eseh European Society for Environmental History

ESEH Notepad

From the President's desk

Dear colleagues,

An exciting program for the second international conference of ESEH is on the web, and the local committee in Prague is busy with preparations while I am writing these lines. The executive board is working to get everything ready (from agendas to lists of candidates to ballots) for the General Assembly to be held in September in Prague. While these activities by so many volunteers are a great contribution, ESEH nevertheless does need more volunteers, and if you feel you can contribute some of your time, or sponsor ESEH monetarily, please contact us and we will discuss how you could help.

Income inequality among European scholars is enormous. Board members have been debating a wise solution for membership fees for a long time, and the current solution is – hopefully – a fair compromise. We are already negotiating with our partners for the third and fourth ESEH conferences about ways to fund travel grants to support environmental historians with low income.

To be able to pursue the manifold tasks a scholarly society could and should engage in, we will need other sources of money besides the membership fees. While I would much rather talk about issues other than money, I feel it necessary to alert all of you to the situation, in the hope that some of you will have suggestions for funding, or be able to make donations.

On behalf of the entire membership, I would like to thank all of the board and committee members for the work they are contributing. Have a good summer and a good start into the next period of teaching!

Verena Winiwarter

A preview of the International Conference of ESEH in Prague, Czechia

This ESEH Notepad appears just shortly before opening of the ESEH 2003 meeting that will be held between September 3–7, in Prague, Czechia. I am very pleased to note that with the active co-operation and help of the Scientific Committee, particularly of ESEH president Verena Winiwarter, the Local Organising Committee (LOC) has done a large amount of work to ensure an inspiring scientific programme and smooth organisation of the conference.

Above all, we hope that the conference not only means a further important step in the progress of environmental history in Europe, but also in the development of its methodology as a scientific discipline which is relevant to

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problems of human civilisation on local, regional and global levels, and to finding their solutions. Thanks to the great generosity of the Forest History Society towards the conference, we have been able to support the attendance of young colleagues from different countries. The Local Organising Committee is providing conference participants with a large number of opportunities to get known the beauties of Prague's historical centre, which is listed in the UNESCO World Heritage Directory. In half-day conference excursions, participants will have the opportunity to learn more about different landscape monuments and the quality of the environment in confrontation with human activities in Prague's surroundings and Central Bohemia.

In view of the overwhelming interest from conference applicantsin presenting papers, the Scientific Committee (SC) has faced a difficult task. In order to enable the largest possible number of participants to attend the conference and present papers, the planned conference structure had to be changed. Therefore at their meeting in Prague in December 2002 the SC and LOC decided to postpone the half-day conference excursions from Saturday afternoon to Sunday morning.

The conference takes place in the main building of the Faculty of Science in Albertov 6, Prague. We are offering conference participants accommodation in student dormitories located close to Albertov in the centre of Prague. This accommodation enables them to enjoy sights located in the famous historical centre of Prague.

However, the LOC had to solve an unexpected organisational problem. According to our plans, conference lunches should have been served in the student dining hall located in the building where the conference takes place. But in late spring, the Charles University budget received some additional finances from the government. These funds have to be used by the end of 2003. For this reason, the faculty management decided to undertake a reconstruction of the dining hall, which had previously been planned for next year, during the summer months. Therefore we have had to move the lunches to the dining hall of student dormitory 'Budec', located within walking distance from the conference venue.

The current programme of the conference, a list of participants (about 180), the updated list of abstracts and a map of Prague showing places related to the conference can be found at <www.natur.cuni.cz/ICESEH2003> from July. All these materials will be updated in late August. Participants receive the printed versions in the conference bag. Those participants who have prepaid the conference proceedings in the registration payment will find them in the bag too. Other participants can buy the proceedings volume during the conference. Transport connection schemes and a map showing how to get to the conference venue and related places will be available on the website in late August to provide conference participants with up-to-date information.

We look forward to meeting all conference participants in Prague.

Leos Jelecek and LOC members

ESEH General Meeting

The second Ordinary General Meeting of ESEH will be held at the Charles University in Prague at 17.45 on Friday 5 September 2003. The Board of ESEH invites all members to attend this meeting, for which you should have received an invitation and agenda in July. Amongst the most important issues of the meeting are the elections of a new Executive Board and Regional Representatives. A list of candidates including a description of their background and motivation has been sent to all members and is also available from the ESEH web site. The venue of the meeting will be announced in due course.

Report on a colloquium in the Netherlands

Report on the Colloquium on the Meaning of Sustainability in History, Utrecht, The Netherlands, 23 May 2003

In the Netherlands, for some years now, a network for sustainable development has been active, aimed at promoting the theme of sustainable development in all disciplinary fields of higher education – the so-called 'Netwerk voor duurzaam hoger onderwijs'. One of the activities is publishing a series of books, one per field, and discussing the books in seminars. This year all attention was devoted to history. Henk van Zon, pioneer of environmental history in the Netherlands, was asked to write the fifth field review, devoted to history. The result was a handsome book, *Geschiedenis en duurzame ontwikkeling* (Nijmegen 2002, ISBN 90-77004-04-1, 135 pp. 7 euro), which was the starting point of the discussion on 23 May. A review of the book will appear in the *Jaarboek voor Ecologische Geschiedenis* ,volume 5, autumn 2003. Here I shall just summarise the themes: examples of sustainable practices among the Greeks and Romans, and from the history of mining and wood use in medieval and early modern times; thinking about questions relating to demography and sustainable growth from the 17th century onwards; the influence of the Dust Bowl; views on exhaustion of sources and sustainability from the middle of the 19th century until recent times.

At the colloquium, attended by some 40 people, several prominent environmental historians and scientists were asked to give their view on the relationship between sustainability and history. The environmental economist Hans (J.B.) Opschoor, rector of the Institute of Social Studies in the Hague, started the debate, presenting notions of sustainability used in development economics. Historian L. Bots from Nijmegen University gave a fine overview of economic long-term thinking and the role of nature and natural resources among 18th- and 19th-century historians and economists, including Malthus, Smith, Ricardo and Marx. Klaas (N.D.) van Egmond, scientific director of the National Institute for Health and Environment and professor of sustainability studies at Utrecht University, stressed the importance of long time series for the environmental sciences, but also pointed to the problems that arise when environmentalists try

to advise politicians and take into account the variety of worldviews – problems they share with historians, trying to discover the real historical past. We were happy to welcome one colleague form abroad, historian Joachim Radkau from Bielefeld University, Germany. He gave a rich paper which contained many interesting examples from his book *Natur und Macht*, and we were even more happy to hear that the book is on its way to being published in English.

In my opinion this was a very useful meeting. In particular in small countries, where numbers of environmental scholars are relatively modest, it is important that the disciplines co-operate. I hope that Van Zon will be able to follow Radkau's example and extend and translate his book as a valuable contribution to providing teaching materials for higher education.

Petra van Dam, Free University Amsterdam, The Netherlands

European Society for Environmental History

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ESEH aims to promote environmental history in Europe, by encouraging and supporting research, teaching and publications in the field. The ESEH maintains its web site at <www.eseh.org>.

Items for the next Notepad should be sent by 1 October 2003 to the address below.

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