

Report on the  
**First Baltic Conference on the Environmental Humanities and Social Sciences  
(BALTEHUMS)**

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In cooperation between the ESEH, Estonian Centre for Environmental History (KAJAK), University of Latvia and KTH Royal Institute of Technology (Sweden), and with the help of several sponsors, the First Baltic Conference on the Environmental Humanities and Social Sciences (BALTEHUMS) was held in Riga, Latvia, on October 8-9, 2018. Initially, the conference was planned as a small-scale event with 30-50 participants from the ESEH Baltic region in mind, but eventually it attracted 98 delegates from all across the Baltic Sea region and beyond. In lively discussions at the conference it became evident that the Baltic States may form a present-day political region, but historically and environmentally it makes no sense to discuss them without the larger context of the Baltic Sea and closest neighbours, such as German, Scandinavian countries, Poland and Russia.

The conference was eventually held in three to four parallel sessions, where each time slot had at least one session in environmental history and one in sustainability studies. Overall impression of the participants was positive. Since most participants did not know each other prior to the conference, the event clearly helped to foster a new community that extended beyond the limits of the ESEH Baltic region. Tallinn University with its climate history, Helsinki University's Environmental Humanities Hub (HUH) and the sustainability research group of the Kaunas Technical University were the biggest research groups present. Timo Myllynatus' project on famines was present with one session of papers and one roundtable.

Topics covered at the conference ranged from engineering water at the Baltic Sea rim to nuclear issues and environmentalism. Almost all major topics of environmental humanities were present, even if only with one speaker: non-humans in literature and folklore, deep time in the Baltic Sea history, herbaria and bees, underwater archaeology, nuclear accidents, Anthropocene, disasters and famines... While history was present throughout the discussions, the conference was equally anchored in the present and future, with clear sustainability focus in roundtables such as HUH roundtable on contribution of the environmental humanities to the sustainability and climate change debate or RCC co-organised panel on environmental communication and several sessions worth of individual papers on sustainable societies and planning. Conference program is attached to this report.

With 98 delegates we fit very tightly into the conditions for a small workshop grant but could not afford issuing any travel grants as was initially planned. For many delegates from the Baltic countries, Ukraine, Russia or Poland, the travel costs are still an issue, as a research funds in general. However, high number of participants shows that the time was ripe for an environmental history/ humanities conference for the wider Baltic region. It also seems that uniting environmental humanities and social sciences was a right decision, as environmental thinking has developed differently in all former Soviet states and in many cases, it is neither environmental history nor ecocriticism – the Western environmental humanities gold standard – that carry weight in the local academic cultures. Participants were clearly

interested in making this event regular, and preliminary plan was made to hold BALTEHUMS 2 in 2020, possibly in Lithuania.

Links to blogposts about the conference:

<https://perhogselius.com/2018/10/29/baltic-environmental-humanities/>

Helsinki University Environmental Humanities Forum blog post

<https://blogs.helsinki.fi/environment/>

And their recorded Twitter live session <https://www.pscp.tv/w/1YpKkLqIArYGj>

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ESEH Regional Representative for the Baltic States