



SESSION ABSTRACT

What Is the Future of Anthropological Collaboration with Russia?

Organizer: Peter Schweitzer (University of Vienna), Olga Povoroznyuk (University of Vienna)

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Abstract: As the world was shocked by Russia's invasion of the Ukraine on February 24, 2022, so was the global anthropological community. Starting with the 1980s, collaboration between the previously separated camps of Soviet and western anthropologists slowly picked up steam, and became a lively exchange of ideas and personnel by the 1990s. Part of this new relationship was a significant increase in fieldwork conducted by foreign anthropologists within the Russian Federation, and, to a lesser degree, by Russian colleagues abroad. Now, both kinds of fieldwork, as well as institutional forms of cooperation seem under severe threat. While personal contacts that have been built up over decades will hopefully survive, the question of the opportunities for institutional and organisational collaboration under these new geopolitical conditions looms large.

Ideally, there will be nothing to talk about in September 2022, as the situation has reversed back to "normal". While we are optimists, this scenario is unfortunately unrealistic. Thus, the session will address whatever situation the anthropological world find itself in in September 2022. We plan to hold the session in the format of a roundtable by invitation.

SESSION SCHEDULE

Round Tabel

Tuesday, September 27, 2022 | Slot 4 | Room 4

Volha Biziukova

Donatas Brandisauskas

Stephan Dudeck

Bjarge Schwenke Fors

Oleg Kuznetsov

Florian Stammer

Zinaida Vasilyeva

Virginie Vaté

SESSION PAPERS

Rethinking the focus and practice of anthropological research in Russia and other post-Soviet countries at today's breaking point.

Volha Biziukova

Volha Biziukova is a post-doctoral fellow at the Central European University. She received her Ph.D. in Cultural and Social Anthropology from the University of Vienna. She works on the intersection of state, class, and consumption with a special focus on the post-Soviet space. For her PhD project entitled "Russia's new middle classes and new consumption policies: changing consumption practices, forging strategic autonomy, and negotiating relationships with a de-responsibilizing state", Volha Biziukova conducted intermittent fieldwork in two Russian cities (Moscow and Smolensk) from 2015 to 2018.

Siberian ethnographic fieldwork at a distance

Donatas Brandisauskas

Donatas Brandišauskas holds a PhD (2009) in social anthropology from the University of Aberdeen, (The Department of the North) in Scotland. Since 2004 he has been conducting ethnographic fieldwork research among indigenous Evenki reindeer herding and hunting communities in East Siberia and Russian Far East. His research interest focusses on human/non-human relations, animism, perception of landscape and rock art and strategies of reindeer herding and hunting of nomadic Evenki living in Zabaikal Region, Buriatia Republic, Sakha Republic, Amur Region and Khabarovsk Region. He is a professor and a senior researcher at the Institute of Asia and Transcultural studies and Faculty of History of Vilnius University in Lithuania. His monograph [*Leaving Footprints in the Taiga: Luck, Spirits and Ambivalence among the Siberian Orochen Reindeer Herders and Hunters*](#) (2017) is an ethnographic study of ontology of luck among contemporary reindeer herders and hunters. His current

ethnographic research includes themes of indigenous land use and multispecies interactions.

Solidarity with Indigenous partners and academic colleagues should be more important than saving our careers

Stephan Dudeck

Bio:

I'm an anthropologist working in Siberia and the North of Russia for almost 30 years. Starting with an action anthropology approach during my student years at the Freie University of Berlin I was always involved in establishing collaboration and partnership with Indigenous communities and activists. I defended my dissertation at Leipzig University during my stay at the Siberian studies group at the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology in Halle/Saale based on fieldwork with partners among the Khanty Indigenous people in Western Siberia. Later at the Arctic Centre of the University of Lapland in Rovaniemi I was able to broaden my geographical scope to the European North of Russia. Since 2014 I am working at the European University at Saint Petersburg at the Center for Arctic Social Studies, doing research as well as supervising students at the faculty of Anthropology. My engagement in research was always not merely academically motivated and I saw my work in visual anthropology, cultural documentation, oral history always in the context of collaboration and engagement together with indigenous friends and activists.

Collaboration was always challenging, but especially after my life in Russia practically came to a halt already during the pandemic and more so since the start of the Russian aggression. However, I am continuing to communicate, supervise, support and plan for future work with my students, colleagues, Indigenous partners in Russia and Ukraine.

Abstract:

This paper summarises some of my experience in research and social activism in collaboration with indigenous communities and activists, artists and cinematographers in the Russian North and aim to look from them into the future. For more than 20 years, I have been engaged in social science research at the crossroads of science and social activism and did research on forms of indigenous self-representation and resilience in Russia's oil-provinces in Western Siberia. My scholarly interest grew with social engagement in indigenous struggles for sustainable futures, land and resource rights and the preservation of indigenous rights to self-determination in the face of dispossessions and resettlements by the state and the oil industry. I established close relations and friendships with indigenous partners, some of which have already lasted for more than 25 years. Departing from a reflection of my partners' and my own experiences in the field of co-production of knowledge, research methods based on long-term relationships, responsibility and reciprocity I reflect about the past and look into the resilience of such experiences in the light of recent events. The situation of indigenous people living in an authoritarian state and lacking effectively functioning institutions guaranteeing their rights remain a particular challenge to the development of collaborative research methods. How robust are the diverse networks I am involved in and how can they survive? Is it still possible to produce outcome to be used in indigenous and scholarly communities, but also in the broader societal discussions on the rights of indigenous peoples in the Russian Arctic and beyond in order to build sustainable futures? Could the involvement in informality and reciprocity secure the

responsibilities build up in the last decades and help to manage power relations and precarious conditions?

Anthropology and the new Iron Curtain: Current status and future prospects for cross-border cooperation

Bjarge Schwenke Fors

Bjarge Schwenke Fors is Head of Department at the Barents Institute at UIT The Arctic University of Norway. He holds a PhD in social anthropology with a specialization in border studies (thesis Performances: Politics, art and tourism where Norway meets Russia). His research relates to identity construction, cross-border interaction, and political and cultural performances in borderlands. Fors has conducted extensive ethnographic research on the Norwegian-Russian border and in the Caucasus. He is a member of the research group Russian Space? Concepts, Practices, Representations. The group is engaged in a multidisciplinary study of Russian attitudes to their own and other people's /nations' spaces.

Social science matters. International solidarity of researchers against the war

Oleg Kuznetsov

Oleg Kuznetsov is a researcher at the Laboratory of Social Anthropology, Collège de France. Graduated from Trans-Baikal State University, he received his doctoral degree at the Institute of the History of Material Culture, RAS (Saint Petersburg). He was a professor at Social Anthropology Dept. at Trans-Baikal State University and Deputy Director for research at Museum of Natural and Cultural History of Trans-Baikal region. Recently he holds a position of senior researcher at the Institute of the History of Material Culture, RAS (Saint Petersburg).

He conducted field research in Trans-Baikal and Irkutsk regions, Aginsk Buryat Autonomous District, Republic of Buryatia and Mongolia. His research covers issues of ethnology and ethnoarchaeology of Evenki, conflict between industrial development and traditional land-use at North of Trans-Baikal, as well as the revival of Shamanism among Aginsk Buryat. Oleg Kuznetsov has collaborated with Norwegian Institute for Cultural Heritage Research (NIKU), Maison des sciences de l'homme (FMSH) and Laboratoire d'anthropologie sociale (Collège de France). He is a member of Scientific Committee at journal "Études Mongoles et Sibériennes, Centrasiatiques et Tibétaines" (France). He published an article "Ethnoarchaeology of Evenki Reindeer Hunters in Siberia: an Application to Late Paleolithic Settlements and Habitation Structures Analysis" at "Ethnoarchaeology: Current research and field methods". BAR (Oxford, 2013) and the co-publication with Ole Grøn, Inger Holm Olsen and Hans Tommervik "Reindeer Hunters and Herders: Settlement Patterns and Environmental Impact" at Kulturminneforskningens mangfold. NIKU 1994-1999. (Oslo, 1999).

Thoughts on rescuing the remains of circumpolar Arctic Anthropology

Florian Stammler

Florian Stammler is Research Professor at the University of Lapland's Arctic Centre (Finland), established and coordinates its anthropology research team. He has led Finnish and international research projects and consortia and published extensively on Arctic human social and cultural diversity and similarity across national borders. Stammler is a well-known expert on the Russian Arctic, where he has lived for years,

working together with local people on topics such as the relation between humans and their environment in the Arctic. This also includes the analysis of relations to the spirits, between the advance of (extractive) industries and rural/indigenous livelihoods, notions of community well-being among indigenous herders as well as Arctic urban industrial youth, and relations between states and their remotest Arctic human subjects. His monograph "Reindeer Nomads Meet the Market" (2005) is the last ethnography of nomadic Yamal-Nenets reindeer herders before the advent of the big gas industry to the Yamal Peninsula. He has also co-authored articles with Russian colleagues as well as worked with them in Russian-funded research projects. Through cooperation with international TV he has also helped popularising the Russian Arctic in the West, such as on the BBC, ("Arctic with Bruce Parry", "Frozen Planet") Discovery ("Tribe"), ZDF/arte ("Terra X"), and others.

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Collaborations under condition of "cancel culture" and the question of responsibility

Zinaida Vasilyeva

Zinaida Vasilyeva is an anthropologist working on the intersection of anthropology of knowledge, history, and science and technology studies. Throughout her career, she studied how materialities (objects, technologies, infrastructures) convey, co-produce and/or contest different forms of knowledge and values attributed to them. In her Ph.D. "From Skills to Selves: Recycling 'Soviet DIY' in Post-Soviet Russia" (2019, University of Neuchâtel, Switzerland), she demonstrated how meanings and values attributed to DIY material culture in the Soviet society have been challenged and contested in the post-Soviet context. Today, she works as a postdoc researcher at the STS Department of the Munich Technical University.

What to do? Dilemmas and decisions on how to move on with research in Russia and collaboration with Russian colleagues

Virginie Vaté

Virginie Vaté is a tenured research fellow at the (French) National Centre for Scientific Research (C.N.R.S), where she is a member of the Group "Societies, Religions, Secularizations" (French acronym: GSRL). She has been doing research in Chukotka, Northeastern Siberia, since 1993 and in Alaska since 2011. Her research addresses issues such as Shamanism and Christianity, human-animal relations, and gender. On multiple occasions, she has collaborated with colleagues in Chukotka and in 'mainland' Russia. In 2007, she coordinated a section of the Canadian journal *Etudes Inuit Studies* (vol. 31, no. 1-2) devoted to research done by local and indigenous researchers. With the Chukchi researcher Galina Diatchkova, she co-published a chapter in an edited volume (Donahoe & Habeck 2011). She was co-P.I. with Vladimir Davydov of the project "Understanding Local Knowledge and its Contemporary Reinterpretations in Siberia: Russian and French Anthropologists Share Perspectives" – a project that led to a 5-year agreement of collaboration (2015-2019) and the co-publication of an article with Elena Davydova in the journal *Kunstkamera*. More recently, with Dmitriy Oparin, she co-edited a special issue of *Etudes Inuit Studies* (vol. 45, no. 1-2) devoted to research in Chukotka, which includes 19 contributions by authors who come from and are based in many different parts of the world, including Russia and Chukotka. This issue was being finalized as the war in Ukraine started.