

Unexpected Nature? European Immigrants in Southern Brazil

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Europeans migrants have crossed the Atlantic Ocean carrying with them cultures and hopes, bodies and skills, techniques and crops. Their skills, knowledge, bodies, even their ethnic identities have interacted with local environments, affecting both people and the land. From 1825 to 1914, thousands of German and Italian immigrants settled in Rio Grande do Sul and Santa Catarina, the southern states of Brazil. The areas where the colonization companies settled them were covered by forests. These immigrants arrived to regions that were completely different in their imagination. Therefore, they tried to adapt and reshaped the environment in their benefits. They had to renegotiate even their ethnic identity with different groups, such as natives, Portuguese, German, Italians, Polish immigrants and so on. The model of colonization chosen by the Brazilian government was responsible for many anthropic changes to the nature of the Atlantic forests and for the ecological crisis it created. Today less than 10 percent of the areas are still covered by forests. I will discuss the settling of immigrants in forest areas, mainly "Araucaria Forests", in the states of Rio Grande do Sul and Santa Catarina and the resulting anthropogenic modifications of the landscape. While forests and its biodiversity were studied and exalted by European naturalists and travelers that same nature was instead profoundly altered by settlers from Europe through extractive activities and agriculture. Even today it is difficult for some of the descendants to understand that the destruction of the forests in the past and nowadays disrupted various ecological services upon which they depend, such as the protection of the soil, the regulation of the water cycle and the climate. The main sources used in our research are government reports, census, memoirs, immigrant's letters, legislation, and traveler's reports, among other documents. Excepting several excellent studies, the connections between environmental history and migration history still needs to be explored. A comparison of the settlement of German and Italians Immigrants in the United States and in Brazil and the way that they changed the landscape trying to

adapt it on their homeland style and also their interaction or learning with native people about nature are important aspects to be discussed.