



## SESSION ABSTRACT

### Environmental activism and citizen science in comparative perspective

**Organizer:** Ger Duijzings (University Regensburg), Nebi Bardhoshi (Academy for Albanian Studies)

**Abstract:** In this panel we would like to explore forms of local environmental activism and emerging citizens' science in different regions of the world, particularly exploring instances of such activism in 'post-colonial' or 'post-imperial' geographical areas such as Southeastern Europe, Siberia, Latin America, Africa, the Middle East, and Southeast Asia, including amongst others marginalised groups and indigenous populations. We invite papers that deal ethnographically with local and grass-roots responses to a wide range of environmental issues, such as the use of genetically modified crops and the application of pesticides in agriculture, transnational waste trade and waste colonialism, mining and the use of fossil fuels and air pollution, the intensive use of hydropower affecting river habitats, the local effects of global warming, etc. In this panel we will explore how concerned citizens and NGO activists organise protests, what are the stages of social and political mobilisation, how they develop forms of citizen science, and how they may include scientific and legal expertise in their environmental justice struggles. Following Arancibia & Motta (2019), we focus on the problem of 'undone science', i.e. forms of (vernacular and experiential) knowledge marginalised and dismissed by the authorities and powerful corporate interests. This can be potentially remedied by the systematic advancement of legal and scientific counter-expertise that builds on local and vernacular forms of knowledge. The panel's objective is to compare, reflect on, and engage with forms of best practice, in order to make environmental struggles ultimately more effective..

## SESSION SCHEDULE

**Wednesday, September 28, 2022 | Slot 1 | Room 3**

*Eva Schwab: Air Pollution and the Neoliberal “Culture of Blame”: Environmental Citizen Sciences in the Segregated City*

*Sermin Güven: Women Building Resilience Against Environment Crises in North East Syria / JINWAR*

*Urszula Małeczka: Forest movements and its practices. The need for common management of nature*

*Hubert Tubacki: Activist anthropology as knowledge produced during local climate resistance practices*

## SESSION PAPERS

### **Air Pollution and the Neoliberal “Culture of Blame”: Environmental Citizen Sciences in the Segregated City**

*Eva Schwab*

In 2020 Belgrade won a questionable “first” by becoming the city with the highest air pollution in Europe. Undoubtedly, as in all cases of urban air pollution, multiple culprits can be named. In Belgrade, next to cars and industry, these are the seasonal burning of surrounding fields by farmers, the burning of waste as a consequence of energy poverty, and also the city landfill Vinča which repeatedly stood in flames that year. While the sources of air pollution are multiple and notoriously difficult to pin down, in one neighbourhood in Belgrade, air pollution became the target of a neoliberal “culture of blame” and responsabilization (Storey 2022; Sletto and Nygren 2019). Local citizens organized anti-pollution protests and founded *Facebook* groups reserved for the documentation of acts of air pollution committed by one particular group: inhabitants of an informal settlement, mostly Roma. Next to pictures and videos of their neighbouring settlement, these citizens also used particle-measuring devices to collect evidence and report their neighbours to the communal police. In this paper I will present my findings from a digital ethnography on this local mobilization against air pollution and analyze them against the background of observations on the restructuring of the local state. I will argue that environmental citizen sciences, as it emerged here in the form of digital vigilantism (Trottier 2017), can be tied to the roll-back of the caring and provisioning role of the state combined with an increase in its policing power, most notably, the introduction of tools of participatory governance and a new citizen app (*Beokom*) that encouraged citizens to document and report forms of communal disorder. Specifically, I seek to analyze how this local mobilization against urban air pollution troubles the distinction between grass-roots, contentious politics, and a state-induced, participatory model of governance (Miraftab 2004).

### **Women Building Resilience Against Environment Crises in North East Syria/ JINWAR**

*Sermin Güven*

Cultural anthropology has a long tradition of scholars becoming advocates for vulnerable communities. Today, in the face of increasing environmental hazards, a growing number of effective alliances are forming between local communities and

scientists.

One of the things I would like to focus on in this context is mutual learning and knowledge exchange, where scientists may be involved but not necessarily. I am interested in spaces where people experiment with their own approaches to science. The focus of my research presented here is on the cooperation of the Northeast Syrian Village Project JINWAR with a Berlin-based community garden project.

JINWAR, is an ecological women's village, whose foundations were laid in 2016 by women near the city of al Hasakah during the Syrian civil war. It is also among the places in this region where there is severe water scarcity and which is nevertheless increasingly affected by climate change-related extreme weather such as flash floods. Together with international allies and scientists, the women are trying to restore ecosystems in their environment and secure their water resources.

At the same time, within the framework of JINEOLOGY (kur. "women's science"), they experiment with new forms of learning and building communities. This is an activist movement that also exemplifies the term of a kind of 'undone science'. One major goal is to increase overall resilience:

The women for instance draw on local knowledge of medicinal herbs, their cultivation and use. They also test new approaches to make rainwater usable and to provide water with the help of solar pumps. The women of JINWAR have close relationships with a women's garden project in Berlin and both benefit from the mutual exchange while trying to stand up against the degradation of their environment.

### **Forest movements and its practices. The need for common management of nature**

*Urszula Małecka*

Over the last five years the number of local forest initiatives in Poland has been increasing. More and more people are interested in what the forest looks like, who it belongs to and what its future will be. People are also starting to question the validity of forest management carried out by the State Forests institution, which oversees 82 percent of the forests in Poland. What does the growing number of forest activists say about the Polish society? Who has a right to the forest? Can forest movements contribute to a broader change in the way nature is perceived and treated, not only at the local, but also at the national or systemic and cultural level?

In my talk, I will draw on research of forest grass-roots movement from Poznan - Moratorium for trees in Poznan's protective forests. Activists from this group oppose the cutting of old trees in the Darzybór Forest using various methods such as searching for natural and social values of the forest, attempts to create a nature conservation area, and media publicity. As a researcher and activist, I participate in the group's activities, working especially with its charismatic activist-biologist leader. In the group, scientific knowledge is intertwined with the social values of being in the woods and manifests itself in a variety of ways. I will talk about how the group talks about the forest and what methods they use to dialogue with foresters. I will refer to the words of Agata A. Konczal (2015) that the future of forestry depends not only on foresters, but on society and its expectations

## Activist anthropology as knowledge produced during local climate resistance practices.

Hubert Tubacki

I will present the practices of my research partners creating transnational activist networks among activist groups in Poland, Czech Republic and Germany (Obóz dla Klimatu, Limits jsme my and Ende Gelände), which I co-created. Obóz dla Klimatu operates mainly in Poland, Limity jsme my in the Czech Republic, and Ende Gelände - the most numerous and known for organizing civil disobedience actions - in Germany. Limity jsme my and Obóz dla Klimatu are mainly involved in organizing climate camps, i.e. meetings of activists that sometimes turn into demonstrations or acts of civil disobedience. Each collective identifies itself as anti-coal, anti-capitalist, and anti-fascist, marking the inseparability of these three demands. While co-creating these groups, we formed specific relationships that built mutual trust, which became the basis for the bond that developed between us. As time went by, my activity became more and more involved. When we as academics step into the role of researcher-activists, we do not stop at participating in the lives of our research partners and learning from them, but we also step into other roles. Together with the people from whom we would ordinarily obtain information, we create new social relationships, taking an activist. Dealing with the role of the activist researcher, I developed my interpretation of activist anthropology not only as a form of engagement, but as a reinterpretation of participant observation. My proposal for engaged practice is an activist anthropology, which may become a value proposition for anthropologists who want to do science, but not in an ivory tower. Young researchers are searching for their way, they are engaged in and committed to creating science for the common good but confront the reality of credits, grants and accountability. In this reality, more and more anthropology students feel the need to get more involved in the field.