



## SESSION ABSTRACT

### **The juncture of dis-/comforts: Environment and tourism in mountain regions in Europe and beyond.**

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Alpine regions in Europe have received significantly more attention by social-cultural anthropologists in the mid-20th century than they receive currently. Acknowledging anthropology's essential interest in social and cultural change this decline of interest is surprising because mountain regions have become conspicuous localities and signifiers of change since then. In particular, two global phenomena have been transforming mountains and livelihood therein in profound and ever increasing ways, namely tourism and, more recently, climate change. Both affect the natural, built and social environment in manifold ways.

The natural environment is the key resource in alpine tourism. However, the ongoing changes of the environment generate troubles. As a result, mountains have become a prominent scene of conflicting interests. These emerge mainly from the predominating goal of tourism to create zones of comfort and thrill for large numbers of visitors and, opposed to this, the various forms of growing discomfort with such intentions. High-tech engineering of touristic landscapes is increasingly confronted with globally acting environmentalists claiming the sustainable use or conservation of nature. In that case the access to and the use of mountains are contested and also considered at risk due to the impacts of climate change. Additionally, visitors and locals alike are confronted with phenomena of pronounced social and cultural remoteness. More or less invented traditions can be seen as commodified attractions for tourists or as a form of resistance against them. Out-migration of young adults and in-migration of cheap seasonal workers seem to be the two sides of one coin representing the global economy.

We welcome empirically informed contributions that address the following topics which are not limited to these though:

Regional differences of the economic impact on alpine tourism and environments;  
Infrastructural prerequisites in times of climate change;  
Negotiation of conflicting interests between relevant actors;  
Which sustainability? Environmental and/or social and/or economic?  
Making a living out of tourism without losing local identity;  
Gender-specific effects of different forms of Alpine tourism.

Theoretical frames which can help to address these complex junctures of contradictory processes: Political ecology and political economy or relational approaches?

## SESSION SCHEDULE

### Thursday, October 1, 2020 | Slot 1 | Room 4

Herta Nöbauer & Gertraud Seiser: Introduction

Hubert Wiercinski: *La tristesse du sanatorium: space, memory, and identity in post-transformation Zdrój, Poland*

Roman Hovsepyan: *Tourism may contribute to the preservation of traditional ethnobotanical knowledge and in the formation of new plant-related practices: the case of Tatev, Armenia*

Discussion

### Thursday, October 1, 2020 | Slot 2 | Room 4

Elisabeth Salletmaier: Women in a rural mountain region in Austria: Empowerment, antifeminism and the reproduction of patriarchal structures

Almut Schneider: Comfort in discomfort – the case of high-altitude farmers in the Eastern Alps

Final Discussion

## SESSION PAPERS

### **La tristesse du sanatorium: space, memory, and identity in post-transformation Zdrój, Poland**

*Wiercinski, Hubert (University of Warsaw, Warsaw, POL)*

Zdrój is a mountain spa town in southern Poland known for its curative waters and unique microclimate. It has the rich tradition one might associate with an elite spa town, the remains of which can be traced back through local discourse, architectural heritage (villas and baths), and the town's socially stratified composition. However, after 1989, the town's landscapes changed from being centrally controlled spaces focused on healing and community, to one culturally fragmented and focused on both free market concerns and exploitative tourism - neither elite, nor healing.

In November 2018 a research team arrived in Zdrój with the aim of ethnographically unraveling the social, historical, economic, and political shifts that began in 1989 to see how they have impacted Zdrój's communities, social memories, and identities.

We currently understand that the transition has brought on massive changes in social relations and the local memory of the people in Zdrój. The gradual erosion of the

State's position has left open space for new discourses as well as entrepreneurship. More specifically, the centralized model of resource management and its associated sociocultural signifiers have been discarded. The Zdrój water supply stands as testament to these changes whereby the once positive social acting collective was inseparable from place and community now has been commoditized and turned over to private hands.

Zdrój has attracted a new business class, in effect introducing new middle-class identities and foreign values. From the local community's point of view these business people (now considered owners) understand the locality and its attributes not as signifying spaces with collective heritage, but rather as commodity and revenue source. Thus, the last decades have resulted in a disintegration of relations within the social domain. Historical relations between local ethos, aesthetics, natural resources, and collective memory do not apply to the market logics of today. Zdrój's sociocultural space is dominated by mass tourism and market discourse, pushing the local community to play the role of "servant" to external forces - not as the heirs to the local heritage.

**Tourism may contribute to the preservation of traditional ethnobotanical knowledge and in the formation of new plant-related practices: the case of Tatev, Armenia**

*Hovsepyan, Roman (Institute of Archaeology and Ethnography, Yerevan, ARM)*

The recent renewal of interest and the increased use of wild plants in the Tatev community of south Armenia are conditioned by a complex of factors including the discontinuation of Soviet propaganda, the increased cost of food and healthcare, and, most importantly, tourism. The mountain community involved in the study along with the local historical and cultural monuments became popular for tourists within the last decade after the construction of the aerial tramway and the repair of roads that made the villages and sites more accessible. A touristic market, where the local people trade mostly with medicinal and aromatic herbs has been set up next to the aerial tramway station and the Tatev monastery. In order to attract tourists, encourage sales, and make profit the traders and other tourist service providers are inclined: 1) to promote traditionally used wild plants, 2) to enlarge the assortment of the plants traded, and 3) to make the assortment of plants traded more recognizable to the visitors. The promotion of traditionally used wild plants contributes to the preservation of traditional ethnobotanical knowledge. To enlarge the assortment of traded plants, the local plant traders first learn about the plants used in other regions and countries. They acquire necessary information mostly from popular books, the internet and directly from visitors. Then the traders search for those "new" useful plants in the surroundings of the villages and, if find (sometimes the species are misidentified), start to gather those and sell in the local herbal market. Thus, the traders of the local herbal market and their suppliers are the main introducers and distributors of the new ethnobotanical information. Meanwhile, the uses of certain herbal products may be falsely presented to visitors as traditional in an effort to make the product more attractive. Thus, tourism contributes not only to the preservation of

the local traditional ethnobotanical knowledge, but also functions in knowledge production through the formation of new plant-related practices.

### **Women in a rural mountain region in Austria: Empowerment, antifeminism and the reproduction of patriarchal structures**

Salletmaier, Elisabeth (University of Vienna, Vienna, AUT)

The contribution deals with women living in a mountain region in Eastern Tyrol, an area characterized by major emigration, especially by young women. Seasonal tourism and higher rates of commuting are typical for this area. Female biographies are at the centre of my current work, and the aim is to describe the situation of women in this rural mountain region, and to analyse their empowerments and disadvantages.

By examining the interrelationship between gender and locality/space the current work builds on intersectional approaches to gender studies that understand gender as interwoven with other categories of difference - inequalities can thus be explained and analysed. Moreover, the work enacts a critique following Judith Butler's theory of performativity. Butler argues that gender identities need to be "done" repeatedly.

In addition to having life in the countryside romanticised as idyllic, the people who live there are saddled with stereotypes of backwardness. The paper aims to overcome dichotomies, and present rural life's idyllic coexistence as broken up - the downsides become apparent, especially with regard to women.

For my master's thesis I conducted three weeks of fieldwork in Eastern Tirol, focusing on biographical interviews with women of different generations. I will show here how women act between empowerment, antifeminism and the reproduction of patriarchal structures. Knowing-one-another and the accompanying talk that make real certain characteristics of rural life have consequences that are particularly disadvantageous to women. Additionally, certain political structures act to create and strengthen conservative discourses and affect antifeminist atmospheres, all of which pose obstacles to women's empowerment.

#### **References:**

Butler, Judith (1991): *Das Unbehagen der Geschlechter*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp.

Schmitt, Mathilde/Seiser, Gertraud & Oedl-Wieser, Theresia (2015): *Das Ländliche und die Land\_Frauen. Sozialwissenschaftliche De\_Re\_Konstruktionen*. In: *SWS-Rundschau* 55(3), 335-354.

Strasser, Sabine & Schein, Gerlinde (1997): *Intersexions oder der Abschied von den Anderen. Zur Debatte um Kategorien und Identitäten in der feministischen Anthropologie*. In: dies. (Hg.): *Intersexions. Feministische Anthropologie zu Geschlecht, Kultur und Sexualität*. Wien: Milena Verlag, 7-32.

**Comfort in discomfort – the case of high-altitude farmers in the Eastern Alps**  
*Schneider, Almut (Free University of Bolzano & Goethe-University Frankfurt, Frankfurt, GER)*

For nothing in the world would I have married an apple farmer. That is what I was told once by a woman in her late thirties, while driving through seamlessly endless apple plantations. The area was interspersed with four-star hotels and well-kept guesthouses. We were close to the village where she grew up and lived before marrying a farmer whose remote homestead is located on the steep mountainside of a nearby valley, 1600m above sea level. She chose a distinctive life, one in relative isolation and close contact with the soil, the source of her, her husband's, and father-in-law's income. Like some of her neighbors she thinks about setting up a few simple guest rooms for hikers and those passing through on mountain trails - something popular with tourists.

Since the late 1970's the regional government of South-Tyrol (Italy) has subsidised high-mountain farmers, facilitating the modernisation of cowsheds and milking installation, and developed the necessary infrastructure to enable farmers to remain on their high, remote farms. However, 'traditional' self-sufficiency is fundamental for the self-image of the mountain farmers; it remains an important aim and infuses the enthusiasm with which they approach their work. Valued above all is their independence, notably as it contrasts with the situation of the inhabitants down in the valley. From the point of view of high mountain farmers, the valley dwellers have to deal with consumerism along with the pressures of scaling houses and plantations, managing tourist streams, and handling the changing decrees concerning the environment and virus protection. Likewise, the mountain farmers' constant and intimate relationship with the animals, plants, soil, and surrounding landscape contribute to the confidence with which they face potential development and dealings with respect to their immediate environment.

The current fieldwork with high-altitude farmers in the context of an ongoing ethnographic research project at the University of Bolzano presents opportunities to discuss their particular points of view on tourism and the environment.