CfP: Panel on Urban Environmental History of Fires at the ESEH 2021 Conference

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Cities on Fire: Environmental History of Urban Conflagrations in Early Modern and Modern Periods

Papers focusing on the urban environmental history of fires are invited for a panel to be submitted to the European Society for Environmental History conference, which will be held at the University of Bristol in July 2021.

From California to Australia, from Turkey to the Siberian Arctic Circle, wildfires are ravaging diverse geographies across the world with increasing numbers, density, and damage to human and nonhuman populations. They also provide some of the most potent images of the Anthropocene in the early twenty-first century: naturally sepia/crimson photography showing humans and animals encroached by flames in suburbs, parks, and beaches; anxious city residents following weather reports to learn if it is safe to go outside, to take their heads out of their windows and just to breathe. These wildfires are no longer confined to the ‘wild,’ but are rather symbols of the entangled worlds of city and nature, urban and rural, humans and nonhumans.

Speaking to this global moment and ecological crisis, this panel seeks to offer environmental historical perspectives to the relations between cities and fires. While environmental historians have mostly limited their research on rural fires, urban historians have conventionally dealt with urban fires as external disasters that ‘happen’ to human populations and the built environment. Following Stephen Pyne’s assertion that the built environment is “as much a fire environment as forests and fields,” the papers gathered in this panel would rather investigate the relations between the un/making of cities and fires—urban fires and wildfires in suburban zones—as organic entanglements that connect humans and nonhumans, fuels and water infrastructure, cities and their hinterlands, built environment and urban natures, in early modern and modern periods.

Potential paper topics include but are not limited to:

- Built environment as fuel for fires
- Climate, cities, and fires
- Fires and urban pollution
- Changing heating & lighting systems and fire risks
- Fire resilience in urban and suburban zones
- Water infrastructure and firefighting
- Environmental expertise in relation to fires
- Cities, forests, and forestry
- Post-fire environments
- Nonhuman agents and victims of fires
- Fire legends as environmental folk tales
- Fire insurance and making of urban environments

Please send a 200-300 words abstract, together with a short bio, to Dr. K. Mehmet Kentel (mehmet.kentel@iae.org.tr) by **October 15**, so that the panel proposal could be completed by the conference deadline, October 31. For more information on the ESEH 2021 conference, visit [https://eseh2021.blogs.bristol.ac.uk/conference-programme/](https://eseh2021.blogs.bristol.ac.uk/conference-programme/).

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