

# **Oslo School of Environmental Humanities**

## **Oslo Miljøhumaniora**

### **(OSEH)**

#### **OSEH in brief**

We propose the establishment of Oslo School of Environmental Humanities (Oslo Miljøhumaniora, OSEH) as a new and experimental interdisciplinary initiative at the Faculty of Humanities (HF). The aim is to develop and promote research and studies of climate change and the natural environment that are historically, culturally and philosophically grounded.

OSEH will:

- Establish Environmental Humanities as a new academic discipline at UiO.
- Build stronger research ties between the humanities, natural sciences and social sciences in the field of climate and environmental research.
- Establish interdisciplinary and co-taught courses in Environmental Humanities at the Master's and Bachelor's levels.
- Initiate a Nordic network for environmental humanities initiatives in the Nordic countries.
- Constitute a timely response from the humanities to society's call for more research that can contribute to solving the major challenges of our times.

While open to all scholars and students, OSEH is hosted by the Department of Culture and Oriental Studies (IKOS) in close collaboration with the Department of Philosophy, Classics, History of Art and Ideas (IFIKK) and Department of Archaeology, Conservation and History (IAKH). Several groups at HF and SV, within a wide range of disciplines, are already doing research in this field and have strong international networks. However, we have by no means realized the full potential of the humanities at UiO in the field of environment and climate change. The time is ripe for an organized initiative.

#### **Why we need OSEH**

The humanities study the human, for instance, their interaction, communication, values and experiences, as well as visual and material products of human behaviour. Because of the extent to which humans have altered the earth's ecosystems it has become increasingly clear that the dichotomy between nature and culture that for long informed the humanities and natural sciences is not viable. The borderlands and interfaces between the human-made world and the natural environment provide fertile ground for the environmental humanities, and the study of the human is increasingly encompassing what we have come to call the environment. At the same time, there is a call for more active participation of scholars from the humanities in natural science dominated environmental research. Environmental Humanities is per definition transdisciplinary and multiperspectival. It is inclusive in the sense that it brings the humanities into closer dialogue with other sciences while maintaining a firm grounding in cultural, philosophical or historical interpretations of humans' responses to, interpretations of, and ways of dealing with climate and environmental changes.

The aim of OSEH is to produce vital knowledge about the entanglements of humans and environment in past, present and, not least, with a view towards the future. To do so, OSEH will develop ways for the humanities to better cooperate across disciplines and engage with researchers from the social and natural sciences. OSEH builds on three assertions:

Our first assertion is that the field of climate and environmental research is suffering from the lack of a consolidated and sustained engagement from humanities researchers. The humanities need, for instance, to play a more active role in critically evaluating and interpreting the ways in which big data is developed and used in climate sciences. They have the potential to generate new insights into how humans have made sense of and dealt with environments in different times and spaces, and they can, for instance, contribute with knowledge of how technological shifts generate new relationships with, and understandings of, the environment. The possibilities are endless but require incentives and structures promoting this kind of collaboration. In this regard, our initiative is a response to the call from the Norwegian government in its recent white paper about the current and potential role of the humanities ([Humaniorameldingen](#)).

The white paper leaves no doubt that society expects the humanities to take a more active role in generating new research questions and themes, not least in the field of environment and climate change. Importantly, such a turn in the humanities might also help bring new methodological and theoretical inspiration to already established humanistic disciplines and, not least, it might help develop better solutions to the biggest problems of our time. OSEH subscribes to Ghassan Hage's statement that "The [environmental] crisis makes of the planet a sinking ship. It becomes futile and even obscurantist to study anything aboard the ship on its own, as if the ship is not sinking. Likewise, it becomes equally imperative to show in what way what one is studying can help stop the sinking process".<sup>1</sup>

Our second assertion is that scholars from the humanities to a larger extent than now need to take *the lead* in developing new research questions, planning for cooperation across academic disciplines, and participating in interdisciplinary applications for external research funding. This requires more than good intentions or normative encouragements. It requires organization and a different institutional order of knowledge. Here it is helpful to look to other parts of Europe, and to Australia and the US where a growing number of universities are now experimenting with different ways of setting up and structuring research and teaching in the Environmental Humanities. Environmental Humanities is a burgeoning and therefore also quite open and undefined field where different universities have somewhat different approaches. If OSEH is established, we at HF will need to develop our own form and content of the field - our own environmental humanities identity. We suggest an experimental model that encourages leadership by humanities scholars in interdisciplinary projects, opens up for closer integration of research and education, and has a strong emphasis on societal outreach and dialogue. Below we also return to the potential for expanding into closer cooperation with scholars and disciplines from social and natural sciences at UiO, integration with the UiO:Energy program, and a Nordic network of Environmental Humanities initiatives that will make possible also fruitful benchmarking.

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<sup>1</sup> Ghassan Hage, *Is racism an environmental threat?*, Polity Press, 2017, p. 2.

Our third assertion concerns our proposal to put HF on the map as Norway's first centre for organizing environmental humanities. As the largest humanities faculty in Norway, HF should take the lead in organizing Environmental Humanities and we suggest that UiO as a university supports the initiative by making OSEH a central and integrated component of [UiO:Energy](#) and [UiO:Life Science](#). In this way HF and UiO would:

- Create a platform for collaboration between human and natural sciences with a firm basis in the humanities. This kind of collaboration still has difficult conditions in the present institutional order and funding schemes.
- Help strengthen UiO:Energy and UiO: Life Science.
- Secure more research funding also to the humanities aspects of energy/environmental research;
- Send a clear response to the Norwegian government regarding its white paper's call for more humanities research on the largest global challenges of our times.
- Support and initiate research that can help us to better deal with the global environmental crisis by unpacking the innovative, self-reflexive, critical, methodologically sceptical and historically conscious voices of the humanities.

### **Organization**

OSEH is organized as a collaboration between IKOS, IFIKK and IAKH, but is open to all scholars at HF. It will be a platform for gradually expanding cooperation also with researchers from other faculties at UiO and beyond. It will be led by an academic director who is doing research in the field and bears the main administrative responsibility for reaching the goals of the initiative. OSEH will have a physical meeting place where workshops, seminars, and meetings will take place. It will run its own website, organize different teams and activities as outlined in more detail below, and be accountable to the organizing departments through a council of representatives from IKOS, IFIKK and IAKH, possibly HF and, eventually, other participating faculties. OSEH will initiate new forms of research cooperation as well as courses at bachelor's and master's levels, as outlined below.

### *Research initiatives*

OSEH will concretely engage in and facilitate the following research activities.

- In a research process the stage where research questions and hypotheses are developed is crucial. In order for the humanities to take a more proactive role in climate and environmental research it is necessary to experiment with fora where groups are encouraged to develop joint methodological and theoretical understandings at *an early stage*. OSEH will therefore establish *Question-labs* where HF scholars get support for organizing workshops developing new research *questions*, and eventually projects and applications for funding, in cooperation with scholars from other disciplines than their own, not least from the natural sciences.
- Engage internationally profiled scholars in the field of Environmental Humanities in Professor II positions. Three professor IIs will be hired to help

build, inspire and support new research projects, and to contribute to teaching at a high international level in the proposed courses at the Masters' level.

- Recruit and train a new generation of PhD and Postdoctoral scholars working within the Environmental Humanities. Initially OSEH will work within HF's established structure of PhD programmes, before evaluating the possibility and relevance of expanding into a more ambitious transdisciplinary research school (*forskerskole*).
- Establish an "Environmental Humanities Support Team" that assists HF scholars and groups planning to apply for external funding for Environmental Humanities projects.
- Organize guest lectures and workshops with the aim of strengthening HF's competence in the field and especially inspire young scholars and postgraduate students.
- Cooperate with the UiO:Energy, UiO:Life Science and the Natural Science Library to establish new platforms for curiosity-driven explorations across disciplinary borders, especially those between humsam and natural sciences.
- Connect key researchers from other faculties at UiO to OSEH (to ensure close interaction between teaching and research, these researchers will also be invited in as teachers and co-teachers in the new English-language courses that OSEH develops. *see below*).

#### *Educational initiatives*

All educational activities in OSEH will draw on the research collaborations and activities outlined above. The aim is to strengthen students' interdisciplinary knowledge and competence in Environmental Humanities while building on their competence from their main academic discipline. It is tempting to immediately suggest an ambitious plan for the establishing of a new full Master's Program in Environmental Humanities.

However, the initiators of OSEH prefer to move forward in a step-by-step process.

While Environmental Humanities is per definition a multi- and transdisciplinary field of study, it is not yet sufficiently clear what kind of qualifications and job opportunities students would gain from enrolling in a full master's program of this kind, as compared to a discipline-based master that includes courses in environmental humanities. It is possible that society would benefit more from graduates who have a strong theoretical and methodological training in an established discipline (such as history, media science, philosophy, language studies, etc.), *and* are able to use this in the field of climate change and environmental studies.

OSEH therefore proposes the following "three-stage rocket" model for the development of courses at BA and MA levels:

At stage 1 (2019), we establish one 10 study point (equivalent to ECTS, from here just "sp") bachelor course with the working title "Environmental Humanities: Knowledge for the Future". The course will be developed and taught in English by teachers from different disciplines *who cooperate closely*, and it will be offered also to UiO's international students. At stage 1, OSEH further explores the options for having the BA course integrated in existing "subject groups" (*emnegrupper*) and in a new "subject

thread” (emnetråd).<sup>2</sup> At stage 1, OSEH also establishes one 10 sp master’s course and integrates it into existing master’s programs. We have explored the possibilities for such an integration and have so far received positive response from master’s level studies in archaeology, history, Chinese society and politics, art history, European culture, and Middle East studies (only a limited number of programs were asked, and it is likely that more will be interested in such a course).

At stage 2, (2020-2021) we evaluate the experiences from stage 1 and proceed to build a 30 sp master’s level *package* in Environmental Humanities, integrated in existing master’s programs (*studieretninger*). The package consists of one 10 sp subject that is open to students from all programs and one 20 sp subject (or 2X10 sp) exclusively for the students who take the full 30 sp package. Existing master’s programs at HF who are interested in the package will need to consider carefully how to integrate it into their existing structure, or, alternatively, restructure to make room for it. Probably only a few programs (for instance in China and East Asia studies, Middle East Studies, European Culture, Museology and Cultural Heritage) will be able to include such a 30 sp package, as one of several options for students, without prior restructuring. A few master programs would be selected for a pilot project including the 30 sp package.

At stage 3 (2022-2023) we evaluate the experiences from stage 2 and, if appropriate, we establish a full master’s program in Environmental Humanities; alternatively, a 60 sp package that includes the 30 sp mentioned above + a 30 sp master thesis with supervisor from OSEH and from the basic academic discipline of the student (e.g. archeology, art history, etc.). At the master’s level, OSEH will attempt to facilitate studies both for students who wish to do an internship related to the study of environmental humanities, and for students who wish to pursue an academic career within the environmental humanities. Both the 30 sp package at stage 2 and the eventual master’s program at stage 3 will require close cooperation between OSEH and existing master’s programs within the more traditional academic disciplines. Stage 3 will also initiate a forum for all Environmental Humanities alumni to encourage networking.

In all courses established (stages 1-3), students will encounter teachers from various disciplines who are working either within the environmental humanities or on environment and climate change from the perspectives of the social and natural sciences. Students will benefit from the new methodological and theoretical platforms that are developed through OSEH’s research collaborations. OSEH will organize team-teaching with teachers across academic disciplines and departments, and courses will necessarily take an experimental form.

In sum, OSEH will facilitate the following study related activities:

- Establish, in a 3-stage process, new bachelor’s and master’s level courses, a 30 sp master’s course package and possibly (stage 3) a master’s program.
- Engage Prof. IIs (see also *Research initiatives*) to assist teaching in the master’s courses.

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<sup>2</sup> We here refer to specific UiO practices of organizing the bachelor’s studies. Our point is just that we will integrate the subject into existing studies in order to make it available to as many students from different disciplines as possible.

- Establish an “Environmental Humanities supervision team” that offers co-supervision to students writing their bachelor’s or master’s thesis on an environmental humanities related topic.
- Experiment with team-teaching among teachers working together across disciplines in the Environmental Humanities Package.
- Establish “Environmental Humanities Alumni” to build networks and share experiences among and with “EH master’s package” graduates.

#### *Outreach and dialogue*

OSEH will build better communication between scholars and students from the humanities and various actors in society working with issues of environment and climate change. This includes NGOs, local and national governments, the education sector, and the private sector. Some activities will be part of the building of research projects, others integrated into the study-related activities, including internships and invited lectures from outside the university.

OSEH will concretely:

- Start “Forum for Miljøhumaniora” which will be a Norwegian meeting place at HF/UiO for discussions, presentations, dialogues related to environmental humanities research and education.
- Establish a website for “Oslo Miljøhumaniora “ / Oslo School of Environmental Humanities”.
- Explore existing networks of the participating departments and scholars in order to create possibilities for internships for OSEH Master students.

#### **OSEH initiators and supporters**

Within the last year, the initiators of this application have worked together to build a platform from which to start OSEH. In November 2016, scholars at IKOS took the initiative to organize several meetings and two larger seminars about Environmental Humanities. The last seminar was held on May 23, 2017 with more than 40 scholars participating, most of them from HF. The seminar included two invited guest speakers involved in ongoing research projects at HF: Karen Thornber, professor of comparative literature and director of Harvard University’s Environmental Humanities Initiative, and Bryan Tilt, professor of anthropology and involved in Oregon State University’s long-term development of environmental humanities. The basis for these early initiatives were three established research groups working on issues related to environment and climate change from interdisciplinary and humanistic perspectives at IKOS. The projects [Geological Times](#), [GreenMENA](#) and [Airborne](#) all include PhD, postdoctoral and senior scholars, and two of these projects have received considerable financial support from, among others, the Norwegian Research Council. Similar initiatives are taking place at IFIKK, for instance the project [Back to the Sustainable Future](#) and the recent international conference [“Making and Unmaking the Environment”](#), research groups connected to philosophy; and at IAKH, exemplified by a project on historical ecology and state formation in Africa, and the department’s announcement in 2017 of UiO’s first professorship in Environmental History (by the time of application the hiring process is still ongoing).

In connection with the open environmental humanities seminars mentioned above, 21 tenured scholars (FVA) from the disciplines of art history, philosophy, Asia and Middle East area studies, history, archaeology, cultural history, religious science, Nordic language and literature, and media science, explicitly expressed their interest in the topic and supported the idea of developing Environmental Humanities further into a larger HF initiative. These include:

- IKOS: Anna Ahlers, Mette Halskov Hansen, Hanna Havnevik, Albrecht Hofheinz, Helge Jordheim, Brynjar Lia, Aike Rots, Rune Svarverud, Koen Wellens.
- IFIKK: Øyvind Storm Bjerke, Ina Blom, Kjetil Fallan, Espen Johnsen, Alejandra Mancilla, Pasi Väliäho, Aron Vinegar.
- IAKH: Per Ditlev Frederiksen, Einar Lie.
- IMK: Øyvind Ihlen.
- ILN: Sissel Furuseth, Gitte Mose.

The working group developing the final application for OSEH consisted of Mette Halskov Hansen and Helge Jordheim from IKOS, Per Ditlev Frederiksen from IAKH, Ina Blom and Kjetil Fallan from IFIKK.

In addition, a considerable number of PhD and postdoctoral researchers have shown a strong interest in developing the environmental humanities, and we have good reason to believe that OSEH will be of interest also to students at master's and bachelor's levels.

OSEH is meant to be for the entire HF - not merely the three organizing departments - and the hope is that more HF scholars will eventually become interested in directing their research towards the environmental humanities and build cooperation across disciplines within and beyond the humanities. At the same time, we are actively building connections to scholars and researchers at other faculties at UiO who are interested in joining the Environmental Humanities initiative, and we have concrete plans for international collaborations and benchmarking processes, as outlined in the following.

### **Expanding OSEH: Collaborations and benchmarking**

Oslo School of Environmental Humanities offers a new way of organizing collaborations across HF's departments and beyond in the field of environment and climate research. Internally at UiO there is great potential for working more closely with natural sciences and social sciences, for instance in social anthropology where several scholars and research groups (e.g. directed by Knut Nustad and Marianne Lien) are working on topics that clearly fall within "the environmental humanities". There is an obvious potential also for OSEH to work together with the UiO supported interdisciplinary programs [UiO:Energy](#) and [UiO:Life Sciences](#). OSEH will discuss, with especially UiO:Energy, the possibility of a formal integration of OSEH into that program. The Centre for Development and the Environment (SUM) is also an obvious potential partner at UiO. SUM has a small group of tenured staff, and a larger group of PhD and Postdoctoral scholars, all of whom are working with different aspects related to development and/or environmental studies. OSEH is an entirely different organization than SUM in that it is established as an initiative within the Faculty of Humanities, integrated into existing departments and study programs, and with the

specific focus on environmental *humanities*. At the same time, there is an obvious and positive potential for collaboration with SUM, both with regard to the development of new research projects and concerning OSEH's plan for developing new courses at bachelor's and master's levels. SUM is responsible for the [Master Program Development, Environment and Cultural Change](#) which offers many possibilities for cooperation and coordination. Nationally, the University of Stavanger was the first to establish an environmental humanities initiative. In 2017 they hired the first professor in environmental history in Norway, and in September 2017 they launched [The Greenhouse](#) environmental humanities initiative. For OSEH, this is an obvious partner for collaboration.

With regard to international cooperation, the initiators of OSEH have so far been drawing on existing contacts with scholars leading environmental humanities centres or initiatives elsewhere, for instance, Professor Karen Thornber who is directing Harvard University's new program, Professor Bryan Tilt from Oregon State University, and Professor Prasenjit Duara who is heading Duke University's new hub for environmental humanities and was recently appointed Honorary Doctor at UiO. These, along with other international initiatives, will be important for OSEH's networks and forms of cooperation.

We were considering either Harvard or Duke as a main benchmarking partner for OSEH. However, one of the requirements of the Environmental Humanities Initiative at Harvard is relevance for China studies (it is financed by an external donor), and the initiative at Duke University is part of larger centre for global studies. We will, of course, continue to cooperate with these to initiatives and we have already discussed the possibility of joint workshops and conference, but in terms of establishing regular cooperation, including an ongoing processes of benchmarking, we believe that centres within in the Nordic countries will be the most fruitful relevant partners. Mette Halskov Hansen will, in November 2017, visit the two directors of [Aarhus University's newly established Centre for Environmental Humanities](#) (Professor Felix Riede and Ass. Professor Heather Swanson) to discuss possibilities for partnership and mutual benchmarking if OSEH is established. CEH would be an excellent partner for OSEH, including for benchmarking practices, over a longer period of time.

Several other Nordic institutions outside of Norway are relevant for collaboration and partnership, for instance KTH in Sweden where [Sverker Sörlin](#) holds one of the few full professorships in environmental history and has been very active in building the field and establishing networks, and in Helsinki University where new [workshops in environmental humanities have been initiated](#), and an initiative will be established soon. We also suggest to draw on the initiators' long-established research and institutional contacts in, for instance, China (e.g. Chinese-Nordic centre at Nanjing University) and the United Arab Emirates, to build new forms of Environmental Humanities networks with relevant research environments *outside* of the Euro-American sphere. To our knowledge, this has so far not been a priority of existing centres in Europe, Australia, US and Canada, and here OSEH would be able to contribute to new forms of cooperation within the environmental humanities but beyond the established Western universities.

In stage one, during the first year of its establishment, OSEH will consider the possibilities of including formal partners from, for instance, social anthropology, at SV.



In the next stages, we will evaluate the possibilities for expanding into a "University of Oslo School", or even a "Norwegian School of Environmental Humanities".

### **OSEH after 2023**

In the announcement of the faculty's PF III initiative it is stated that departments participating in an application should account for how the initiative will proceed after the financial support from the faculty ends in 2023. If a School, including both research and educational activities, is established the goal should definitely be that it continues also after five years' time. It is therefore of utmost importance to this application that the three participating departments already have adopted environmental humanities into their internal strategies. This is concretely reflected in, for instance, IAKH's recent announcement of a full professorship in environmental history, in IKOS' plan for positions to be announced that includes one associate professor in environmental humanities and another related one in Cultural History, and in IFIKK's support for research groups and projects working within environmental humanities and based in the disciplines of Art History and Philosophy.

If OSEH is established, the participating departments will continue to finance these positions also after 2023, and they will make arrangements to take over the expenses connected to the bachelor's and master's courses established by OSEH. The support for research groups and new initiatives will depend on the financial resources of the departments and the degree of external funding for OSEH. In the course of the first five years, OSEH will build a culture for applying for external funding that will hopefully generate more research also beyond the period of faculty financial support. Furthermore, as outline above, in the course of the first five years of OSEH, we explore possibilities of being formally connected to UiO:Energy and possibly expand to become a UiO (or national) school. Such steps would create new possibilities for OSEH after 2023.

### **External funding**

It is always difficult to predict levels of external funding. However, the urgent topics of how humans in different parts of the world and in different times of history deal with climate change, pollution, and other forms of socio-environmental disruptions are definitely calling for more engagement from scholars in the humanities. There is hardly any doubt that both the Research Council of Norway, other Nordic funding institutions, and the various EU funding schemes will increasingly adapt to this call. In Norway, this trend is supported through the Norwegian government's recent white paper about the societal role of the humanities, and the national evaluation of the output of all the humanities disciplines. It is very likely that an increasing number of calls for thematic research for instance from the Research Council of Norway and EU's coming programs will open more up to humanities perspectives, not least when integrated with natural science research. Norway's largest faculty of humanities need to seize this opportunity and develop new forms of organization that are better adapted to these knowledge needs and can help improve research that has implications for the planet's future.

### **Budget and activity plan**

See attached Excel-file for calculation of costs.

<b>Activity</b>	<b>Period</b>
Professor. II X 3 (hired by IKOS, IFIKK and IAKH respectively)	3 years each, some overlap. Prof. II A: 2019-2021 Prof. II B: 2020-2022 Prof. II B: 2021-2023 Hereafter, IKOS as main host department, and the other participating departments will have to decide whether or not they have resources to continue funding Prof. II positions.
Academic Director (50% administration + 50% research)	3 years with possibility for extension to 6 years. Announced in 2018 with upstart 2019.
If director is external to HF: 6 months "supporting director" from one of the participating departments and with profound knowledge of HF and UiO	6 months substitute teacher for "supporting director"
Education activities: "EH Course Package" 30 sp + single subjects BA and MA + Alumni + frikjøp teachers	See three-stage rocket plan above
Administration	full period
"Forum for Miljøhumaniora", workshops, guest lectures, meetings	full period
"Question-labs" + research support/development	full period