

MATTERS OF CONTAINMENT

Material approaches to the handling of
threats in the modern world

3rd International Conference
of the Quarantine Studies Network

Lisbon-Évora (Portugal), 28-29 May 2020

Past conferences of the QSN network in Malta and Mallorca explored an expansion of the classical study of quarantines and sanitary cordons into an interdisciplinary field of “quarantine studies” so that their multiple political, military, social, economic and, of course, health dimensions were systematically brought to the foreground. In this third conference, we intend to take a more decided step in that direction by exploring the material realities of containment anywhere in the world and preferably for the period 1750-today.

The word “containment” is usually given two meanings: 1: the act of keeping a hazard within limits, for example, an epidemic disease or a radioactive leakage; 2: the policy of preventing an hostile military, economic or ideological expansion. Both meanings could be - and usually are - intertwined, as can be seen, for example, in the scientific and political measures taken to check the “threats” associated with the Mecca pilgrimage in the 19th century, the Soviet Revolution in 1917 or the Chernobyl nuclear accident in 1986.

This transversal nature of containment can be better grasped through a focus on its often neglected material aspects. Containment ultimately consists of the handling of threatening human bodies, living beings, objects and ideas, which is always performed by specialized groups of humans who use various tools and techniques to carry out different types of actions in a large variety of spaces. In this sense, for example, the detention and examination of the bodies of migrants aims to provide at the same time sanitary, ideological and economic “protection”; measuring tools used in customs’ laboratories may guard the health of a country’s population against adulterated products and the country’s industry or agriculture against the “damage” caused by the “invasion” of another country’s products. Materiality can also provide a more accurate picture of the actual scope, the effectiveness and consequences (social, political, economic, spatial or environmental) of containment measures, as well as of historical continuities and the collective memory about them.

We invite researchers from any disciplinary background to present their contributions to this conference, by sending a 250-word abstract and a short CV to the following email

quarantinestudies2020@gmail.com

The deadline for receiving abstracts will be 20th December 2019. Although the conference official language is English, papers in other languages would be considered.