

**From Instants to Eons:  
Time in Environment and Environmental History**

Tallinn, March 25-26, 2013

International Conference organized by the Centre for Environmental History in Estonia  
(KAJAK)

Environment and environmental history feature countless diverse and often hardly reconcilable time scales. While “time” is probably one of the least questioned concepts in experimental science, being the basis of objectivity in measurements, it becomes infinitely diversified in the phenomenal world. Evolutionary, ecological, geological, cyclic, perennial, organismic, human (that is, specifically cultural) times are all indispensable elements of every environment and environmental historical treatment. At any given moment, the environment is shaped by the mostly short lived organisms acting here and now and long-term processes like evolution, ecological and climatic cycles or the birth and disappearance of human civilizations.

This diversity in times in environment and history poses also several methodological challenges, especially concerning the research material and metalanguage. The understanding of time and the choice of time scales is one the most fundamental components of environmental historical narratives and analysis. Without implicit temporal scales, we could not speak about changes and breaks, processes of (co-)evolution, revolution, pollution, industrialisation, migration or transformation, nor assess the importance of those phenomena for certain environments or cultures. In the past decades the question of human vs non-human time scales has further escalated together with the intensification of debates over human induced environmental change.

The conference invites contributions that delve into all these different times, their different scales, different perceptions of time or the lack of it, and last but not least, their methodological challenges for the environmental history. Especially welcome are contributions that try to look for time frames and patterns typical or necessary for studying the environmental history of the Baltic region.

The conference encompasses the following sub-topics, but is not restricted to them:

- Concepts and narratives: What are the important temporal concepts that we work with in environmental history (e.g. global warming, catastrophes, invasions, domestication, origin, narratives of decline, progress etc.)?
- Scopes: Temporal scope of the environmental impact on human cultures, esp. in the Baltic region: How were the natural and cultural floras and faunas formed in the countries of the region? How and to what degree were natural and cultural developments interdependent, observed in different scales of time and space? To what degree environment has determined or restricted our past and present cultural features and developments?
- Perception and priorities: Linear *versus* cyclic or even cataclysmic *versus* cyclic time. What social and cultural processes and natural events guide the prioritization of some manifestations of time over others? For example, cataclysmic events of abrupt change that in short time scale have a devastating effect (forest fires, climate change, global warming) can be at the same time normal and necessary events in a larger cycle.
- Sustainability and protection: Does prolonging the temporal scope to the past also help us to think further in the future? Modern societies have an obsession with time and an unprecedented urge to make it stop. That has taken to flourishing protection activities (e.g. museums, zoos, national parks), where the preference for time frame or time type is never self-evident. Which of the many times we should prioritize? What about methodological implications (creation of knowledge as destruction)?
- Methodology: how to match the different time scales and methodologies, featured by different branches of environmental historical research? The same event, seen from a geological, evolutionary or human time scale may be highlighted or concealed, furnished with different meanings and characteristics. What are the revolutions, innovations, breaks we are talking about?
- Constructions: how to unroll a long-term historical process based on an archaeological finding, chemical analysis of remains, series of measurements or a few extinct document fragments? How to guarantee the representativeness of your material? How to erase time between us and our research objectives?

You have 20 minutes for your presentation and 10 minutes for discussion. The working language of the conference will be English. Please send an abstract (300 words) and your CV to [sillasoo@tlu.ee](mailto:sillasoo@tlu.ee). Deadline for application is December 20th. We will inform you about the acceptance of your presentation by January 10<sup>th</sup>. There is no conference fee, but participants are expected to cover their accommodation and travel costs.

Right after the conference we also organize a thematically related doctoral seminar. You will find the information about that in a separate Call soon.