

The ESEH Diversity Committee

In 2020 the ESEH President Marco Armiero established a Diversity Committee with a brief to:

1. Analyse the diversity performance of our society since its foundation (the composition of the boards, committees, leadership, perhaps the conference programmes);
2. Identify the main obstacles to fostering diversity in our society;
3. Identify measures our society can take to become more diverse.

The committee was also encouraged to implement events which could support the nurturing of diversity.

The members of the Diversity Committee come from different backgrounds and regions. They are (in alphabetical order): Malcom Ferdinand (Afro-Caribbean Martinique – Paris, France); Lisa FitzGerald (Irish – Evian, France); Andy Flack (Anglo-English – Bristol, UK); Katie Holmes (Anglo-Australian – Melbourne, Australia).

We recognise that diversity takes many forms. We include within our remit diversity in terms of gender, race, ethnicity, culture, dis/ability, class, age, geographic region, sexual orientation. Indeed, we recognise and value diverse identities whatever shape and form they take.

The desire to enhance the diversity of ESEH is not just about being inclusive and respectful of all, although those things are very important. It also stems from a recognition that our scholarship will be richer and more rigorous, our Society will be strengthened and our voices will have more impact when our activities and conferences reflect the diversity of our practitioners and the breadth of the field of environmental history. We know that a commitment to diversity requires us to take active steps – that it won't happen by chance, that those groups who are traditionally marginalised will continue to be so unless we deliberately work toward their inclusion. With this in mind the Diversity Committee has been working on a number of different levels to understand how the ESEH has been tracking so far in relation to diversity, and what we can do to foster greater inclusion within the Society.

One undertaking is an audit of past conferences in order to get some baseline data about conference participation and subjects covered. We realised that if we wanted to be able to track changes in participation as a result of our activities, we needed to have some idea of the composition of past conferences. We have also realised this is quite a challenge (and time consuming). In order to test the usefulness of this approach, we decided to concentrate on one

conference and see what the data revealed, before expanding the reach. This is still a work-in-progress.

Another undertaking has been to write a Diversity Statement. The following statement has been approved by the ESEH Board and expanded upon in the Call for Papers for the 2021 conference:

Commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion is at the heart of ESEH. We recognise the unique contributions of every member of our society and seek ways of ensuring that people of all identities and in all circumstances can contribute to our biennial conference and to the wider life of our society. We strive to promote equality and diversity at our conference, in relation to conference participation, and the composition of topics comprising the conference program. We also endeavour to create a platform to encourage active and sustained debate on issues of marginalisation and accessibility amongst our members.

In order actively to promote diversity and inclusion within the ESEH, we have also developed a set of strategic objectives for the Society, including the selection of panels and keynotes for future conferences, the conduct of conferences and the composition of the Board.¹

Strategic objective 1

Maintain a culture within the Society that encourages and promotes diversity, inclusion and respect in its conferences and its Board membership.

For future conferences we suggest:

- ESEH considers diversity as a criteria when selecting panels for the conference and that all male panels may not be selected without a specific reason
- ensure at least one woman keynote
- consider other forms of diversity in the selection of keynotes, including region (whether from the global south or north), race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, etc.
- include a statement in the conference material about ensuring personal safety and respect and have in place a process for complaints should any arise

Board membership: the Society will actively encourage nominations from diverse scholars and strive to reflect the diversity of the Society in the membership of its Board.

1. In developing these Strategic Objectives we have borrowed from those adopted by the Royal Society's Diversity Strategy: <https://royalsociety.org/-/media/policy/topics/diversity-in-science/2019-09-Diversity-strategy-2019-22.pdf?la=en-GB&hash=3C2C52DE55E915B0FC394A05400ACFFB>

Strategic objective 2

Ensure that subjects which are marginalised within environmental history are included in conferences and other ESEH events:

- prioritise panels which, in relation to environmental history, address issues to do with:
 - gender
 - (post)colonialism
 - racism
 - justice
 - (dis)ability
- encourage and financially support participants from diverse communities, taking into account gender, ethnic background, abilities, age
- host a panel discussion on diversity in environmental history (this can be in addition to a panel at the conference)

Strategic objective 3

Develop guidelines for panel chairs

- establish a set of guidelines for panel chairs to ensure a diversity of questioners and the encouragement of questions from audience members who are less senior or experienced.

Strategic objective 4

Develop guidelines around accessibility of conferences, events, the website²

- establish a set of guidelines around accessibility of conferences including:
 - accessibility for conference events (keynotes, receptions, carparking etc)
 - accessibility of field trips where possible
 - gender-neutral bathrooms
 - room setup for panel sessions allowing for wheelchair access, visibility for hard-of-hearing and interpreters
- establish a set of guidelines for an accessible website
 - consider: design that follows Web Content Accessibility Guidelines and is Perceivable, Operable, Understandable and Robust.³

Strategic objective 5

Recognise and champion the achievements of a wide range of environmental historians from under-represented groups

- introduce a prize to actively encourage scholars from developing regions to attend the ESEH conference. The prize would be to cover

2. The Association for the Study of Literature and Environment has a very comprehensive set of guidelines for ensuring the accessibility of conferences from which this list is adapted.

3. See <https://www.accessibility.org.au/guides/what-is-the-wcag-standard/>

conference registration, economy travel and student accommodation (or equivalent) for the duration of the conference.⁴

In addition to the Diversity Statement and Strategic Objectives, the committee is also actively seeking to promote diversity in environmental history through a series of bimonthly online webinars beginning in 2021. These aim to showcase work around the intersections of environmental history and areas of diversity including race, ethnicity, gender, disability; to raise questions that need addressing; to facilitate discussion about these issues. The ESEH 2021 conference will be another place where people will be able to engage with our work as we will be hosting a plenary session addressing issues of diversity in the field of environmental history.

Promoting and embracing diversity and inclusion within ESEH is not just the work of the Diversity Committee. It is incumbent on all members to promote the values of our Society and work to create a welcoming and inclusive environment.

KATIE HOLMES
(Chair, ESEH diversity Committee)

4. The International Federation of Theatre Research has the Helsinki Prize, awarded to 'a promising new scholar who may be a postgraduate or lecturer at any university, but whose country of origin and of first degree-level studies is in Africa, Asia, South America or the Middle East , and who wishes to participate in an IFTR conference ... The prize is awarded on the basis of academic merit and strives to promote the exchange and networking of new scholars in developing regions, and to encourage research in the field of theatre in their countries.' <https://www.iftr.org/prizes>