

Statement for Plans as Regional Representatives for Nordic Countries

We are applying jointly for the positions of regional representatives for Nordic countries for the European Society for Environmental History.

Tuomas Räsänen works as an associate professor of environmental history at the University of Eastern Finland. Since completing his Master's thesis at the University of Turku, Finland, in the early 2000s, Räsänen has researched and taught environmental history extensively. In his research, Räsänen has focused on marine environmental history, the history of human-animal relations, the history of environmentalism and the history of environmental sciences. Räsänen has been a member of the ESEH for several years and has attended every ESEH biannual conference since the Copenhagen WCEH congress in 2009. Prof. Räsänen therefore knows the ESEH and the field of European environmental history rather well and for a considerable amount of time.

Viktor Pál is a Grant-funded Scholar at the Department of Cultures at the University of Helsinki. Pál has focused his research on the environmental history of authoritarian regimes with particular attention to Cold War Eastern Europe. Similarly to Räsänen, Pál has been a member of ESEH for over a decade and participated in several ESEH conferences. Most recently, Pál served the ESEH in 2018-2019 as the conveyor of the ESEH's NEXTGATE Program, which fostered up-and-coming environmental historians.

If chosen as regional representatives, our goals are to enhance two areas of cooperation: communication of research results and teaching.

Research Portal for Nordic Environmental History

In our opinion, the Nordic-ESEH email list functions well as a means of information exchange. Via the email list environmental historians may obtain information about upcoming conferences, summer schools, etc. We think that interaction and awareness of each others' research and publications among Nordic environmental history scholars could and should be better via improved communication networks. In our view, a research portal and adjacent social media channels would make it much easier for research practitioners to find partners for research groups and international funding applications.

In this vein, Pál, Räsänen and other environmental historians have organized the Environmental History Day of Finland in 2020, which will result in joint publication efforts as well as further scholarly meetings and interactions.

Teaching Environmental History in the Nordics

The global pandemic has changed the way we teach in all of the Nordic countries. We have come to learn that online teaching, when properly planned, can be as rewarding as traditional classroom teaching for both teachers and students. Moreover, online teaching has improved opportunities for collaboration in teaching. Räsänen has designed an online course on Finnish environmental history, which will be taught in the autumn semester of 2021. In this course, scholars from four Finnish universities will share teaching responsibilities by teaching in their own area of expertise. In contrast to traditional multi-teacher classes taught in one place, online technology will enable this course to be taught simultaneously in all four universities with participants from every institution. Räsänen plans to expand this concept of teaching to other Nordic countries as well. This would improve teaching, as a given topic would be taught by a leading expert in the field, but the shared nature of teaching responsibilities would also allow more time for research for every teacher involved.

At the University of Helsinki, an Environmental Humanities Study Program was introduced in 2019 by the Helsinki Environmental Humanities Hub where Pál currently serves as a coordinator. Head of the hub is Mikko Saikku, a renowned environmental historian. The Helsinki environmental humanities study program includes several environmental history and related modules. The hub has been involved in cooperation with BRIGHT, the Nordic Environmental Humanities network, that has been mapping and planning common environmental humanities teaching in the Nordics. In this vein we are planning to strengthen interdisciplinary cooperation between environmental history and related fields via improved teaching cooperation.

Tuomas Räsänen, Associate Professor of Environmental History, University of Eastern Finland

Viktor Pál, Grant-funded Researcher and Coordinator for the Helsinki Environmental Humanities Hub, University of Helsinki