WORKSHOP ABSTRACT

Anthropology and climate change: The potentials and pitfalls of Anthropocene engagements

Organizer: Alexandra MEYER, Susanna GARTLER
E-Mail Address: alexandra.meyer@univie.ac.at

Abstract: Climate change has emerged as a central research topic in anthropology. Not only does anthropology have a lot to contribute to the study of climate change both methodologically and theoretically (Barnes et al. 2013), but climate change and the Anthropocene more broadly have also driven recent theoretical developments within the discipline. The environmental changes we are witnessing re-actualize fundamental questions about the relationship between nature and culture that have contributed greatly to the development of the discipline (Dove & Carpenter, 2009), while urging us to think in new ways about human-environment relations. In the words of Hulme (2010), climate change is "performing valuable work", by dissolving contested distinctions between nature and culture, the local and the global, and between matter and discourse. At the same time, critics warn that this dissolution of categories might prevent us from arriving at scientific insights and is unable to recognize the specific configurations of human agency responsible for the current environmental crises (Malm 2017). Addressing the ambiguous contribution of the Anthropocene to Anthropology, Bruno Latour (2014) has called the concept a "poisonous gift" to the discipline, due to its potential for rethinking the human in the Earth system (and thereby increasing the relevance of Anthropology), while running the risk of overemphasizing human agency.
This session seeks to explore what Anthropology can gain from grappling with climate change and the Anthropocene. We welcome both conceptual and empirical contributions examining the theoretical and/or methodological opportunities and challenges inherent in such engagement.

SESSION SCHEDULE

Monday, September 23, 2024 | Slot 3 | Room 1

Fasco Chengula: Knowing weather, strengthening livelihoods: the role of Indigenous knowledge weather forecasting in fishing communities in coastal Tanzania

Adelia Rachman: Indonesia's Nickel Downstreaming Eco-Dystopia

Norbert Witt: Tawich is where I Belong – Marine Conservation and Battling Climate Change in our Homeland beside Weeneebeg and Washaybeyoh

Frida Teller: Tracing the Anthropocene in the Central German Lignite Mining District - About Absence and Creation in the Anthropocene

Sabine Schelch: Indigenous tribes' and communities' responses to climate change: In situ adaptation strategies of Native Americans in the U.S. Pacific Northwest

Monday, September 23, 2024 | Slot 4 | Room 1
Annalee Sekulic: Multispecies Care of Olea europaea in the time of European Union Accession: the case of Lun Olive Gardens, Croatia

Padma Rigzin: Seeing the snow leopard in digital spaces and in Ladakh in the Anthropocene

Zdenka Sokolickova: Anthropology, Anthropocene and Antarctica: A trip to Antarctica as living in denial, or rite of passage?

Andrian Vlakhov: Talking about Climate Change When Nobody Believes in It: Ethnographic Experiences from Russian Arctic

Aastha Tyagi: 'I cannot be 'objective', the planet needs us now!': Emotions as a site of solidarity building among climate scientists

SESSION PAPERS

Knowing weather, strengthening livelihoods: the role of Indigenous knowledge weather forecasting in fishing communities in coastal Tanzania

Fasco Chengula

Weather and climate forecasting play a crucial role in bolstering resilience against severe events that disproportionately affect marginalized communities. Despite advancements in technology, the reliability of weather forecasts remains low in Tanzania. There is a growing recognition of the importance of indigenous knowledge systems (IKS) in weather forecasting, particularly in mitigating hazards and supporting livelihoods in developing countries. Utilizing ethnography as both a methodological and theoretical framework, this study explored how indigenous weather forecasting practices empower decision-making among fishermen within the complex fishing livelihoods of Mafia Island, Tanzania

The ethnographic fieldwork revealed that a stratification of weather prediction knowledge existed among the fishing community. This knowledge was intricately interwoven with the Islamic lunar calendar, the seasonal patterns of the Indian Ocean monsoon, and the socio-cultural and geographic milieu of the island. Recent climatic perturbations have rendered weather patterns increasingly unpredictable for fishermen, accentuating the exigency for dependable meteorological information. However, the forecasts

disseminated by governmental agencies fail to sufficiently address this exigency.

The empirical findings of this study delve into theoretical discussions within the anthropology of weather and IKS. Furthermore, it explores the dialectical interaction between traditional and conventional methods of weather forecasting and their implications for fishing livelihoods. Given the unreliability of weather information provided by the state, fishermen rely on IKS to validate conventional forecasts by comparing it with their own perceptions of accuracy. The disparity between IKS and conventional meteorological approaches underscores the necessity for their harmonious coexistence. However, the increasing dominance of state-sponsored conventional weather forecasting mechanisms marginalizes indigenous knowledge systems, endangering their transmission across generations. Consequently, there is an urgent need to integrate indigenous knowledge systems into the broader framework of weather and climate services and to develop a more comprehensive understanding of user needs to strengthen weather and climate-sensitive livelihoods in Tanzania.

Indonesia's Nickel Downstreaming Eco-Dystopia

Adelia Rachman

Nickel downstream policy demonstrates Indonesia's engagement in supporting the electric vehicle ecosystem while fostering economic transformation and acceleration, in terms of GDP growth. However, the major issues confronting the extractive-based development policy model include imprudent resource management and inequity in the risk, impact, and benefit distribution mechanisms. The investment-oriented policy performance is inextricably linked to several issues that affix to social injustice and an unsustainable environment, covering a range of pollution to the loss of land rights. This paper examines relevant studies on Indonesia's nickel downstream industry and its empirical evidence therewithal through a degrowth standpoint. The analysis focuses on policy and detrimental consequences, which further expose the state's contribution to its ecological decline, delineated as eco-dystopia. It allows us to ponder the urgency of immediately enforcing firm efforts to overcome and anticipate the negative repercussions of downstream nickel by proposing a mining moratorium. Encouraging growth is a respectable thing to generate, yet we should commit to shrinking growth if that renders abundant inauspicious drawbacks and ultimately policy reorientation is critical for attaining an equitable economy, social welfare, and sustainability.

Tawich is where I Belong – Marine Conservation and Battling Climate Change in our Homeland beside Weeneebeg and Washaybeyoh

Norbert Witt

The land between Weeneebeg (western James Bay) and Washaybeyoh (southern Hudson's Bay) has always been a sacred place that is essential for Omushkego (Swampy Cree) well-being, culture, and way of life since the time of first light. This interconnected ecosystem is also globally significant for carbon storage in their peat lands. Three elders working with and advising Mushkegowuk Council, the Tribal Organization of the people of the Muskeg (Swamp), will present Mushkegowuk Council's initiative of creating a National Marine Conservation Area (NMCA) as the first step to

implement the Omushkego Wahkohtowin Conservation Plan for land and water. Wahkohtowin refers to correct relationships between people and the natural world, which is presently negotiated with both provincial (Ontario) and national (Canada) governments

Tracing the Anthropocene in the Central German Lignite Mining District - About Absence and Creation in the Anthropocene

Frida Teller

Lignite Mining in the Central German Lignite Mining District
(CGLMD) in Eastern Germany has profoundly shaped a landscape emblematic of the Anthropocene epoch. The geological impact of human intervention is evident in both the mineral extraction process and how the landscape is being constantly restructured by humans.

Building on ethnographic and artistic research, this paper applies the method of tracing as a potential new form to encounter the Anthropocene in concrete landscapes. By conceptualizing manifestations of different temporalities as traces, the research illuminates the complex, nonlinear relationships between scientific and political discourse, and its material forms. This research argues that while diverse pasts and futures are shaping the landscape, a lack of adequate maps, accessibility, and vocabulary obscures the current state of the mining region. This paper argues that in the CGLMD, the presence is characterised by an absence, which could be caused by a missing link between Anthropocene discourse, and lived experiences.

Combining ethnographic, poetic, and organic materials sourced from the mining site, this exploration seeks to support a new cross-disciplinary literacy of the CGLMD, a landscape in the Anthropocene. Thereby, experimenting with new art-science collaboration, which so often been called for, in regard to the urgent challenges of the Anthropocene. The research thereby also evaluates the limitations of such an exploration in regards to the political economy of the region.

Indigenous tribes' and communities' responses to climate change: In situ adaptation strategies of Native Americans in the U.S. Pacific Northwest

Sabine Schelch

Emphasizing the value of anthropological research on climate change, Susan A. Crate and Mark Nuttall have pointed out: “As anthropologists we can consult with the diverse ancient wisdom of our collaborators and reflect on their capacity to adapt, be flexible and create new ways of being within their local and immediate worlds.” (Crate and Nuttall, 2024, p. 7) Thus, Anthropology can gain contextual insights in social and cultural aspects of impacts, vulnerabilities, and adaptation activities when grappling with climate change and the Anthropocene. This bears theoretical and methodological opportunities to better understand and help to advance local responses on climate change which can contribute to developing new approaches on addressing climate-related issues on the regional and/or global scale.
By centering climate change in situ adaptation strategies of Native Americans in the U.S. Pacific Northwest in my Master’s thesis (Schelch, 2024), I apply qualitative research

methods to investigate indigenous tribes' and communities' responses to climate change. Taking on a decolonial approach and focusing on the Nez Perce Tribe in Idaho within a single-case study research, place attachment and indigenous knowledges in the context of environmental immobility are argued to be pivotal for enhancing collective abilities to stay and adapt in place. Empirical results reveal the integration of historically deep-rooted, place-based indigenous knowledge and value systems in local adaptation efforts while tribal sovereignty and self-determination function as key factors. Despite facing increasing climate-induced threats, e.g. to culturally important species and foods, which further exacerbate socioeconomic disadvantages originating from historical colonialism, indigenous tribes and communities are leading manifold in situ adaptation activities. While knowledge systems are locally bound and need protection from exploitation, understanding and translating their underlying cultural values of respect, reciprocity, and environmental sustainability through a decolonial lens implicates opportunities as well as challenges for anthropological research on climate change.

Multispecies Care of Olea europaea in the time of European Union Accession: the case of Lun Olive Gardens, Croatia

Annalee Sekulic

As climates change and political responses are translated between various levels of governments, we are left to question how international policy is received and enacted at the local level. In particular, this paper explores how are ethnobotanical relationships with Olea europaea (Olive) tending and stewardships altered following harmonization with the European Union Common Agriculture Policy (CAP)?

Building from a multispecies framing of care to "pay attention" to the human communities reasoning and positioning of olive care/stewardships – including but not limited to the complete operational sequence of olive growth and tending. By patterning with the Vrtovi lunjskih maslina (Olive Gardens of Lun) during the 2024 growing session, data is cocreated by the active participant observation of human-plant relationships. Methods extend to include policy reviews and archival analysis of historical documents relating to agricultural funding and implementation of the CAP over the last 20 years, from both local and foreign organizations, aimed provide greater context and to identify moments of change or persistent practices.

Since 2010, following Croatia's accession to the EU, the Vrtovi lunjskih maslina experienced changes in care and use practices due to increased seasonal migration, intensified tourism, and climate changed induced pest increase resulting cumulatively in lower, or often absent, olive yields. The case of Lun provides a particular intersection of policy and multispecies relations, as the trees are owned by various families changing the role of care, as the land – following the end of the Cold War – is now owned by the Croatian state, complicating the approaches care and access to EU subsidies. Initial research shows, Olive-tree stewards, frame both the age of the trees, often up to 3,000 years old, and the form of the garden, being one of the world's largest wild olive groves, in attempts to build a protected space.

Seeing the snow leopard in digital spaces and in Ladakh in the Anthropocene

Padma Rigzin

In this paper, I attempt to document how a specific idea of the snow leopard emerges in documentary films on snow leopards and the organised immersive snow leopard tour, which builds into an expectation of how tourists will see the animal. Based on 14 months of ethnographic fieldwork among snow leopard tourism guides and tourists in Ladakh, the Indian trans-Himalayan region, I argue that films on snow leopards and the organised immersive snow leopard tour are the social settings where "schooling of the eye," drawing on Cristina Grasseni, takes place. Then, I show how films showcase the imbrication of digital technology and the changing climate by increasingly highlighting the ruining planet and its possible impact on snow leopards through the concept of digital Anthropocene. I then illuminate how optical devices like spotting scopes (potable telescopes) allow tourists to see that the snow leopards also look back. So, for some tourists, snow leopard tourism becomes a means to see and be seen by the snow leopard. In the last section of the paper, I follow a video captured in Ladakh by a tourist that had gone 'viral' on the Internet. Analysing the comments on the video, I argue that the circulation of such videos reinforces the value of seeing the snow leopard through the processes that school the eye. This paper contributes to the analysis of the emerging visual culture around snow leopards in the digital Anthropocene from the global South.
Keywords: Digital Anthropocene, snow leopards, gaze, schooling, tourism

Anthropology, Anthropocene and Antarctica: A trip to Antarctica as living in denial, or rite of passage?

Zdenka Sokolickova

We know climate change alters Antarctica fast (IPCC 2023). We suppose tourism to Antarctica has a negative environmental footprint, both globally and in situ. At the same, Antarctic tourism is growing quickly (from 40,000 in 2009-2010 through 74,000 pre-pandemic to over 122,000 in 2023-2024), rapidly diversifying (Nielsen & Roldan 2023), bringing wealthy tourists from polluting countries (mostly USA, China, Australia, Western Europe and Canada) to consume a melting destination. What can anthropology gain from grappling with climate change porn of calving glaciers, enjoyed on the deck of a luxurious cruise ship in a jacuzzi with a glass of champagne and lobster tails? Is Antarctic tourism a particularly striking example of living in denial (Norgaard 2011), or is there hope that experiencing Antarctica can lead to both an emotional and rational rupture in people's minds, turning them into Antarctic ambassadors (Eijgelaar et al. 2010; Vila et al. 2016), changing their behavior upon return from this Anthropo-scenic landscape?

The presentation displays an array of possible anthropological takes on Antarctic tourism as studied in the GUIDE-BEST project. Drawing on pilot interviews with tour guides and existing anthropological literature on Antarctic tourism (e.g. Kriwoken & Hardy 2018; Picard 2015; Zuev & Picard 2015), I explore Antarctic tourism as an example of human agency co-responsible for the current environmental crises, showcasing the paradox of the Anthropocene: We know we are a damaging force, yet we want to learn to care about "nature" through damaging more. Engaging with van Gennep's and Turner's theories on rites of passage, I ask whether a trip to Antarctica can be understood as the liminal phase during which realizing the horror of the Anthropocene can make it to people's hearts and

brains. Is an anthropologist studying Antarctic tourism just “an accountant of death” (Beaulieu forthcoming), or can valuable work be performed?

Talking about Climate Change When Nobody Believes in It: Ethnographic Experiences from Russian Arctic

Andrian Vlakhov

Throughout my career, I have been balancing between Russian and Western academia conducting numerous field studies in the Arctic alongside many distinguished colleagues from both traditions. However, I have continuously felt myself drifting away from the mainstream discourse of the Western tradition as many of its analytical concepts are perceived as alien in the communities I study. Some examples include sustainable development, human rights and climate change, the latter being the most notorious as the gravity of the ongoing climate change is obvious for any scholar dealing with the Arctic. While the climate change is here and most of my community research partners feel it and articulate their concerns when asked, the societal and political dynamics in Russia (and in the Soviet Union before that) have caused the dominant public discourse to operate in entirely different categories, with Western concepts considered alien, disrupting and dangerous.
Under the risk of being labeled as climate change denier (which I certainly am not), I argue that a totally different language must be designed and used to discuss the climate change with people whose habitats and livelihoods are to be affected quickest and hardest by it, namely indigenous and local communities of the Arctic. No colonial practices such as “propaganda of scientific knowledge” can be tolerated; instead, scholars should favor co-production of knowledge together with the local communities. In this task, anthropologists should play a pivotal role as the only scholars with relevant cross-cultural communication experience.
In my talk, I will share some of my own field experiences of discussing climate change with the Arctic communities and invite others to contribute to developing new approaches to talking about climate change.

'I cannot be 'objective', the planet needs us now!': Emotions as a site of solidarity building among climate scientists

Aastha Tyagi

Seminal works on emotion (most prominently Hochschild (1983)) have shown us how networks and practices produce emotions. Since then, emotions as an anthropologically produced category has been identified as important, but not studied enough. We do name emotions such as anger and fear, but studying them as mobilising techniques, especially when it comes to climate change, will give us new insights on how movements and scientists alike articulate and co-produce their own emotions, for a larger goals. Social psychology has shown us that fear does produce action, but only in the short term.

In this paper, I interrogate the emotions produced in the networks of climate scientists to understand their self-perception in the political climate of today. Climate scientists produce emotions in a variety of ways but most prominently, fear, angst and despair.

Interestingly, hope, has been seen a discursive way to engage with these emotions. The link between capacity for agential expression and solidarity (faith in social movements) is becoming stronger—also in the case of researchers studying climate change. Such a finding, re: hope, has the consequence of lending more legitimacy to the work of climate groups and researchers alike.