

## **The Hellenic Society for Environmental History: A Report from the Board**

On 16 March 2022, after repeated postponements due to the challenges posed by the Covid-19 pandemic and subsequent lockdowns, more than thirty scholars from diverse disciplines, career stages and Greek cities gathered to sign the statute of the Hellenic Society for Environmental History (HeSEH). The decision to establish had been a conscious one and not a product of compulsory pandemic idleness. The founding members of the Society realised that the time had come to establish a more robust organisation, rather than a loose network, that would help us promote the field of Environmental History in our country. Although the ground had been prepared by the strenuous efforts of Vaso Seirinidou, the former and first Regional Representative of Greece in the European Society for Environmental History and Professor of History at the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, the Greek economic crisis had impeded any further progress as new and ‘experimental’ fields of history would not get the funding and attention they needed to flourish.

But while the light was flickering, it never faded. A new generation of historians, ethnographers, archaeologists and political or social ecologists rose to the occasion and decided to carry Environmental History further. The first experimental statutes were written during the pandemic lockdowns, eventually developing into a description of an organisation that has as its main goals:

The promotion of Environmental History as a separate branch of historical science ... The pursuit of the introduction of Environmental History as a separate course in universities and other educational institutions in Greece; The organisation of all kinds of actions promoting the protection of the environment; [and] The representation and support of the professionals of Environmental History in Greece and abroad, with emphasis on their cooperation with the European Society for Environmental History.

The statute was ratified during the summer of 2022 and, right from the start, HeSEH became involved in events that have left and probably will leave their mark on the way Environmental History is developing in the country. Firstly, HeSEH was introduced as a permanent co-organiser of the most prominent academic event for Environmental History in Greece, the History of the Environment Meeting, hosted by the Piraeus Bank Group Cultural Foundation. From 2014, when it was held for the first time, the annual History of the Environment Meeting has been the most vibrant Environmental History hub in Greece, with significant exposure to the broader public. Secondly, HeSEH took the initiative to organise along with the Institute of Historical Research

of the National Hellenic Research Foundation a series of four documentary screenings titled 'Views into the History of the Greek Countryside' that ran from October to December 2022. This event was grounded in two ideas. The first was to disseminate the idea of Environmental History and the history of the countryside in general to the broader public through more accessible means, like documentaries. The second was to have part of the event covered by a Q&A session directly with the creator of the documentary that had been screened, to disclose their insights on the matter and anecdotal information that did not make it to the final cut. The public response was impressive, counting in aggregate more than one hundred viewers. The National Hellenic Research Foundation decided to renew the event for the next academic year.

By far the greatest challenge that HeSEH faces is complete lack of funding. The members' subscription has been set at 20 euros annually and, with fewer than forty members, HeSEH's income will not cover the costs of the forthcoming website and the additional expenses of our accountants. Even worse, the low income will not allow the Society to flourish, forcing it to be constantly a co-organising institution rather than a leading one. For that reason, the members and General Board of our Society are eager to pursue project proposals with other societies and institutions that can provide exposure and financial independence to our young organisation. The future is indeed quite bright for HeSEH, and its presence will soon be noted across Greek academia.



GEORGE L. VLACHOS, VASO SEIRINIDOU, GEORGE GASSIAS,  
DIMITRIS AGGELIS-DIMAKIS AND GIORGOS VELEGRAKIS

## **The Società Italiana di Storia Ambientale (Italian Society of Environmental History) Is Born**

SISAM, an association of environmental historians established in 2021, is the first of its kind in Italy. This initiative sees Italian historical research on the environment aligned with a long process of scholarly organising that started in the United States in the 1970s and then moved to Europe in the eighties and nineties.

In recent years, several reviews of Italian academic production have been published, highlighting the motives, problems and research themes that show the existence of schools and informal research groups that have joined forces with single scholars, specific universities, or just common methods and themes of study.

In a historiographical context initially characterised by weakness and delays, which then became more dynamic but fragmented, barely institutionalised yet prolific and active, SISAM was founded with the aim of creating a point of reference for the numerous Italian environmental history scholars with no permanent place for debate.

SISAM is inclusive, open to all the branches of Italian environmental history. It aims to draw the original matrices together with the new stimuli that come from the ever-increasing interdisciplinary attention to natural sciences, and from debate with the new generation of scholars who have studied in an international context in contact with the ‘environmental humanities’ and with ‘science and technology studies’, along with the themes of environmental justice. SISAM also intends to address the questions that the climate crisis poses to contemporary society.

SISAM thus wishes to carry out multiple interventions in the development of environmental history in scientific, educational, academic and civil fields. SISAM’s statutory commitment is to respond to society’s requests for knowledge. It wishes to converse with the bodies and institutions that deal with the environment. The ability to respond from a historical perspective to the pressing questions about the environment is what SISAM is founded on. It wishes to operate by making scientific research in the historiographical field available to everyone. SISAM aims to intervene in teaching and work in universities to help scientific research grow. Indeed, the linking together of research, teaching and dissemination is central to its statutory tasks – a refresher course on teaching environmental history has already been organised to start in Padova this year. Environmental historians are well aware how behind Italy is in its academic recognition of environmental history.

In terms of research, SISAM aims to enhance the multi- and trans-disciplinary dimension of environmental history. It therefore puts itself forward as a society of historians open to debate with the languages and methodologies of

the other disciplines that deal with the environment, both in the humanities and in the natural and earth sciences.

The first step on this path was to build a website to spread communication, the second to quickly organise SISAM's first national conference through an open call that would allow us to take stock of interest, research and the study topics of Italian researchers in environmental history. The conference, which took place in Catania in September 2022, one year after SISAM's foundation, brought in more than 150 proposals and as many registrations into SISAM. This represents the starting point on a path that hopefully will be long and full of initiatives and results.

The conference presented a wealth of talks on the topics of the Italian tradition of studies, as well as on two other sectors of study. The first was that of the relationship between the environment, productive activity and employment (agriculture, industry and tourism). Were we to make a comparison, the countryside was more present than the city and industry, confirming the persistence and strength of the root of Italian environmental studies in the history of agriculture. In this context, tourism appeared as an emerging theme. The second sector was that of the history of movements, parties and ecological cultures, with a variety of topics and characters.

More specifically, studies on nuclear power grew, those on disasters were consolidated, those on the relationship between humans and animals have emerged, and those on dams are new. The theme of water, its use and management, appeared the most frequently, crossing all historical periods and showing itself to be the most popular in Italian environmental studies.



SALVATORE ADORNO

*University of Catania, President pro tempore of SISAM.*

<https://www.storiaambientale.it/bpage/5/>