

CfP: 12th Biennial European Society for Environmental History (ESEH) Conference

Mountains and Plains

Past, present and future environmental and climatic entanglements

Bern, Switzerland | 22-26 August 2023.

The European Society for Environmental History (ESEH) is pleased to invite proposals for sessions, individual papers, roundtables, posters, and other – more experimental forms of communicating scholarship – for its 2023 biennial conference. The conference theme has been chosen in connection to Bern's closeness to the Alps and it points to a much broader set of historiographical issues. The deadline for submissions is **31 October 2022**.

The conference theme

Drawing inspiration from Bern's alpine location, the theme explores what environmental history looks like from the summit of mountains in their connection with the surrounding plains. The Alps, for instance, have been seen as a barrier to protect and to be surmounted since Roman times, they are the “water castle” of large parts of Europe, they play an important role for weather and climate; and they have been one of the most important places for transit and tourism in Europe. They were also the first transnational mountain range to be examined by scholars in more detail. But “the Alps” and their entanglements with the plains are everywhere in the world: “alpine” has become a synonym for “mountainous” in general, and mountainous ridges as well as smaller elevations have been named after the Alps and Switzerland.

Contributions on other mountainous areas all over the world and their interconnections with the plains and the sea that surround them will enrich our insights into the overall topic. However, numerous environmental challenges of today and for the future are closely connected with mountains: the melting of glaciers, changes in resource security, a possible increase of natural disasters, traffic and tourism. In addition, topics such as the loss of cultural landscape ecosystems

regarding outmigration, structural economic problems of low earning agriculture and forestry, maladaptation by state subsidies and related problems of biodiversity loss, environmental consequences of (human) infrastructure as well as loss of territory stability (avalanches, landslides, etc.) and loss of cultural and natural heritage could be highlighted. The conference will focus on these topics to show the relevance of environmental history approaches (in a wider sense) for present-day and future societies.

Possible topics to be discussed as part of the conference's thematic focus on "Mountains and Plains", include, but are not limited to the following:

- Transit across mountainous areas and their socio-economic impact (including culture and knowledge transfer)
- History of environmental knowledge related to mountains and plains
- Environmental histories of tourism in the Alps and other alpine areas as well as traffic connected with these activities
- Mountains/plains interactions, e.g. water metabolisms
- Resource use and management, biodiversity, and the commons in mountain environments and their associated plains
- The place of underwater and island mountains in oceanic environments and climates
- Influence of weather and climate on mountain and plain regions in the past, present, and future
- Mountains and plains as battlefields, migratory routes and barriers of war – the environmental impact of war

In addition, we warmly welcome papers/provocations/presentations on environmental history also outside the conference theme. We also invite contributions on teaching and communicating environmental history to a wider public (e.g. schools, university pedagogics, public outreach, citizen science). Furthermore, we encourage submissions from related academic disciplines and interdisciplinary fields, such as archaeology, anthropology, digital humanities, infrastructure studies and geography.

An inclusive and diverse conference

While ESEH believes in the value of a physical conference, we continue to acknowledge how the uncertainty of our pandemic times and the sustainability issues relating to international conferences may affect the possibility for all to attend in person. The conference will thus offer the chance to integrate the virtual and face-

to-face experience in a hybrid format that will allow as many scholars as possible to attend talks, keynotes, plenaries, and poster sessions (also as recorded events), as well as provide opportunities to connect. Online-only participants will be offered a reduced conference fee.

Commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion is at the heart of ESEH. We recognise the unique contributions of every member of our society and seek ways of ensuring that people of all identities and in all circumstances can contribute to our biennial conference and to the wider life of our society. We strive to promote equality and diversity at our conference, in relation to conference participation, and the composition of topics comprising the conference programme. We also endeavour to create a platform to encourage active and sustained debate on issues of marginalisation and accessibility amongst our members.

We want to create a set of inclusive conference practices and 'resist the normality' of hierarchies and silos. We will consider all historical periods, all geographical areas and all disciplines. To bolster diversity at the event and promote new forms of networking, we are hoping for panels/interventions where the presenters come from different regions, generations, genders, different institutions or different disciplines. We also encourage demographic balance and the use of emergent scholars as facilitators/session chairs. Graduate students will be offered a special reduced fee.

Travel grants

A limited number of grants for ESEH members who would not be able to attend the conference without external support. These travel grants are intended for graduate students, independent scholars, and those from low-income countries. Applications for these grants will be made as part of the submission process.

Participants of the preceding ESEH Summer Schools on *Commons* and on *Climate* (both in alpine locations out of Bern) – see the additional call to be launched in September 2022 – will be fully reimbursed for their travel costs to Switzerland, but are not admitted to apply for another travel grant.

Formats

Conventional Discussions

We are looking for session suggestions, individual papers, roundtables, posters and other, more experimental sessions. Of course, panels and roundtables are indispensable and constitute much of the conference, but we need new modes of conversation. So we encourage submissions that introduce a productive conflict of views, interpretations, or methodologies:

1. Panel sessions

Sessions are 3 papers of 20 minutes each or 4 papers of 15 minutes each. Other formats (debate panels, roundtables) should be submitted under the Roundtable or 'Different World' session categories. Session proposals will include a session title and session abstract of 250 words; list of contributors and a chair; and individual paper titles and abstracts of around 250 words each. Session proposals may also include a commentator/discussant in place of the fourth paper – or not. Please remember, all sessions should include sufficient time for general discussion.

2. Individual papers

Contributors may also submit individual papers of max. 20 minutes, which will be combined into sessions of three to four papers in case of acceptance. However, the scientific committee prefers session submissions, and cannot guarantee thematic coherence for the combined sessions. Paper proposals are to consist of an abstract of 250 words.

3. Roundtables

Scholars can also propose 90-minute roundtables, consisting of panels ranging from 3-6 people and a chair who speak to a common question or theme. Successful roundtables involve interaction between the panelists, an active chair who shapes the conversation, and time for the audience to interact with the panel. Roundtable proposals are to consist of an abstract of 250 words.

4. Posters and Virtual Posters

Poster proposals will include an abstract of 250 words. There will be a designated display area, and a special plenary session for all poster authors to present their research in 5 minutes time per poster. The *Environment & History* Poster Prize sponsored by The White Horse Press is awarded to the best poster (€100 award)

and the 2nd place poster (€50 award). We will also permit short videos in lieu of posters, to enable digital dissemination of research. For ideas on presentation, see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1RwJbhkCA58>

“Different World” Sessions

In the spirit of rethinking the conventional, we welcome proposals for unorthodox sessions with creative formats. To submit a proposal for a special session, please provide a 250-word abstract, describing the activity, including any special logistics you might need. Ideas include, but are not limited to:

– *Workshops and new research tool demonstrations*

Teach others your skills (e.g. in writing, GIS, or digital humanities) or offer mentorship or field-work tips.

– *“Difficult conversations”*

Presenters address sensitive issues within environmental history within a safe space. We use what we call Chatham House Rules 2.0: The discussion is not tweeted and remains within the confines of the room.

– *“Flipping the panels”*

Papers will be made available in advance as draft papers or even short video presentations. Rather than just summarise their paper, presenters come to the panel with questions they need answered to improve their research. Instead of just listening to presentations, audience members come with their own questions/suggestions. The panels become conversations between presenters and the audience in collaborative research efforts. This is also an inclusive way of extending the peer-review process.

– *History Cafes*

A facilitator provides a question on a predetermined topic or proposes a problem that needs solving. The group divides into smaller groups, discusses, and submits feedback for the larger group at the end. Conversation and participation are the key processes and collaborative projects are stimulated.

– *PechaKucha presentations.*

In this rapid “chit chat” format invented in Tokyo, speakers show 20 images, each for 20 seconds. The images advance automatically and speakers talk along with the images. It is like an “elevator pitch meets karaoke!”

– *Soundclash debates*

We import this idea from the music industry. Soundclashes normally occur when two different bands or DJs play against each other on either side of the stage. The conference encourages intellectual frisson by debating opposing points of view over contentious issues (methodology, theory, historiographical model) in environmental history.

– *Book lounge*

We encourage authors to offer a reading from their recent book. Also welcome are shared discussions of a single book, major paper, movie, or even primary source.

– *The Historian in the Mirror*

Reflective roundtables that examine our own academic practices, activism and ourselves.

Submissions

Each person can be a primary presenter in only one session proposal, but can also serve as a chair/commentator in a second session proposal. In addition, a presenter of a Conventional Session can submit a proposal or participate in a “Different World” session as well. All submissions should include an abstract of about 250 words and at least three keywords. The **conference language is English**; no submissions in other languages will be accepted. All proposals will be reviewed by the ESEH Programme Committee. All proposals should be submitted through our online submission system (August to 31 October 2022):

www.eseh2023.unibe.ch/conference/call_for_papers/

The submission deadline is 31 October 2022.

Those who have secured a place on the programme will be advised of this by mid-January 2023.

Questions about proposals should be directed to the Chair of the Programme Committee, Dr. Wilko Graf von Hardenberg, through the email conference@eseh.org.