



SESSION ABSTRACT

Living with changing environments in an overheated world

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The world appears to be changing ever more rapidly, unevenly and irreversibly accompanied by a growing prevalent connections between human activities and these “accelerated changes” (Eriksen 2016). Not merely economic, political or social changes, but also all kinds of environmental changes are – in the anthropocene – increasingly afforded to human activities rather than natural processes. Exponential rise of environmental changes influenced by very diverse local, regional and global policies and other factors, heighten a sense of awareness of complex interrelations between peoples, things, technologies and places in seemingly unrelated localities.

In the past, anthropological analysis used to understand place and environment predominantly as a relatively stable backdrop to human activities, which radically changed in the past decades and one dimension brought about by spatial studies was also its attention on the changeability of places in terms of morphology, socio-political location of places, their embeddedness in the global production chains etc.

The panel aims to explore how people perceive spatial or environmental changes, e.g. erosion, pollution, degradation due to extractive, agricultural or industrial technologies, and environments affected by climate changes, and attribute responsibility to various agents and influences, amongst them industrialization, urbanization, environmental policies and global capitalism, climate changes and other human-induced factors or natural processes. We are also interested in the ways in which sensory environmental relationships are entangled in people's imaginings of the future.

The intention is to facilitate comparative discussion, based on studies of diverse environmental changes, and highlight, among other things, how people connect locally manifested changes to global forces, how do they perceive their irreversibility, address accountability, take action, alter their ecologies, remember their past and imagine their futures in environmental contexts. We are interested in cases of living with changing environments and invite papers either ethnographically detailing sites of “overheating”, i.e. how people on the local levels perceive, imagine and cope with environmental changes, or papers that theoretically reflect upon human perception and understanding of environmental changes, coping practices and imaginings futures of living with changing environments.

SESSION SCHEDULE

Tuesday, September 29, 2020 | Slot 3 | Room 2

Natalia Doloisio: *Locals' perception of permafrost thaw in the Sakha Republic (Russia): Dimensions at risk in face of climate change*

Jaka Repič: *Overheating in the Alps: Living with changing environment in the Slovenian Alps*

Zdenka Sokolickova and Thomas Hylland Eriksen: *"My world is melting": Perception of environmental change in Longyearbyen, Svalbard*

Tuesday, September 29, 2020 | Slot 4 | Room 2

Christine Weber: *Child Marriage, Marriage Payments and Drought: Lessons from Bangladesh and Ethiopia*

Ana Svetel: *Living with and living through the environmental changes in northeastern Iceland*

Blaž Bajič: *discussion*

Tuesday, September 29, 2020 | Slot 5 | Room 2

Gabriele Weichart: *When the world goes down ...*

Ivan Rajković: *Rivers to the people: Ecopopulist universality in the Balkan Mountains*

Nataša Gregorič Bon: *discussion and concluding remarks*

SESSION PAPERS

Locals' perception of permafrost thaw in the Sakha Republic (Russia): Dimensions at risk in face of climate change

Doloisio, Natalia (UVSQ/CEARC Laboratory, Puteaux, FRA)

The Sakha Republic (Russian Federation), covers a surface of over 3.000.000 km² and more than 40% of it is in the Arctic Circle. This region is characterized by its extent and extreme climatic conditions, but also by its historical processes and its cultural diversity.

Trying to understand how climate change and accelerated permafrost thawing impact northern communities requires paying attention to several complex systems simultaneously. Along the region of Yakutia, some common impacts related to these previously mentioned processes are observed and are clearly described and valued by locals. During the fieldwork in Tiksi and Bykovsky (Sakha Republic - July 2019), semi-structured interviews have been conducted in order to obtain further

information on the local specificities of risk perception and the social significance attributed to changes unchained by climate change and permafrost thaw. Qualitative analysis of the narratives revealed different levels of concerns between the populations of these two settlements which can be associated, among others, to their site-specific characteristics: urban vs rural settlement, diversified economy vs fishing-oriented economy, demographical composition and geographical and geological situation. Despite of their remoteness and similar socio-economic challenges, locals' narratives demonstrated that permafrost thaw expresses differently or at different rates in Tiksi and Bykovskiy and therefore priorities for action from their populations also vary.

Overheating in the Alps: Living with changing environment in the Slovenian Alps

Repič, Jaka (University of Ljubljana, Ljubljana, SLO)

Various processes demonstrate that European Alpine environment is among the world regions most markedly affected by global climate changes and various human activities. The fragile Alpine environment appears to be in the process of rapid changes: most notable demonstration of these changes are the melting glaciers all across the Alps, but there are also changes in temperatures, climate patterns, precipitation, and changes that result from changes in human activities: forestation of grazing lands, changes in plant and animal species etc. I want to address some of the environmental changes also in the historical perspective – people have lived with the changing environment as well as actively produced its changes. Even though the Alps are currently a prominent site of 'overheating' in the sense of intensive, accelerated and interconnected changes due to human activities and non-human processes, the local population has historically lived with the changing environment.

The presentation will primarily focus on the Slovenian Alps, particularly the area of the Bohinj valley and surrounding mountains, and will present several examples of environmental changes that were produced by direct or indirect human activities such as the settlement patterns, subsistence economy, forestation, mining and exploitation of land resources, and lately increased mobility and tourism. I also want to address how current changes due to 'overheating' – as global climate changes and pressures of tourism and mobilities are perceived and imagined by the locals.

“My world is melting”: Perception of environmental change in Longyearbyen, Svalbard

Sokolickova, Zdenka (University of Hradec Kralove, Longyearbyen, CZE) & Eriksen, Thomas Hylland (University of Oslo, Oslo, NOR)

The town of 2,300 inhabitants at 78 degrees latitude north on the Norwegian archipelago is both extreme and symptomatic. With annual temperature increase by 5 °C since 1970s, the impacts of climate change noticed by many include less sea ice, warmer weather, permafrost thaw, more precipitation including heavy rain, shorter winter season, retreating glaciers, erosion, avalanche and landslide danger. It is impossible to ignore that something is happening to the environment, that the landscape and weather patterns we knew once keep changing. Yet environmental change is difficult to conceptualize in terms of time and space because our scales often do not overlap. There is a gap between scientific knowledge, prominent and vibrant in Longyearbyen with a high concentration of Arctic researchers, and power to

come up with measures, make decisions and implement them in the local context. The recent shutdown of coal mines was intended as a green gesture but the picture gets complicated as it has been replaced by tourism and neither environmental, nor economic or social impacts of the move seem to be only positive. Outsiders often look at Svalbard as a place where "it is happening" and believe that people living here are environmentally conscious and engaged, given that the place is impacted so clearly. The reality is much more nuanced and a whole range of attitudes is present here, from explicit mocking and denial, through general concern that in some cases leads to engagement, to fear that might be as depressing as energizing. For some, climate change has little relevance as they are worried about other, more "burning" issues. While tourism has been put on a halt, the pandemic cooled the overheated town down and made the legal and socio-economic gap between Norwegians and non-Norwegians even more visible, climate change is being mentioned in the local discourse especially when it comes to building industry, and landslide and avalanche prevention. The paper is based on the project boREALIFE: Overheating in the High Arctic (time span 2019–2021) carried on in Longyearbyen, Svalbard, mentored by Thomas Hylland Eriksen.

Child Marriage, Marriage Payments and Drought: Lessons from Bangladesh and Ethiopia

Weber, Christine (University of Amsterdam, Amsterdam, NLD)

In light of proceeding climate change, it is of particular importance and urgency to know its socioeconomic impacts. One potential but detrimental adaption strategy of families in countries of the Global South is marrying off their underage daughter. This stems from the fact that they relieve the household resources in terms of food and educational fees and additionally receive a bride price in some countries. Contrary, the climate change-induced child marriage rate might decrease due to insufficient funds from the male side or for wedding celebrations. Against this background, this paper focuses on the question of how climate change, captured by drought impacts the probability of marriage among rural female adolescents in two agriculture-dependent countries that practice opposite directions of marriage payments: *dowry* (bride to the groom) in Bangladesh and *bride price* (groom to the bride) in Ethiopia. The main results indicate that the likelihood of child marriage significantly increases in post-drought years irrespective of the direction of marriage payments. The strong relationship between climate change-induced drought and child marriage that is found points to the fact that marrying off a daughter is pressured by short-term economic conditions. However, the decision is followed by long-term consequences that determine the prospects of girls concerning education, health and general well-being later in life. These findings should attract the attention of policymakers to design mitigation programs for groups most vulnerable and policies most effective to prevent and eventually end the practice of child marriage.

Living with and living through the environmental changes in northeastern Iceland

Svetel, Ana (University of Ljubljana, Ljubljana, SLO)

Environmental changes do not affect only the adaptational strategies of the individuals and communities but also co-shape the individual and collective imaginings of various spatialities and temporalities. Local experiences and narratives are related to the personal, family and local histories and memories which can structure the way the environmental changes are thought of and placed into everyday practices. Diaries, visual material, notable events, but also art and literary works can serve as referential points through which changes are perceived and articulated. Transformations of the environment are usually described through the comparison with the past times. While some of the changes are more straightforwardly comprehensible and explainable, the others are, at least as shown in my ethnographic material, introduced with more ambiguity and hesitation. They might be expressed as changing atmospheres (Bohme 1992) of a place or as not verbally explicable but nevertheless sensed (Pink 2009) transformations. In my paper I will illustrate these aspects with the ethnographic examples from Thorshofn, Iceland, where I have conducted fieldwork as a part of my PhD research. In contextualizing environmental changes I will outline the more global aspects (Iceland being part of Subarctic and Northern European region), the national dimension (the changing landscape and often disastrous geomorphological activities co-shaped the perception of the other or more recent environmental transformations), and the local perspective, where both fishing and agriculture practices are deeply intertwined with the environmental changes. Moreover, the local perspective of Thorshofn and its surroundings shows a relatedness between the environmental changes on the one hand and the infrastructural systems, tourist imageries, the ideas of remoteness and islandness on the other. Changes are conceptualized through various layers of temporalities, one of them being the annual cycle with its seasonal landscapes (Jones 2007) but also through different non-human species - I will bring forth the case of migratory birds. Finally, I will look at how the emic notions and observations of climate change are reflected in the seemingly "mundane" weather talk. As the weather envelops us (Ingold 2005) it also affects the experiences, practices and emotions when living with and through the changing environments.

When the world goes down ...

Weichert, Gabriele (University of Vienna, Vienna, AUT)

This paper deals with environmental change as a result of natural or human-made disaster and its impact on local populations.

I will discuss these issues by presenting a case study from Indonesia. There, in the Province of East Java at the outskirts of the city of Sidoarjo, an underground mud volcano first erupted in 2006. Since then, water and oily mud has spilled over a vast area and inundated at least nine villages. More than 10.000 people had to be evacuated and relocated. It is widely believed that the Indonesian company PT Lapindo Brantas caused the sudden eruption when drilling for gas with insufficient technical equipment.

Although there were no direct casualties to be mourned, the disaster has had severe and long-term negative effects on the environment as well as on people's social, economic and health conditions. The struggle for adequate compensation and other

kinds of support from Lapindo Brantas and the government, which after fourteen years is still going on, has further led to sentiments of helplessness, frustration and resignation. My own research in the area focused on small-scale tourism initiatives that the local people had set up alongside the shore of the mud lake. Over the years, these businesses have become less successful and now seem to reflect the local residents' notions of pessimism and passivity.

In my paper, I will compare the situation at "Lumpur Lapindo" with other cases of disaster and their commodification in western Indonesia. I will further aim at explanations for differences in perceptions of the environment, as well as in coping practices and imaginings of current and future lives.

Rivers to the people: Ecopopulist universality in the Balkan Mountains

Rajković, Ivan (University of Vienna, Vienna, AUT)

The state regimes in the Balkans are increasingly targeting natural resources as the latest frontier. Such is the plan to create 3,500 small hydropower plants - a carbon-free technology which, however, implies putting rivers into pipes, with devastating socio-environmental impact. In the popular imagination, such development is seen as pushing beyond the limits of commodification, something that endangers 'life' itself. Focusing on the ageing region of Southeast Serbia - where water grabbing is compounded by rapid depopulation and fervent peasant-cum-ecological activism - I explore the 'River Defenders of Stara planina' - a motley network of affected villagers and their urban kin, ecologists and nature lovers, and a wide chunk of citizenry mobilised through social networks. Waging a 'water war' against the investors, the guardians increasingly oppose the 'people' to the 'state'. But exactly what 'people' they summon? Neither nation, citizenship or class describe them fully. Rather, water here functions as an empty signifier - a nexus in creating an alternative eco-populist universality. Environmental struggle thus generalises other social frontlines. But unlike in Laclau and Mouffe's model, 'life' is not merely the stuff of signs. Its equivalences are made in living webs and cycles, an intergenerational moral ecology connecting the dead, the living, and those still to be born. And if rivers became the basis of new insurgent kinship, it is because they could be imagined as the last shared substance, at once traversing different places and times. Such rivers connect, as well as divide.