



Programme:

**The Way the Rivers Run:
World History and Changes in the
Water Landscape**

November 17-18, 2008, Oslo, Norway

This workshop aims to present an overview of current research and discussions on the relationship between climate change, river system development and human adaptations in relation to some major historical issues. The workshop will present some case studies and organise discussions comparing developments in different river basins and in different water landscapes. It will focus on human actions to exploit or meet these changes in both long and short term perspectives.

How have climate change and changes in the world's water landscapes affected human development and structured societies in major river basins throughout history? In a world with an ever-fluctuating environment and climate, it is important to understand the particular and unique ways freshwater availability and human control of water have been organised in different types of development processes and societies throughout history. Environmental changes and human interferences in the world's 'waterscapes' have created possibilities as well as limitations, which when considering changes, from sudden "dramatic" events to long term climate change, are fundamental factors in understanding world history. Some papers will also, as a contrast, present analyses of abrupt changes in river discharges or rainfall patterns or catastrophic events such as floods and droughts and how these changes and responses to them have influenced social developments and technological innovations.

Climate change is often perceived and characterised by long-term processes, but for humans these changes are sometimes dramatic, short-term events such as seasonal drought or sudden flooding. By the same token, humans' entrepreneurial implementation of major water projects such as river damming and diversion are marked, short term events, having potential long lasting effects bridging various historical temporalities. Environment does not necessarily elicit cultural response, but water resources create the potential and premises for humans to act upon, and exploit them, causing changes which may have effects lasting centuries, resulting in new social organisations, ideologies and economic systems.

The aim with this workshop is to investigate relations between long-term climatic changes and short-term hydrological events in major river basins with fundamental relevance to social developments, forms of economic activity and political institutions. Since the themes of this workshop focus both on specific hydrological events and change in a long term perspective, although at different scales, it may raise theoretical and methodological issues which enable one to compare historic processes providing new insights into man-water relations and climate change in world history.