Climate Change and human Society conference – Report for department website

Event summary

The Climate Change and Human Society Conference, organised in the context of the Research Dialogues took place on 4-5 December 2015. It brought together PhD and early career researchers in archaeology and related disciplines across the social sciences, arts and humanities in order to examine the wider socio-ecological relations between climate change and human societies in the past, present and future. This inter-disciplinary perspective, integrating various lines of evidence, allowed for a range of historical and geographical perspectives to be brought to bear on this important issue.

The following themes were central to the conference:

- The socio-political, cultural and economic impact of climate change on human societies
- Perceptions of climate change
- Adaptations and responses to climate change by human societies
- Archaeology’s role in the current climate change debates

Through addressing these key themes the conference sought to stimulate cross-disciplinary discussions on climate change and explore possibilities for reconstructing and understanding its effects on different human societies.

The conference opened on the evening of 4th December with a keynote lecture by Prof. van de Noort (University of Reading), who introduced the concept of climate change Archaeology. The main body of the conference was scheduled over the next day, with three sessions of papers (each followed by a short discussion), in which eight papers were presented by PhD students and early career researchers with a variety of disciplinary backgrounds, ranging from Archaeology, Geography and Anthropology to International Development, English Studies and History. All of these papers addressed one or more of the key themes and covered study areas from around the world, from Spain to Fiji and the Indus Valley to the Aral Sea. In time, they ranged from prehistory (c. 3000 BC) to the medieval period and the present day. Thus, the conference provided a cross-cultural and long term (pre)historical perspective on the relation between human societies and climate change. A second keynote lecture by Dr. Baldwin (Geography, Durham University) looked at climate-induced change migration from the perspective of critical humanism. The conference was closed with a roundtable discussion at the end of the afternoon.

A total of 43 delegates (mostly postgraduate students, but also staff and professionals) in Archaeology, Anthropology, Geography, History, international Development, Geology, History, Languages and Law, coming from institutes across the UK attended the whole or
parts of the conference. Speakers included postgraduate students and early career researchers from England (Coventry, London, Southampton, Cambridge, Oxford, St. Andrews, Newcastle and Durham) and the Czech Republic (Brno).

**Outcomes and perspectives**

The conference should be seen as an initial step towards identifying shared themes in climate change research and fostering avenues for further interdisciplinary work. Thus, the main outcome has been to establish an initial research network for continued, cross-disciplinary discussion and dialogue.

Bringing together such a diverse group of people and topics provided for stimulating cross-disciplinary discussions. Despite clear disciplinary differences, there were several interconnecting themes. These include: identity (in terms of disciplinary boundaries, academic and practitioner identities, and how social identities (e.g. gender or race) intersect with climate change issues), scale (the multiple scales – local, national, global etc. – at which climate change impacts emerge and are engaged with), and temporality (from historical and archaeological studies of climate changes in the past, to climate change in the present and possible climate change futures (for instance in connection to climate-induced migration). The many different specialties represented further served to strengthen and expand academic networks, and have generated lively discussions between the conference participants.

Following very positive feedback on the conference from various delegates and presenters, the organisers are currently exploring the possibilities of publishing the proceedings of the conference in a special issue of a journal/edited collection, or conference proceedings with the conference contributors. The organisers are also considering writing a joint article discussing some of the issues raised in the conference from their different disciplinary backgrounds (Geography, Anthropology and Archaeology). This could perhaps be published in the Institute of Hazard Risk and Resilience Newsletter. Alternatively, a summary article will be written by the organisers and published on the conference website ([http://climatechangeandhu.wix.com/strip-header-layout](http://climatechangeandhu.wix.com/strip-header-layout)). We are also currently looking into the possibility of setting up a ‘Climate Change and Human Society mailing list’ through Jiscmail and/or a Facebook group, allowing for the easy dissemination of calls for papers, interesting publications, and other relevant information.