

ESEH – Past and Future Activities

As I write this notepad, the programme committee for the 7th Biannual ESEH Conference in Munich is meeting next door, in the conference room of the Rachel Carson Center for Environment and Society. The committee is made up of scholars from across Europe—from Portugal to the far north of Norway, from Great Britain to Hungary—and the members each represent very different research interests. The group, led by Peter Coates (Bristol), has a difficult task ahead of them, for well over 600 people applied to come to Munich to present papers or posters, take part in panels or roundtables, or to chair an event. The number of applications far surpasses any seen before in the history of the ESEH, and we are eagerly anticipating what promises to be a very exciting conference program.

The Munich conference is titled ‘Circulating Natures: Water—Food—Energy.’ It is organized by the Rachel Carson Center, and will feature over 100 panels, a poster session, slide shows (of former ESEH meetings and summer schools), a book fair, a silent auction, and a keynote by the award-winning author, food expert, and consumer activist Marion Nestle. On 21 August, the conference will start with an optional field trip to an Alpine lake (Walchensee power station) in Southern Bavaria and to Glentleiten Open-Air Museum. The official opening of the conference will take place in Munich’s famous Town Hall, where there will be an address by the Vice-Mayor, a member of the Green Party. There will be an evening event at the Deutsches Museum (the world’s largest museum of science and technology), and an evening reception with a keynote in LMU Munich’s historic main building. On the final evening, all conference participants will be invited to join us for a banquet with live music in a traditional beer hall. The conference fee (very reasonable for ESEH members) covers this final banquet, conference lunches with locally sourced food, a half-day excursion, a ticket for public transport, and all evening receptions.

While we are very busy looking forward to the ESEH Conference in 2013, it is worthwhile to look back for a moment at the abundance of ESEH activities and programs in 2012. The ESEH was co-organizer of two summer schools this year. One took place in the medieval abbey of Flaran, France, in June, and the second one in St. Petersburg, Russia, in August. The Flaran summer school was organized jointly by Emmanuel Huertas, a historian of economics (Université de Toulouse), and by Gregory Quenet, an environmental historian (Université de Versailles-Saint-Quentin-en-Yvelines) and it was dedicated to

the discussion of “Rural history vs. Environmental History.” A total of 20 participants—doctoral students, postdocs and mentors—from several European countries, as well as from the United States and Canada, took part in this event. The participants of the summer school in Flaran were jointly selected by the French organizers and by two members of the ESEH Summer School Committee: Dolly Jørgensen from Umeå Universitet, Sweden, and Marguerite Ronin from the Université de Nantes, France. The summer school saw both rural and environmental historians, each group with their unique intellectual traditions, engage in an exciting and fruitful debate on a set of methodological issues, research topics, and perspectives. Three main themes were at the core of the program at the École d’été Flaran: sources and archives, environmental conflicts and local communities, and the shift from local discussions to broader ecological and scientific debates.

The St. Petersburg Summer School was organized by ESEH Vice President Julia Lajus, and participants and mentors were selected in close collaboration with the ESEH summer school committee (Dolly Jørgensen and András Vadas) and with the Rachel Carson Center in Munich (Christof Mauch). As in the case of Flaran, the Carson Center was one of the sponsors of the St. Petersburg summer school, alongside the Estonian Centre for Environmental History, the National Research University’s Higher School of Economics in St. Petersburg, and the European University St. Petersburg. The thematic focus of the St. Petersburg program was “Natural Resources: Historical Ideas, Exploration, and Exploitation.” Fourteen students from nine countries discussed their papers with mentors or lecturers from the US, Norway, Russia and the United Kingdom. Doctoral students had an opportunity to present and discuss their own research at length. All papers dealt with the role of natural resources in history, in particular timber, soil, fish, mineral resources, and water. The discussions revolved around such diverse issues as technologies (for the extraction of resources), scientific debates, knowledge transfer, and the role of national cultures and identities. A cultural program—with excursions to the St. Petersburg Museum of Water and a boat excursion on the River Neva—were among the highlights of the summer school.

A couple of years ago, the European Society for Environmental History decided to cooperate with the Rachel Carson Center in Munich and establish its own peer-reviewed book series with Berghahn Books (New York and Oxford). This English-language series of monographs and anthologies showcases high quality research in environmental history and related disciplines from around the world, with a particular emphasis on European, transnational, and comparative research. Currently six manuscripts by authors or editors from six countries are under review, and we are very happy to report that the first book in this series has just been published. Entitled *Civilizing Nature: National Parks in Global Historical Perspective*, volume one of our series is edited by Bernhard Gissibl (Mainz), Sabine Höhler (Stockholm), and Patrick Kupper (Zurich).

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The volume focuses especially on the actors, networks, mechanisms, arenas, and institutions responsible for the global spread of national parks. It argues that national parks are one of the most important and successful institutions in global environmentalism, and addresses questions such as: How national were the first national parks? What are the differences between US and early European parks? And can there be wilderness without parks? Individual chapters present case studies from countries and regions as diverse as Switzerland, Malaysia, French Colonial Africa, India, Mexico, and Slovenia.

We are also happy to report that another joint project that is the result of the excellent cooperation between the European Society for Environmental History and the Rachel Carson Center—“Arcadia,” a digital resource for environmental historians—has had a very successful start in 2012. More than a dozen ESEH members have contributed to this new online environmental history portal: Arcadia articles are in the form of an encyclopaedia entry and besides a brief scholarly text, contain images and links pertaining to events, individuals, organizations, or species, exploring their resonance for both nature and human society. All current contributions come from ESEH members; at some point in the future the project will expand to include non-ESEH contributors, and will cover all world regions.

Another success story in 2012 has been the Estonian Centre for Environmental History (Eesti Keskkonnaajaloo Keskus, KAJAK). Founded in late 2011, the new centre has already established a monthly seminar series at Tallinn University’s Institute of History. Speakers in this series have included ESEH members from several European countries, and their presentations covered topics from urban environmental history and historical climatology to the history of agricultural pests. One of the highlights in 2012 was a conference on “Turning Points in Baltic and Central East European Food History” that took place at Tallinn University in late August.

Altogether it seems that environmental history is on advance all over the world. To give a few examples: historians from Europe and the US were invited to inaugurate the new Center for Ecological History at Renmin University in Beijing, China, in May 2012; the Latin American Association for Environmental History, which is even younger than the ESEH, held a big conference with almost 400 participants in Villa de Leyva, Colombia, in the summer; scholars at the University of New South Wales (UNSW) in Australia established a new online journal in the field of the Environmental Humanities; the Humboldt Foundation is supporting a transatlantic network of ecocritics and historians in Europe and the US; and the Royal Institute of Technology in Stockholm has just established a new centre called the KTH Environmental Humanities Laboratory. The upcoming annual meeting of the American Historical Association (AHA), the largest gathering of historians anywhere in the world, will be largely in the sway of environmental history this January, not least because AHA President William Cronon, Vice President

John McNeill, and AHA Program Committee Chair Paul Sutter are all environmental historians, and two out of three Awards for Scholarly Distinction will go to environmental historians, namely to Alfred Crosby and to Donald Worster.

In our own society in Europe we have seen a steady rise in members in the course of 2012. Currently, the electronic newsletter of the ESEH President goes out to approximately 540 individuals. And there can be no doubt that 2013 and 2014 will see many exciting activities in Europe—not just the biannual ESEH conference in Munich in August 2013, and the World Congress of Environmental History in Portugal in 2014. The plethora of regional initiatives in particular just go to show that historians all over Europe are being inspired by environmental issues.

As in 2012, we will have two ESEH summer schools in 2013—one, focusing on the topic of “Time in Environmental History” will be held in Estonia from 27-28 March; and a second, tentatively entitled “The Sound of Music Tour: Mountains Across Borders—An ESEH Summer Workshop for Graduate Students” will take place from 17-21 August 2013 in Lavin, Switzerland. Sylvie Nail, Professor of British Studies at the Université de Nantes in France, is organizing a conference on the complex relationships between humans and nature in France and the British Isles between the eighteenth and the twenty-first centuries, entitled “Nature(s): concevoir, vivre, représenter (18e-21e siècles).” The conference will be held from 6-8 June 2013 in Nantes; Alexei Kraikovskiy of the European University in St. Petersburg is announcing an education project on Russian culture in Baltic nature titled *Российская культура в природе Балтийского побережья: на стыке культуры, ландшафта и культурного наследия*; Hrvoje Petric of the University of Zagreb, the ESEH regional representative for Croatia, invites proposals for article submissions for a special journal issue on the topic of “History and Sustainability” for the international journal *Ekonomika i ekohistorija* (Economics and Eco-history); and Finn-Arne Jørgensen, ESEH representative for the Nordic Region, invites students to attend a PhD course on “Comparative Forest Histories of the Global North.” It will be taught by Professor Nancy Langston and take place at Umeå University, Sweden, from 15-19 April 2013.

The list of events and activities is long and it is growing at an ever faster pace. Thus we can look back with pride at 2012, and forward with anticipation to 2013 and beyond; and in particular, I look forward to welcoming many of you to Munich in the coming year.

CHRISTOF MAUCH