

17th International Conference on Environmental Science and Technology

(CEST2021 – Athens)

The International Conference on Environmental Science and Technology (CEST) was established in 1989 and it is usually celebrated every two years in either Rhodes or Athens (Greece). It is organized by Global Nest, the University of the Aegean and the National Kapodistrian University of Athens and has the support of different Universities and organizations all over Europe. In this conference, top scientists and experts present state-of-the-art research on current and emerging environmental issues.

The CEST 17th edition was celebrated on 1-4 September 2021 in Athens and the National Kapodistrian University of Athens hosted the event. Due to the COVID global pandemic it was organized as a hybrid event for the very first time. This enabled the physical attendance of many experts and, at the same time, the knowledge exchange with virtual participants from all over the world. On the other hand, the conference physical event was scheduled as usual, including different speeches, plenary and poster sessions, round tables and coffee breaks. Strict COVID measures, including daily mandatory COVID tests with negative result or vaccination certificate, were always followed. In general, the conference included a high number of sessions addressing diverse environment related fields, such as analytical chemistry, pollution, climate change, waste management, SARS-CoV-2 impact or water and resources management, among others.

On September the 1st, the welcome ceremony was celebrated with the participation of different experts, politicians and sponsors such as the Mayor of Athens, Dr. Demetris Francis Lekkas, Dr. Nikolaos Thomaidis and the Prince Sultan Bin Abdulaziz (International Prize for Water), main sponsor of the event. All of them highlighted the importance of this conference where knowledge exchange and interconnections between researchers are build up in pursuit of environmental protection and restoration.

On September the 2nd, the event was split into three rooms, including both physical and online speeches and plenary sessions, where attendants were able to make questions and interact with the speakers in real time. The sessions were focused on water resources, water and wastewater treatment and reuse, solid waste management, advance oxidation processes, climate change mitigation and adaptation, emerging pollutants and microplastics. This last topic was highlighted with speeches focused on the fate of microplastics, their detection and their interactions with other pollutants. It is worth noting the plenary lecture of Damià Barceló, which versed on the emerging concern about microplastics after the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic; due to the plastic wastes associated with masks, gloves, PCRs, etc. There were also pre-recorded flash presentations of posters, which were also exposed both physically and online. Furthermore, 4 different virtual sessions were available which included more speeches about the previous topics, but also sessions versed on heavy metals in the environment and energy technologies and sustainability.

On September the 3rd, the event included a total of 21 physical and virtual sessions focused on spatial environmental planning, biomonitoring of emerging pollutants, environmental biotechnology and bioenergy, air pollution, life cycle analysis, food waste, ecology environmental change and management, forest and agricultural sustainability, food waste, hydrology and water resources, among other topics. It is worth highlighting the plenary lecture by Dr. Adrian Covaci, which versed on the human biomonitoring of emerging pollutants as a promising tool for human health risk assessment and the CLIMPACT network plenary lecture and session, which focused on the climate change impact due to the worldwide anthropogenic pressure, and the future perspectives and challenges facing climate changes for the area of Greece (in particular) and the Mediterranean (in general). Furthermore, a virtual workshop on contaminated soil management was also imparted.

On September the 4th, the last day of the conference, physical sessions were versed on many interesting topics, such as environmental health, innovative environmental solutions, circular economy, industrial symbiosis or wastewater-based epidemiology for COVID-19 monitoring, etc. The plenary lecture by Susan Richardson on the regulation of toxic disinfection by-products, and the sessions exploring the possibilities of waste water epidemiology for the COVID-19 detection and future research, among others, were very interesting.

In the evening, a closing session was celebrated, including a lovely conference dinner with nice Greek food and a farewell speech from Dr. Lekkas. The celebration of the CEST2021 Awards was not possible due to the COVID measures and the winners were communicated via email.

The CEST2021 conference included a program covering a wide range of topics related to the environmental science. Furthermore, it explored the possibility of organization of hybrid international conferences, which make easier the attendance to these events and reduce the greenhouse gas emissions due to travelling (such as virtual conferences do already), but at the same time enable the possibility of physical attendance. I would like to acknowledge SECyTA for the financial support and the opportunity to attend the CEST2021 conference.

Rodrigo Álvarez Ruiz

PhD Student

Centro de Investigaciones sobre Desertificación (CIDE)

University of Valencia