of the growing environmental discourse, the CEPT would become more proactive during the 1980s. In 1986, one year before the European Year of the Environment, the CEPT focused on conservation and environmentalism. For this reason, postal service ministries made use of the EUROPA stamps in 1986 to promote the topic. The structural framework for stamps depicting European nature and environmental protection thus became more established. Stamps offered a transnational platform to visualize European conservation and environmentalism. This also became evident in 1986 with the selected motifs. In addition to landscapes, plants, and animals, these motifs focused much more on environmentalism as part of a European understanding. The latter still consisted of typical national entities, as were mainly found on the stamps of 1970. However, it was now more important to continue this idea of a European heritage beyond national borders and to focus on European responsibility for common natural resources such as the sea, air, or water. This led to a visual Europeanization of conservation and environmentalism on stamps. In the end, the ECY provided numerous European countries with an important incentive to pay tribute to the common goal of protecting the European heritage by issuing stamps. A closer look at the motifs reveals the variety of conveying images of nature and the environment, which reveal the facets to the ECY and its significance for cross-border, European-wide nature conservation. The national institutions responsible for issuing the stamps usually condensed a lot of information into a very small format. This led to constant discussion about stamp design in general and information density in particular. The variety of stamps illustrate various concepts of nature – not only iconic species and sceneries but also threats caused by pollution, reclamation, or building schemes. The variability and freedom to change the visual components and linguistic elements stress the purely normative and non-legally binding character of the CoE and the diversity of approaches towards any such thing as European conservation. Nevertheless, it was this diversity of presentations and their arrangement that gave rise to the idea of a future European conservation, envisaged and imagined by applicants and those responsible in the postal service ministries. When looking at the entire series in an album of a collector or a digital archive, the stamps form a diverse and yet connected European tableau.

The ECY and its symbols resemble a compass that drew the attention of officials, stakeholders, and the general public to a European map displaying a wealth of species in the most diverse natural landscapes, which were in need of protection. The motifs present key issues of environmental concern that the CoE had addressed. Even the two biodiversity concepts elaborated by Lisbeth
van de Grift and Wim van Meurs (see chapter 16) were already recognizable: the conservationist and the biodiversity concept. The most common presentations are true to nature with a symbolic impetus connecting to the conservationist concept of the 1960s. Some of them, however, already advanced a more ecological approach, which would prove decisive for the future European environmental policy. The symbol of the circle, standing for the ecological cycle, turned into a feature of stamp design. The use of landscape sceneries, which seem to accentuate the aesthetic value and qualities of a region, had a hidden agenda, like in the case of the Camargue, which at the time was seriously threatened by development schemes. The stamps with plant and animal motifs draw the consumer’s attention to species protection. Birds – and bird protection – were almost omnipresent, especially birds of prey, indicating the loss of central organisms of the web of life. Other animal species, like the Cretan wild goat, already pointed the way to the future of European conservation schemes like the Bern Convention (1979). One of the most progressive and straightforward stamps, however, was issued in Italy, which was dedicated to the dangers arising from intensified land use and air and soil pollution. These examples highlight the changing biodiversity concepts, which focus on the survival of mankind rather than on individual species or scenery protection.

5 Conclusion

This synopsis of stamp motifs highlights the meaning of stamps as strong visual impacts. Their message is intended to be grasped by viewers within seconds. In the examples presented, each country featured a specific approach towards visualizing the ECY. Using the logo and/or phrase endorsed common visual politics. The evolving corporate identity and design, however, did not hinder individual countries from finding their own ways to express their idea of European nature and European conservation. European visual politics, as it materialized on the stamps, echoes both the search for a common ground and the need to be distinguishable.

Throughout the 1960s, conservation had turned into an issue that called for European collaboration. European nations strove to promote the cause by highlighting and presenting the importance of as well as constant threat to natural heritage. Images are one of the decisive tools for getting this message across. They also provide researchers with material to identify historic moments and processes that mark the visual Europeanization of nature protection. Stamp issues that were designed particularly for the ECY can be read as a symbol and as a visualization of the European idea. These small postage receipts made the
vision of a common Europe tangible and visible to many people precisely because they were so common in everyday life. They travelled across countries and crossed national borders while advertising both their country of origin and a common goal. As stamps are small but strong indicators of what politics classifies as valuable and what a country should represent, they help us to understand the process of visualizing Europe and Europeanizing imagery.

Here, we can see how cross-national conservation and environmentalism turned into legitimate principles, which some of the participating countries had been emphasizing for decades. This allows us to trace historical developments in the Europeanization of conservation and its visualization and to highlight both similarities and differences. The stamps created for the commemorative year carried a specific European momentum as they triggered intense debates among those who were involved in the process of production about how to present the issue, as seen in the German case study. The stamps as such turned into agents of spreading the visual message of how Europe’s nature actually looked like and should look like in the future.

Writing a visual history of Europe means looking at sources that have been produced for the sake of their perception. The production process, the visual product, and its reception are relevant for a European environmental historiography. Images were not only created from a specific idea but also embedded in a socially negotiable framework. As part of an aesthetic practice, they were intended to stimulate reflection on what European nature conservation might look like and to act accordingly. While the environmental movements have repeatedly been accused of limiting their visual scope to either utopian or dystopian motifs, the range of visual narratives proved to be much broader. The messages and meanings displayed on the stamps are more complex than one might assume at first glance. The strong feelings that materialized in the images were an immanent part of the social and political discourse and helped to determine it beyond the motifs depicted.

With the help of visual history, these debates can be studied. If the world view of a group can be expressed by using images, then this can be pursued in diverse ways. The first part of the study focused on the motifs depicted on the stamps. This approach revealed similarities and differences of a common Europe imagined by people from different countries. This was visualized both by nationally anchored ideas about a common Europe and transnational environmental protection as well as by tangible natural points of reference such as landscapes, plants, or animals. The second focus of the study was the actual process of creating a stamp series. The production of stamps for current events such as the ECY was subject to institutional and personal constraints. Such imponderables were also at the expense of visual clarity. However, this is only partially evi-
dent in the final product and can therefore only be explored by consulting written sources regarding the creation process. Such complementing approaches help to shed light on the complex negotiation processes at a national and European level, impaired or promoted by individuals. After all, 40 visual testimonies of a common European path developed agency, which spread the vision of a shared natural heritage across the continent and the world.

Notes

4 Harald Welzer, Die smar te Diktatur: Der Angriff auf unsere Freiheit (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 2016), 245.
10 Ibid., 1878.
13 Dunaway, Seeing Green, e.g., 11.
18 *MICHEL stamp catalogue: CEPT 2019* (Unterschleißheim: Schwaneberger, 2018). The use of the corresponding stamp illustrations and MICHEL numbering (MICHEL Number, hereafter MiNo.) (country MiNo. 123) is courtesy of Schwaneberger Verlag GmbH, Germering.
25 Member states of the Council of Europe in 1970 were: Austria, Belgium, Cyprus, Denmark, France, West Germany, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, and the United Kingdom. Non-member states participating in the conference in February 1970 were: Finland, Portugal, Spain, Lichtenstein, Israel, Canada, USA, Czechoslovakia, Romania, and Yugoslavia (Nature in Focus, 2).
26 Monaco MiNo. 959, 966–971; Israel MiNo. 456–460; Canada MiNo. 450; USA MiNo. 999–1002, 1004, 1012–1015; Romania MiNo. 2824–2831, 2868–2873, 2888–2893.
27 On motifs and issue dates, see figure 1.
29 Wöbbe, “Die ausgezeichnete Natur Europas”.
32 Wöbbe, “Die ausgezeichnete Natur Europas”.
35 Wöbbe, “Die ausgezeichnete Natur Europas”.
36 Kühne, *Das Naturbild in der Werbung*, 73, 74, 170 and 190.
39 *Nature in Focus*, 20.
41 Wöbse, “Die ausgezeichnete Natur Europas”.
46 Ibid., 155.
49 Wöbse, “Die ausgezeichnete Natur Europas”.
50 Haßlacher, *Krimmler Wasserfälle*.
54 National Archives Koblenz, B 257/42208.
55 National Archives Koblenz, B 257/45387 (Druckblatt 8/1969); B 257/42208/12–15, 125–40, 58–60.
56 National Archives Koblenz, B 257/475 and 42208.
57 National Archives Koblenz, B 257/42208/139–146.
59 National Archives Koblenz, B257/42223/443–448.
These discussions accompanied almost all conservation and environmentalism stamps in West Germany but were very prominent in the 1969 series (National Archives Koblenz, B 257/42208).


Bibliography


