



The ESIL IG of the History of International Law

Call for abstracts - deadline 15 January 2026 (23:59 CET)

What could be the future of a sustainable international law? Lessons from history

The Interest Group on the History of International Law is organizing an online workshop for early-career scholars on the histories of sustainable international law in the context of the 2026 ESIL Research Forum, Forum '*Sustainable International Law. Reconciling Stability and Change*', to be hosted by the Jagiellonian University in Kraków. The workshop will take place online on **Tuesday 7 April 2026, from 14:00 to 16:00 CET.**

Theme of the workshop

The sustainability of international law — and the international law of sustainability — are often framed as distinctly contemporary concerns. Yet the underlying ideas are far older. Although the vocabulary of “sustainability” is recent, earlier centuries produced comparable reflections on how to protect nature and human communities, and how to craft an international legal order capable of lasting across generations.

Historical actors diagnosed similar challenges: from resistance to “technicians for whom the earth is merely a “dead ball” and an object of their plannings” (Friedrich Georg Jünger, *Die Perfektion der Technik*, 1946), to Lassa Oppenheim’s 1908 call for a “Science of International Law” that would secure a stable and enduring international order through scientific reasoning. Visions of sustainability in international law were tied not only to predictions that war could be ended forever through mechanisms such as arbitration, but also to anxieties about the vulnerability of both humans and nature — forests, lakes, landscapes, and the people who depended on them.

In 1609, Hugo Grotius declared that the seas were common to all, thereby justifying economic exploitation and military operations, while challenging the dominance of individual states. Air pollution in early modern cities led to legal debates and measures. Late nineteenth-century debates already connected environmental, social, and legal precarity. Reformers denounced the exploitation of US mountain workers by industrialists and criticised the “land hunger” that fuelled the dispossession and suffering of South African communities — injustices that some argued required new forms of legal protection, including the extension of civil rights within the British Empire.

Across these contexts, jurists, administrators, activists, and thinkers proposed solutions aimed at preserving nature, restraining extractive practices, and stabilising international order. Some ideas persisted; others were discarded; still others reappear today under new names. This call invites international lawyers and historians to examine how earlier generations conceived of what we now call “sustainability”:

- What legal, institutional, or conceptual proposals were advanced to protect nature (including animals), or ensure a durable global order?
- How were environmental protection, social welfare, and the stability of international law linked — or opposed — in different periods?
- Which proposals proved resilient, and why? Which ideas disappeared, and for what reasons?
- How did historical debates frame the relationship between protecting nature, regulating economic power, governing empires, and maintaining peace?

The Interest Group on the History of International Law welcomes papers that recover these past debates, analyse their conceptual vocabularies and political contexts, and reflect on their relevance for today’s discussions on the sustainability of international law and the international law of sustainability. Contributions from diverse regions, methodologies, and linguistic traditions are strongly encouraged.

Submission of abstracts and timeline

The deadline for submitting abstracts is **15 January 2026 (23:59 CET)**. Abstracts may be submitted in English or French. Submissions must not exceed 400 words and should be submitted to this email: esilighistory@gmail.com.

The following information must be provided with the abstract:

- The author’s name and affiliation
- An academic CV of the author
- The author’s contact details, including email address and phone number
- Whether the author is an ESIL member, and a member of this interest group
- Confirmation that the author is an early-career scholar (see eligibility conditions on the ESIL website).

Authors of selected abstracts will be notified by **3 February 2026**. Authors of accepted abstracts are invited to submit a draft paper by **30 March 2026**. The draft papers will be circulated among the workshop participants. If you have any questions, feel free to contact us at esilighistory@gmail.com.

Please see the 2026 ESIL Research Forum [website](#) for all relevant information about the Research Forum.

Conveners

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