

President's Message Board

Dear friends, environmental historians,

It is hard to get back to business as normal when we hear about catastrophes such as the one in Japan where natural and man-made disasters have hit a great country. As environmental historians we are aware that nature has been a powerful actor in history. Volcano eruptions, such as the one in 1600 B.C., led to the downfall of the Minoan culture in the Mediterranean; earthquakes and El Niño storms marked the end of the Peruvian Moche culture in A.D. 600; an earthquake coincided with the end of the 'perfect dictatorship' in Mexico City in 1985; and in 1999 earthquakes in Izmir and Athens, during which Greeks and Turks supported one another, led to an unhopd-for improvement in diplomatic relations between the two nations, with their centuries-old hostilities. While we are aware that nature is a major actor, as environmental historians we also know that humans have played a central role in many of the disasters that have been called 'natural'. The famous 'Dust Bowl' is a case in point, Hurricane Katrina – and now Fukushima. While our thoughts are with the victims on the other side of our planet, and with those who are struggling to limit the destruction that was brought about by tsunami waves and nuclear power, we are reminded once again that what we on this planet make of our environment is to a large part our own affair. It is closely connected to the way in which we – as humans in general, and as environmental historians in particular – perceive the world around us, how we interrelate with it, and how we present the story of the interaction between nature and culture.

In Europe, one of the cities that constantly reminds us of the power of nature is Venice. Most of us have forgotten that the reason for the 'sinking of Venice' dates back to a decision that was taken some six hundred years ago. At that time the city's inhabitants protected themselves against outside attacks by diverting all major rivers that were flowing into the lagoon. This created an ever-deeper lagoon environment, it led to the sinking process and frequent low level floods. Venice will be the place where the Second ESEH Summer School will take place in June 2011 (20–26 June 2011), just one week before our Turku meeting. A selection committee with members from five different European countries helped identify a group of 18 doctoral students from 11 European countries who will discuss not just floods and 'sinking cities' but many other topics as well that are related to water history and the environmental history of wetlands. The Summer School is sponsored this year by the Rachel Carson Center for Environment and Society (RCC) and by ESEH. It is being organized by Christof Mauch (RCC/ESEH) in cooperation with Roberta Saccon (Venice), and the Centro Tedesco Di

Studi Veneziani where it will be held. Among the tutors of the summer school are Stefania Barca (University of Coimbra), Salvatore Ciriaco (University of Padova), Dolly Jørgensen (Umeå University), Donald Worster (RCC Munich) and Petra von Dam (Amsterdam University). Participants will have a chance to take part in excursions in and around Venice and to present their own projects to peers and academic mentors.

Another project that the ESEH is starting in 2011 – and that will, among many other topics also discuss the history of floods and the environmental history of Venice – is the new ‘Arcadia Project’. This project is based on cooperation between the Rachel Carson Center in Munich and ESEH. ‘Arcadia’ is going to be a new online European environmental history resource with very short encyclopedia-like articles, images and links about any site, event, organization, or species as it relates to nature and human society in Europe. Arcadia will include entries on items such as an individual river, the environmental history of a country, a specific site of a disaster, an environmental action group, or a polluted site or region. Currently a group of ESEH members and RCC staff (Kimberly Coulter, Andreas Grieger, Finn Arne Jørgensen, Julia Lajus, Christof Mauch, Timo Myllyntaus, Wilko von Hardenberg and Verena Winiwarter) are involved in creating templates for this project and in writing the first pilot-articles. The group will meet in St. Petersburg in May, upon the invitation of Julia Lajus, to discuss its goals and the implementation of the project. Arcadia will be publicly presented for the first time at a roundtable discussion during the Sixth ESEH Conference in Turku. In its initial phase all ESEH members will be invited to contribute to this exciting online project. This will give all of us the opportunity to contribute to a truly multinational environmental history project that helps us to bring together our findings from every part of Europe, and to make our ideas and insights available to a broader public.

Geneviève Massard-Guilbaud, President
Christof Mauch and Petra van Dam, Vice-Presidents
Paris, Munich and Amsterdam, March 2011

Nominations to the ESEH Board requested

The European Society for Environmental History is inviting members to nominate candidates for election to the Board. Elections will be held at the Ordinary General Meeting at the ESEH conference in Turku, Finland, on 1 July 2011.

Two members of the current Board, Genevieve Massard-Guilbard (President) and Petra van Dam (Vice President), have reached the end of their terms and are not eligible for re-election in their current posts. Therefore, we need nominations for candidates for President and Vice-President. Members may, of course, nominate candidates for all posts on the Board.

SOCIETY PAGES

Please send nominations to the chair of the Nominating Committee: David Moon, Durham University, UK (david.moon@dur.ac.uk) by 12 April 2011 (according to the Constitution, nominations must be sent to the Nominating Committee at least 80 days before the Ordinary General Meeting, which will be held on 1 July 2011). Please include a one-page CV, or link to the webpage, of the nominee, with details of the person's current post, previous posts (where relevant), degrees, main publications, research grants and projects, experience in academic societies, and any other relevant information.

Notepad Editor: Phia Steyn

Items for the next Notepad should be sent by 15 June 2011 to the address shown below.

All correspondence should be directed to the secretariat:
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