

News from the Secretary: WCEH, OGM, Board elections

Dear Colleagues,

From 4 to 8 August 2009 environmental historians from all over the world will convene in Copenhagen (Denmark) and Malmö (Sweden) to attend the First World Congress of Environmental History. Local organizers from Roskilde University (Denmark) and Malmö University (Sweden) have worked hard – and still do so – for the preparation of this meeting. The Scientific Committee has also done hard work selecting some 420 papers of about 620 proposals. Now the preliminary program is online <<https://wceh2009.ruc.dk/program/pdf>>, providing an impressive spread of themes and perspectives. One of the keynote lectures will be given by Nobel Laureate Paul Crutzen.

Registration is still open. Scholars presenting at the WCEH should have made their payment of the conference fee by 15 April 2009, at the latest. The acceptance of panel, paper or poster remains provisional until the scholar has paid the congress fee. The organisers keep a waiting list and ask everyone who has a panel, paper or poster accepted and cannot participate at the WCEH 2009, to inform the congress secretariat as soon as possible. As the number of presentations is limited, refusals in time will enable other scholars to present their work at the congress.

You may remember that ESEH, as a member of the International Consortium of Environmental History Organisations (ICEHO), has abstained from organising an own conference this year and encouraged ESEH members to send in proposals and attend WCEH. Thus the conference will be an important meeting place for ESEH members, both for scientific communication and the meeting of colleagues and friends, and also for the societal life of ESEH. The Ordinary General Meeting is going to be held at the conference venue, the Radisson SAS Falconer Centre, Copenhagen, on Thursday, 6 August 2009 from 5 to 6.30 p.m. All ESEH members are asked to attend the OGM. As the ESEH Board has worked and negotiated on different topics and with different external partners (see our President's letter from 6 January, available on <<http://eseh.org/membership/mailtomembers/Presidentmail090106>>) there will be important issues on the agenda. Furthermore there will be elections of the Executive Board and the Regional Representatives for Czech Republic and Slovakia, Nordic countries and Hungary. The Nomination Committee welcomes candidates, to be announced by 20 May at the latest, to Julia Lajus, email: J.Lajus@bham.ac.uk.

Best wishes from Darmstadt and see you in Copenhagen!

Martin Knoll
ESEH Secretary

Job opportunities at the Rachel Carson Center

The international Rachel Carson Center for Environmental Studies, Munich, has announced several positions in research and research administration. For further information please visit: <http://eseh.org/jobscarson>.

Environmental History Research in the Low Countries

We continue our series of regional reports of environmental history research with news from the Low Countries (The Netherlands, Belgium and Luxemburg).

Environmental History Research Programmes

In the Low Countries there is a broad range of environmental research going on, much of which touches upon the history of the environment, though very few projects focus entirely upon environmental history.

Starting in Belgium, at the **University of Namur** (in the Walloon part of the country), some historical geographers and historians are looking into the history of pollution of some old industrial towns. Namur, Liège, Mons and Charleroi were among the first industrialised Belgian towns, and there are many documentary sources yet to be studied. Similar research is being carried out at the **Free University of Brussels**, mainly by historical geographers (C. Billen and Chloé Deligne et al.).

The Department of Medieval and Ecological History of the **University of Ghent** in Flanders, headed by Erik Thoen, has a tradition of research into the environment of medieval Flanders. Research focuses on land use, settlement history, history of water management (T. Soens) and also forestry. Besides this kind of research, there is a PhD student looking into the history of pollution in medieval cities (B. Vannieuwenhuyze) and another studying the history of 19th-century industrialisation and pollution in Flemish towns (H. van Royen).

The Free University of Brussels and the University of Ghent also hold strong positions in the field of archaeology, where over recent decades some fine research has been carried out in the Belgian coastal area. This has resulted in a rather detailed reconstruction of the environment of the last 5,000 years by studying plant remains (C. Baeteman) and reconstructing sea level fluctuations.

Turning to Dutch universities, **Wageningen University** (Alterra) has built quite an expertise in agriculture, biology and the history of both, though focusing more on the present and less on the past. Spatial planning and policy making have become the core business of this university <<http://www.wageningenuniversity.nl/UK/about/organisation/Chair+groups/environmental/>>, and of its social sciences programme, except for the Rural History Group, which analyses processes of modernisation and their effects on land use, the social and economic organisation of society, rural communities, consumption and production, agriculture and the environment. In addition to these fields of interest, research at Alterra also looks into climate related topics and water management.

At the **Free University of Amsterdam** (Vrije Universiteit, Amsterdam) several research institutes and research groups are involved in environmental research with a historical dimension <http://www.ivm.falw.vu.nl/Organisation/index.cfm/home_section.cfm/sectionid/20AFDAF1-7B78-45FF-807076211E2CC120>. The Institute for Environmental Issues (IVM) mainly deals with present-day environmental issues, and is making scenarios for the near future in view of processes like climate change and sea level rise. The Climate Research Institute deals mainly with long-term climatic change <<http://www.climatecentre.vu.nl/Research/index.cfm>>. In the Faculty of Arts, there is a rather modest but firm focus on environmental aspects of the Middle Ages and more recent periods. The chair of the History of Water management has recently moved from the University of Amsterdam to the Free University of Amsterdam, where it is now held by Petra van Dam. The Institute for Geoarchaeology and Bioarchaeology (IGBA) conducts research on landscapes of the recent past, looking at how they have been changed by humans on a longer time scale and at the the impact of climate on the environment <<http://www.falw.vu.nl/nl/onderzoek/geo-and-bioarchaeology/index.asp>>. A recently started programme looks into the Neanderthal environment (M. Langbroek); another (LECHE) looks into the use of dairy products in past millennia and their effects on human bone; and a running research programme looks into the reconstruction of the climate of the past centuries, weather extremes, such as flooding and their perception (A. de Kraker). A PhD is being prepared on the history of water management and coastal defence of the mid-Zeeland Flanders, 1600–2000 (M. de Vleeschauwer). There is also co-operation with the Rijksmuseum to look into Little Ice Age aspects of genre paintings from the 17th century. A recently finished programme looked into river corridors of several European countries with special emphasis on the cultural landscape and the protection of the archaeological remains in it <<https://partners.sparc-project.org/manual/public/>>. At the Research Institute for the Heritage and History of the Cultural Landscape and Urban Environment (CLUE), scientists from various disciplinary backgrounds are working on projects concerning the changing role of heritage in our environment, the historical dimension of spatial issues and the historical development of cities and countryside. One of the projects of CLUE looks into the impact of weather extremes of the past centuries in the IJsselmeer area. Recently a new chair has been established in the interdisciplinary field of landscape archaeology, historical geography and heritage studies. This looks like a promising start for environmental history as well.

At the **University of Utrecht** some research in historical geography borders on environmental history. Programmes are being set up to study regional perceptions of landscapes, a PhD student is looking into digital data collecting of cultural landscapes of the past, while another is studying historical atlases of areas in the Netherlands. There is also a project about European cultural landscapes of the past (H. Renes), which should lead to a reference book in this field.

At the **University of Amsterdam** Merel Klein is working on a PhD on Perceptions of Environmental Pollution in Amsterdam, in the 19th century. Research carried out by Marjolein in t'Hart is partly focused on the history of water management, but also explores new domains of research.

Finally, some governmental institutes also do some environmental history related research. **The Rijksinstituut voor Kust en Zee** has some programmes that look into the future of coastal management in view of expected sea-level rise. Their research unusually includes data from the late nineteenth century onwards. Also the **Royal Dutch Meteorological Society** (KNMI) has a modest number of meteorologists who study the past climate and some weather extremes (A. van Engelen and J. Buisman). Although it is not quite their core business, a five volume book has been published about weather of the past centuries, called *Duizend jaar weer, wind en water in de Lage Landen* (J. Buisman).

Congresses and Meetings

On 31 October 2008 the **Netwerk Historisch Cultuurlandschap** (NHC) held its annual meeting in Garderen (Gelderland) <<http://www.historischegeografie.nl/contactdag.htm>>. The meeting, which mainly consists of historical geographers, was dedicated to forest history of the Netherlands, focusing on the area called De Veluwe (central part of the Netherlands).

The first Belgian conference on environmental history, organized at the **University of Namur** (I. Parmentier), presented the state of the art in the Walloon and the Flemish parts of Belgium as well as in neighbouring countries <<http://www.fundp.ac.be/facultes/lettres/departements/histoire/recherche/prebel/>>. A broad range of topics and regions – including former colonies – were covered. This excellent initiative deserves a follow-up in 2009 or 2010.

On 17 December 2008 **The Society of the History of Water Management** held its annual meeting at Lelystad. Most of the talks reflected upon the recently published report on the future of Dutch coastal defence policy. Assessing both its weaknesses and strengths, speakers pointed to examples of the past in order to demonstrate there was really nothing very new in a lot of proposals that would change some parts of the landscape very dramatically. The Society of the History of Water management mainly focuses on coastal defences of the past, including dyke, sluice, canal building and the administrative and juridical organization of coastal and water management.

Publications

Since 1997 the Vereniging voor Ecologische Geschiedenis (Society for Ecological History) has published a yearbook, the *Jaarboek voor Ecologische Geschiedenis*. Eight volumes have been theme issues. Each volume includes peer-reviewed articles and book reviews. The forthcoming edition of the yearbook will be dedicated to climate history.

In autumn 2007 Adriaan de Kraker launched an *Environmental History of the Low Countries Newsletter: Nieuwsbrief Milieugeschiedenis Lage Landen*.

The e-version of this letter <<http://www.falw.vu.nl/nl/onderzoek/geo-and-bioarchaeology/collaboration/newsletter/index.asp>> contains news about new research programmes, meetings and international congresses, new publications, reports by colleagues about their research, and all sorts of announcements. In 2008 the newsletter was combined with the editing board of the Yearbook for Ecological History of which Adriaan de Kraker has now become a member.

Adriaan de Kraker

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>.

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Items for the next Notepad should be sent by 1 July 2009 to the address shown below.

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