



Non-human agency in historical environments
ESEH 2019 Summer School in Environmental History
University of Tartu, Estonia
August 17-20, 2019

The Departments of History and Semiotics at the University of Tartu and KAJAK, the Estonian Centre for Environmental History at Tallinn University, with the support of the European Society for Environmental History (ESEH) and the KTH Royal Institute of Technology in Sweden are pleased to announce a four-day graduate school in environmental history hosted at the University of Tartu, Estonia. This graduate school will precede the ESEH biannual conference in Tallinn (August 21-25), and offers intermediate to advanced graduate students the opportunity to present and discuss their work, to network with other researchers from across the world, and participate in practical workshops.

The 2019 ESEH graduate school, *Non-human agency in historical environments*, will explore the agency of non-humans as a lens through which to understand past environments and societies. The instructors of the course include specialists from environmental history as well as bio- and ecosemiotics. The event will therefore focus particularly on one of the biggest challenges for humanist scholars interested in environment: how to build a methodologically sound enquiry into the life worlds of non-humans? How to escape environmental determinism without anthropomorphising non-human nature?

In the summer school we will be looking for specific approaches and methods that could be useful for all of us who work with bigger animals or microbial life, earth systems or fungi, insects or plants. We reflect on the diverse interrelations between material agency and social phenomena in various fields of social life. We discuss how to write environmental history without attributing humans' species-specific perceptive capacities to other species or material objects. Is there a way to write history from the point of view of fungi or chimpanzees, or is it always an artistic device? What are the advantages and challenges of including non-human agency to the study of historical environments? How can we add a historical perspective to the description of non-human life worlds? We will also discuss the tension between species and individual agency – how can museum exhibitions and scientific texts display non-humans as individuals while they are there to represent typical species characteristics at the same time?

The graduate school aims to gather 15 graduate students or recent post-docs together with junior and senior scholars who will all give formal and informal presentations, as well as feedback for promoting rich methodological discussions in a friendly atmosphere. The discussions are concentrated into thematic blocs that include a presentation from a senior scholar, oral presentations by the doctoral students, feedback for each of the presentations both from instructors and other participants, general discussion and a practical workshop or a field trip. All participants are expected to make a 20-minute oral presentation and give constructive feedback to other presentations. They are also expected to submit a draft of a chapter or article

(approximately 4000 words) one month before the summer school that will then be discussed at the feedback session. The summer school includes a workshop on poster presentations. After the course, the participants should submit a poster, synthesizing the main take-away ideas that they have got from the course.

All workshops and feedback sessions will be led by both historians and semioticians. Biosemiotics has a long track-record of developing methods to account for non-human agency and describe how other life forms take decisions within their perceptive capacities and environmental conditions. Semiotics has also developed tools to approach how humans and non-humans make sense of their environment and how environment affords or negates certain actions, without resorting to determinism. This summer school will incorporate some of the methodological tools offered by semiotics by cooperating closely with the Tartu Summer School of Semiotics that is held at the University of Tartu at the same dates (<http://tsss.ut.ee/>). Contact the organisers as soon as possible if you want your presentation to be included in the part of the program that the two summer schools share.

All doctoral students and immediate post-docs working on the above topics are welcome to apply. A few places can be given to excellent MA students. An application for the graduate school consists of sending the organizers:

- 1) a curriculum vitae;
- 2) an abstract of the presentation and outline of the research topic (ca 300 words);
- 3) a letter of support.

All accepted participants will receive free lunches and accommodation during this four-day seminar (in shared rooms), but participants are responsible for their own transportation to and from Estonia.

The working language of the summer school is English..

The course will give 3 ETCS.

APPLICATION DEADLINE: April 1, 2019.

Please send all queries and your application to Marten Seppel ([marten.seppel\[at\]ut.ee](mailto:marten.seppel[at]ut.ee)) and Kati Lindström ([kati.lindstrom\[at\]abe.kth.se](mailto:kati.lindstrom[at]abe.kth.se))

The event is supported by the University of Tartu's ASTRA project PER ASPERA (European Union, European Regional Development Fund), European Society for Environmental History (ESEH), Fulbright Specialist Program and KTH Royal Institute of Technology

