

ESEH NOTEPAD

This edition of Notepad is devoted to three exciting regional environmental history conferences. Congratulations to the convenors on these successful events!

Istanbul Unbound: Environmental Approaches to the City

Istanbul Research Institute – Pera Museum

The ‘Istanbul Unbound: Environmental Approaches to the City’ conference, held virtually on April 8–11 2021, was co-organised by the Istanbul Research Institute and Pera Museum, supported by Heinrich Boll Stiftung-Turkey, through partnerships with Istanbul Planning Agency, IstanbulLab, Occupy Climate Change! and birbuçuk. It was endorsed by the European Society for Environmental History and Network for the Study of Environmental History of Turkey, and a part of the American Society for Environmental History’s Environmental History Week 2021. The conference sought to offer new insights on the complex layers of Istanbul’s urban landscape. It brought together innovative studies and practices in the fields of environmental history, political ecology and critical art studies. It put more than a hundred academics, artists, activists and policymakers, and thousands from the global public, in a dialogue on Istanbul’s environment, especially needed at a time when short- and long-term environmental risks are increasing on an unprecedented scale. Out of around a hundred participants in the conference, more than sixty were female.

The media of presentations ranged from conventional academic papers to artistic/academic collaborations of video production, with topics ranging from Byzantine waters to the excavation debris of the mega projects in contemporary Istanbul. Flora, fauna, material infrastructures, disasters and diseases in Istanbul, past and present, were among the topics covered throughout the conference. The keynote lecture was given by the renowned anthropologist Anna L. Tsing, whose talk ‘The Particular in the Planetary: Reimagining Cosmopolitanism Beyond the Human’, was an inspiring introduction to her most recent (collaborative) work, *Feral Atlas: The More-Than-Human Anthropocene*. The eminent Ottoman historian Cemal Kafadar gave the closing remarks with a presentation titled ‘Istanbul Found and ... Lost. Not Again!’ Kafadar eloquently connected the papers in the conference to the foundation myths of Istanbul and showed how new, environmental, readings of these centuries-old stories offer insights into the current ecological crises as well as the historical city.

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1,730 registered users attended the conference, 1,198 of whom followed at least one session live, and around 600 have so far watched replays, which are still available at the conference's [Crowdcast platform](#). The videos of the keynote and the closing were also streamed on the Istanbul Research Institute's YouTube page and are still available, so far watched around 4,500 times. The ten videos produced for the conference, commissioned by *birbuçuk* through artistic, scholarly and activist collaborations, are available on the Pera Museum's YouTube page and have so far been watched more than 6,500 times.

The organisers of the conference aspired to achieve continued collaboration with organisations and collectives working on Istanbul's environment, and to raise awareness among Istanbul's residents, policymakers and academics of the city's historical and current environmental issues, the agency of nonhuman actors in the making of the city and the ways in which we can reorient our thinking on Istanbul toward environmental justice and inclusivity. The first tangible outcome of this ongoing collaboration was an 'emergency event' on Istanbul's mucilage crisis that peaked in the summer months of 2021. On 1 July Istanbul Research Institute and IstanbulLab co-organised "[Istanbul Unbound Talks: The Sea and the Snot, Transcending Disciplinary and Administrative Boundaries,](#)" which brought together a series of experts and policymakers, including scholars working actively in the field as well as representatives of the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality. From the title of the panel to the talks of the panelists, the event strongly referenced the discussions and the public impact of Istanbul Unbound, and depended on the networks established through the conference, as envisaged by the organisers. *birbuçuk* and Pera Museum also co-organised a series of talks on the aforementioned video works that brought together the creators of these videos as well as artists and scholars working on similar themes.

Another planned outcome of the project is a series of publications. We are currently working with ESEH board member Onur İnal on a proposal for a peer-reviewed edited volume, based on the historical research presented at the conference, to be submitted to a top-tier university press. Furthermore, *YILLIK: Annual of Istanbul Studies*, the peer-reviewed open access journal of the Istanbul Research Institute, will publish a special dossier in an upcoming issue that will feature political ecological works on contemporary Istanbul presented at the conference.

We are grateful to the ESEH Presidency and the Board for the generous endorsement of the conference, providing it a global audience of environmental historians.

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The IV Meeting of REPORT(H)A, the Portuguese Network of Environmental History

The IV Meeting of REPORT(H)A took place from 14–16 October 2021, hosted by the Centre for History of Society and Culture (CHSC), in partnership with the Institute of Interdisciplinary Research of the University of Coimbra (iii-UC) and the Centre for Functional Ecology (CFE). The event included four keynote lectures by Marco Armiero, Manuel Gonzalez Molina, Charlotte Roberts and Marcus Hall.

The main goal of the meeting was to gather students, early career and senior researchers from natural sciences, social sciences and humanities in a transdisciplinary discussion about the role of Health in Environmental History. Sharing of knowledge and debates focused on preliminary questions concerning how health of humans has been affected by their use of nature, how perceptions of health and disease and their relationship with the environment have changed over time, how food systems have determined the social allocation of health and disease, how inequalities do/did shape health asymmetries in past and present colonialisms, how these asymmetries further reproduce inequality, or how the civilisational quest against disease precipitated species' extinction and other ecological and environmental dynamics, and also how this loss of biodiversity and climate change has, in turn, affected our present and future resilience to disease.

Under the main theme 'Sapiens, Health and Environment. Natural and Artificial Frontiers', the meeting was organized in 10 thematic sessions: *Diseases, health and inequality*; *Food systems: justice and sustainability*; *Representations of health and nature in art, philosophy and text*; *Historical patterns of disease and the environment*; *Agriculture innovation and environment throughout History*; *Present and future: nature-society interactions, climate change and biodiversity conservation*; *Loss of biodiversity and extinctions*; *Climate change*; *Innovative Farming: Diffusion of Agricultural Knowledge in the Iberian Countryside (16th–19th centuries)*; and *Lei e natureza: responsabilidade e ação nas crises ecológicas*. This encounter gave continuity to the objectives of the network in terms of inter- and trans-disciplinarity, and internationalisation, with the participation of seventy speakers from more than eighty research units of Universities in Portugal and beyond, including Brazil, Spain, Mozambique, Morocco, India, France, Romania, Peru, USA and Sweden.

The Book of Abstracts is available for download at <https://www.reportha-meeting2021.com/en/programme> and the videos of poster presentations will be soon available at the [CHSC YouTube channel](#).

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The next REPORT(H)A Meeting in 2023 will be held at Universidade do Minho. All the information will be released in due course at <https://reportha.org/en/> and in the mean time you can follow the Portuguese Network of Environmental History on Instagram @rede.reportha

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BALTEHUMS II

KAJAK: Estonian Centre for Environmental History

The Second Baltic Conference on the Environmental Humanities and Social Sciences (BALTEHUMS) was successfully held on 1–2 November 2021, organised by the Estonian Centre for Environmental History (KAJAK), Tallinn University, Estonia on the occasion of its tenth anniversary. The aim of the conference was to serve as a *Treffpunkt* for topics related to human–environment interactions in the Baltic region as well as to provide an overview of research projects in environmental humanities currently carried out in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania.

The conference was held fully online. The programme of the conference¹ was not too extensive, but the compact and well-assembled panels created an amplifying effect to individual topics. Approximately 150 people attended the conference, fifty of whom were present throughout both ten-hour-days. BALTEHUMS II included fifty regular presentations, two keynote speeches, two social events, a virtual exhibition² and a roundtable on environmentalising Baltic art histories, organised together with the Latvian centre for contemporary art. Individual sessions were dedicated to environmental history, sociology, anthropology, philosophy, semiotics, archaeology and ecocriticism. Although the disciplinary array of the participants was wide, the strong regional aspect of the presentations created connections and parallels that facilitated mutual understanding.

In addition to researchers in environmental humanities from Estonia and Latvia, who formed the majority of the presenters, researchers from Lithuania, Australia, USA, Germany, Switzerland, Sweden, Finland and Russia also presented. A number of major EH research projects currently carried out in the Baltic region were showcased through the presentations, such as ‘Estonian environmentalism’ led by Prof. Ulrike Plath, ‘Competing Discourses of Nature’ by cultural geographers of University of Latvia, as well as a project about the interaction of humans and river Daugava from the same university, and a

1. The programme and abstracts of the conference are available here: <https://www.tlu.ee/sundmused/baltehums-ii-konverents>
2. <https://padlet.com/katilindstrom/gv0f99vplv68622q>

project studying the environmental behaviour of humans from the perspective of semiotics and sociology carried out in University of Kaunas.

Each conference day featured a keynote speaker. Kate Brown of MIT shared the results of her recent fieldwork on Soviet kitchen gardens. Instead of conceptualising them as a grassroots response to a shortage of everything, they can be thought of as a platform for gaining autonomy for the citizens of the USSR. Michael Loader, University of Glasgow, looked into the history of Soviet Latvian hydroenergy developments of the 1950s and the civil protests sparked by damming and submerging of culturally significant locations.

The conference had no participation fee, as the zoom rooms were provided by the Institute of Humanities of Tallinn University, and the organisational work was carried out by former and current members of KAJAK board in co-operation with our student and regular members. The head of the organising team was Kati Lindström, ESEH regional representative for the Baltic states.

The next BALTEHUMS conference in will take place in Kaunas.

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