

Experiencing Climate and Environmental Changes in and beyond Europe Symposium

Research Centre of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts (ZRC SAZU)
May 5th and 7st, Ljubljana, Slovenia, 2022

Organisers: Institute of Anthropological and Spatial Studies, Research Centre of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts (ZRC SAZU); Department of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology, University of Ljubljana (UL); Department of Studies in Culture and Religion, University of Hradec Králové (UHK).

Organising Committee: Nataša Gregorič Bon (ZRC SAZU), Jaka Repič, (UL), Ana Svetel (UL), Blaž Bajič (UL), Zdenka Sokolíčková (UHK/UiO).

In recent decades, we have been witnessing accelerating climate and environmental processes that are transforming landscapes and changing lives, both on local as well as global scales. Climate change is an “existentially urgent” (O’Reilly, et al. 2020) issue, but is often perceived and discussed as a “conceptually abstract problem” (Knox 2020). This symposium explores how environmental and climate changes and continuities are experienced, sensed, and lived in and beyond Europe; and how they are entangled with social and cultural processes, imaginings, hopes and expectations. It attends to how growing carbon emissions, consequences of rising sea levels, severe river management and subsequent erosion, deforestation, growing wildfires, melting glaciers, recurrent droughts, floods etc., affect ways of being and becoming in different locations. Our aim is to question what ontologies, epistemologies, technologies, practices and potentialities emerge or disappear when faced with new climate and environmental realities. This will allow us to revisit and further complicate the prevalent meanings of the notions such as “environment”, “climate”, “change”, “sustainability”, “adaptation”, “resilience” and “vulnerability”.

* Keynote lectures: 45 min + 15min Q&A

* Paper presentations: 20min +10 min Q&A

TENTATIVE PROGRAMME

Venue Prešern's Hall, ZRC SAZU

Novi trg 4

1000 Ljubljana

DAY 1 – May 5th 2022

8.30-9.00: Meeting and gathering, welcome

9.00-10.00: Keynote Thomas H. Eriksen

Some Unintended Consequences of Modernity

10.00-10.30: Break

10.30-13.00: Session 1

Arctic Change and the Built Environment

Peter Schweitzer, University of Vienna

Permafrost Thaw, Infrastructure and Community Development: Navigating Socio-Economic and Environmental Change in Northern Yakutia, Russia

Olga Povoroznyuk, University of Vienna

Stories of Changing Human-water Relations from Svalbard: Forms, Agencies and Ripple Effects

Zdenka Sokolíčková, University of Groningen; Esteban Ramirez Hincapié, University of Groningen; Jasmine Zhang, University of Agricultural Sciences Upsala; Ann E. Lennert, University of Tromsø

Continuity and Change at Vjosa River Valley in Southern Albania

Nataša Gregorič Bon & Urša Kanjir, ZRC SAZU

13.00-14.30: Lunch

14.30-16.00: Session 2

Pollution and its Metaphors: Climate Change in Serbia

Maja Petrović-Šteger, ZRC SAZU

"It's the Voices of People who Think they Know Better": Examining Emplaced Climate Scepticism in Rural Northern Sweden

Flora Bartlett, Goldsmiths London

"The changes in nature are deep": Living with the changing environment in northeastern Iceland

Ana Svetel, University of Ljubljana

19.00: Dinner

* Keynote lectures: 45 min + 15min Q&A

* Paper presentations: 20min +10 min Q&A

DAY 2 – May 6th 2022

8.30-9.00: Meeting and gathering, welcome

9.00-10.00: Keynote Marc A. Brightman

The Structure of Money and the Promise of Green Growth in a European Landscape

10.00-10.30: Break

10.30-12.30: Session 3

Rethinking environmental justice in the post-socialist city context. More-than-human vulnerabilities to environmental and climate changes in Tallinn's informal green spaces

Bianka Plüschke-Altöf, Piret Vacht and Karina Vabson, Tallinn University (Zoom)

Future Making – Future Taking: Environmental Change and Socio-Economic Transformations in Indonesian Borneo (Zoom)

Michaela Haug, University of Cologne

Temporal and spatial disorders in the alpine cryosphere – And what to do now and here?

Herta Neubauer, University of Vienna

Three Walks and a ZOOM: Researching, Imagining, and Walking with Rižana River in NE Adriatic

Nataša Rogelja Caf, ZRC SAZU

12.30-14.00: Lunch

14.00-15.30: Session 4

Environmental Experiences and Attitudes of Older Czechs in the Time of Accelerating Climate Change

Vojtěch Pelikán, Masaryk University

Imagined Communities, Communal Imaginations: Land, Lineage, and (Non-)change

Veronika Zavratnik & Blaž Bajič, University of Ljubljana

Student's paper

15.30-16.00: Break

16.00-16.30

Closing Session

DAY 3

Excursion to Solčavsko region (<https://www.logarska-solcavsko.si/>)

* Keynote lectures: 45 min + 15min Q&A

* Paper presentations: 20min +10 min Q&A

ABSTRACTS

DAY 1

Keynote

Some Unintended Consequences of Modernity

Thomas H. Eriksen, University of Oslo

It is by now widely recognised that Anthropocene effects require a rewrite of the human past and present, which does not add the natural world as an afterthought, but places the relationship of humans to the wider ecology of which we are part at the forefront and as a premise. This lecture does not mainly delve into the effects of the fossil fuel revolution, which are well known, but presents a few other unintended consequences of modernity, from the information revolution to the happiness paradox. It indicates the limits of planning in a broad sense and shows how complexity interacts with flexibility, often in surprising ways. A comprehensive understanding of the current impasse, with catastrophe looming, therefore has to be holistic, relational and processual. It also has to resist the temptation of specialisation. Perhaps what we are currently witnessing is a return to the kind of anthropology that dominated before Boas and Malinowski, which was multidisciplinary, historically and comparatively oriented.

Session 1

Arctic Change and the Built Environment

Peter Schweitzer, University of Vienna

Environmental change – from a warming climate to ocean acidification to plastic pollution – has been capturing the imagination of anthropologists and other social scientists lately. While one might be tempted to diagnose a certain level of environmental determinism in these treatments, they respond different forms of ecological crises and their representations. The Arctic is an interesting case study in that respect, as arctic landscapes are heavily affected by global environmental change processes, while at the same time being imagined as “pristine” and “natural”. Still, the colonial incorporation by southern states and empires has been accompanied, and often caused, by the introduction of new forms of built environment. While only certain parts of the Arctic – such as the Soviet North during the 20th century – have been heavily industrialized in the process, all parts of the region inhabited or visited by people have been altered to some degree. The interaction between “built” and “natural” takes on a special twist in the Arctic, as houses and roads crack and subside as an effect of climate change. Thus, this is a call for a more inclusive notion of the environment, one that doesn’t purge the built (or the social) from our understanding of environmental change. Such a “total environment” perspective allows us to see humans and other animals as “dwellers” of environments that have been built and/or modified by these actors. The focus of this presentation is on a subcategory of the built environment, namely on different forms of (transport) infrastructures in the Russian and North American Arctic. It is the “affordances” of these elements of the built environment under conditions of Arctic (climate) change that is at the center of attention. Or, in other words, do roads enable sustainable livelihoods or are they just triggers and/or symptoms of environmental change?

Permafrost Thaw, Infrastructure and Community Development: Navigating Socio-Economic and Environmental Change in Northern Yakutia, Russia

Olga Povoroznyuk, University of Vienna

* Keynote lectures: 45 min + 15min Q&A

* Paper presentations: 20min +10 min Q&A

The town of Tiksi, founded in the period of Soviet explorations along the Northern Sea Route, is still proudly called “the Arctic sea-gate of Yakutiya” and is a water transportation node. The neighboring indigenous village Bykovskiy is a smaller and older coastal community dependent on the sea for subsistence and connection with the outside world. Both communities have been struggling with the effects of the Post-Soviet socio-economic transformations. The complicated delivery system and curtailing of state-funded system of “northern supply” result in high consumer prices and challenge the supply of fish, the main resource of the local economy, to market. The tightened supervision over the entry to the military border zone and cancellation of passenger air connection to other cities (except for Yakutsk), reinforce isolation of the communities.

In the meantime, the growing effects of climate change (coastal erosion, thawing permafrost and sea ice, etc.) become an issue for public discussions only in cases of major economic losses (e.g. when extreme weather events or thawing of permafrost effect the seasonality of supply of necessary products and foods by winter roads). Longer term processes of environmental change (e.g., the destruction of a graveyard due to severe coastal erosion in Bykovskiy) seem to be ignored or overshadowed by more immediate concerns, such as distribution of fishing quotas, access to markets and passenger mobility. While the population of the neighboring villages is drawn to Tiksi, the residents of Tiksi move to the cities on the “Big Land” leaving empty houses behind.

The paper based on the ethnographic fieldwork in Tiksi and Bykovskiy, analyzes the entanglement between socio-economic and environmental change, and transformation of arctic communities, which were once outposts of the Soviet exploration and industrialization, into shrinking remote settlements left to cope with the unpredictable natural forces on their own.

Stories of Changing Human-water Relations from Svalbard: Forms, Agencies and Ripple Effects

Zdenka Sokolíčková, University of Groningen; Esteban Ramirez Hincapié, University of Groningen; Jasmine Zhang, University of Agricultural Sciences Upsala; Ann E. Lennert, University of Tromsø

The aim of the contribution is to map “stories of change” and how one perceives and experiences an inconstant world related to water. We wish to unpack the “abstract problem” of climate and environmental change through a study of a local urgency, narrated in ambiguous stories with water as the main character. There is a scientific consensus about the archipelago of Svalbard, in the European high Arctic, warming up faster than other parts of the planet. Among the most apparent and fast accelerating changes in landscape and weather patterns we can name melting glaciers, increased precipitation including heavy rainfall events, coastal erosion, thawing permafrost, elevated avalanche and landslide danger, and loss of sea ice. People who live in Svalbard or visit regularly (such as scientists, technicians or tour guides) observe and experience these changes in a subjective and relational manner. Climate and environmental change in Svalbard is multifaceted. In line with the call’s scope, we narrow our focus on water in its various forms (such as rain, snow or ice) and agencies (such as wetting, melting, freezing, eroding, disappearing, exacerbating, or threatening). The contribution is based on ethnographic data collected through interviews, focus groups and workshops, and also on self-reported observations of changing land- and waterscapes through the digital tool of maptionnaire. Impacts of changing water environments in Svalbard can range from alteration in mobility patterns of humans and non-humans, through changing

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routines in scientific activities and changing human-water relations, to geopolitical implications. The paper is an outcome of the interdisciplinary project SVALUR - Understanding Resilience and Long-Term Environmental Change in the High Arctic: Narrative-Based Analyses from Svalbard.

Continuity and Change at Vjosa River Valley in Southern Albania

Nataša Gregorič Bon & Urša Kanjir, ZRC SAZU

What is change and what is its role and meaning in volatile environments where dynamics is part of continuity and stability is a rupture? This presentation delves into dynamic rhythms of the Vjosa River in Southern Albania, which is currently still one of the few intact - infrastructurally not yet heavily managed - rivers in Europe. However, in the last five years, the Vjosa, like other rivers in the South East Europe, is facing severe infrastructural changes (e.g. plans to build hydropower plants, road construction, oil drilling, mining). In contrast to river dynamics, these infrastructural interventions, which are currently taking place or are part of future plans, aim to bound (through the HPP construction) and stabilise the river. Drawing on a cross-disciplinary methodology that combines Remote Sensing analysis and ethnographic research, this paper questions what happens when social and geophysical dynamics and associated changes relevant to Vjosa Valley suddenly meet the management and control of various national and transnational policies that seek to limit and stabilise them. We argue that amphibiousness, dynamism and constant changes are inherent in Vjosa River Valley. The people who inhabit the valley have become accustomed to these changes and live them as part of their daily routine. But what happens when these volatile environments meet global debates about climate and environmental changes?

Session 2

Pollution and its Metaphors: Climate Change in Serbia

Maja Petrović-Šteger, ZRC SAZU

Serbia has a charged climate risk profile. The country has suffered, over the last twenty years, drought, flood, unusually harsh winters, major air pollution and other extreme weather-related events; these have placed strain on the country's water resources and inflicted financial damage, notably on the agricultural sector, as well as harming people's health and property. Climate change projections indicate that Serbia (together with the Western Balkans) faces a high probability of continuing temperature increases, meaning more frequent and prolonged droughts and wildfires. Despite widespread alarm, and a certain recoil at what people have gone through, the country continues to rely on coal and diesel heating systems, with thousands of hectares of forests further disappearing each year as a result of illegal logging.

The paper looks at how people are attempting to organize a collective life around their experience of climate change – where 'climate' is understood not only to refer to the environment, but also more broadly to relations between people and their material conditions (Latour, 2018). Beyond more basic questions of health and wealth, the link is often made in Serbia between environmental degradation and the exhaustion or running-down psychically of its inhabitants, who are said to be victims of a “collective mental pollution”. The research traces how people feel inwardly undone by air and water pollution, expressing anxiety over changes in the atmosphere and the politics behind them. It draws on years of ethnographic research in Belgrade and the south of Serbia on the emotional life of 'polluted atmospheres'.

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"It's the Voices of People who Think they Know Better": Examining Emplaced Climate Scepticism in Rural Northern Sweden

Flora Bartlett, Goldsmiths London

Understanding that climate change exists as a discourse as well as a physical phenomenon, I examine climate scepticism in Arjeplog, rural Northern Sweden, through ethnographic fieldwork (2017-18) and experimental visual methods. I argue that climate scepticism is rooted in historical tensions with the State and urban South, differing understandings of climate, and local environmentalism. Engaging photography to amplify ethnographic methods, I examine tensions between traditional sustainable living, such as the moose hunt, and environmentalist discourse emanating from the South, contextualised within the history of the Northern resource landscape. The State has used the North for resources and renewable energies which disrupt the local landscape, and my participants view national environmentalism as continued interference. Climate change discourses emanate from the urban population, whom they see as 'other' with little understanding of the rural North or the reliance on petrol motors for kinship, mobility, and traditional practice, while climate change is understood as a global natural cycle. I argue that anthropologists should go beyond an activist framework and examine emplaced climate scepticism, complicating the limiting tropes of 'climate denial' to fully grasp the global phenomenon of climate change.

"The changes in nature are deep": Living with the changing environment in northeastern Iceland

Ana Svetel, University of Ljubljana

DAY 2

Keynote: *The Structure of Money and the Promise of Green Growth in a European Landscape*

Marc A. Brightman, University of Bologna

The characterization of climate and environmental change as a situation of crisis has been a growing tendency in recent years, to which European elites have not been indifferent. In financial circles, there has been a growing movement, spurred by the 2008 financial crisis, to give finance a sense of moral purpose, leading to the meteoric rise of 'green' and 'social' finance. This movement found fertile ground in the 2020 discussions over economic recovery from the effects of the pandemic, leading to Europe's principle capital-raising instrument to this effect: centrally issued EU recovery bonds, some 30% of which should be 'green' bonds. Christine Lagarde, head of the ECB, is pushing for a 'green capital markets union', and 60% of green bonds are already issued in Europe. In other words, green financialization is the order of the day in European corridors of financial and political power, aiding the proliferation of morally charged financial objects (notably green and social bonds). The transactional and structural qualities of these objects can be elucidated with some help from anthropological theory. This then helps us to ask what they mean for landscapes and communities in Europe and beyond? The Italian oil major, ENI, attempted to secure part of the recovery funds to support its project for blue hydrogen production and the world's largest carbon capture and storage facility in the Adriatic, leading to a series of debates at local, national and EU level about the meaning of sustainability. In the end, blue hydrogen, and therefore the ENI project, was excluded from the recovery plan because of its reliance on gas. Yet the Adriatic and the Po delta wetlands remain the focus of debates over infrastructure plans, criteria for 'green'

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financial products remain weak, and ‘sustainable’ investment remains largely a way of diversifying portfolios. Can Europe’s ambitions to make capitalism ‘green’ really be taken seriously without addressing the problem of growth at its heart, and without giving more weight to local ecological relations?

Session 3

Rethinking environmental justice in the post-socialist city context. More-than-human vulnerabilities to environmental and climate changes in Tallinn’s informal green spaces

Bianka Plüschke-Altöf, Piret Vacht and Karina Vabson, Tallinn University (Zoom)

Environmental justice theory has largely been developed in Western contexts, leaving blind spots when applying it to the unfinished planning project of socialist modernity, which left huge informal green spaces now subjected to neoliberal urbanization processes. Our study focuses on informal green spaces in Estonia’s capital Tallinn. It combines ecological, socio-logical and anthropological fieldwork in the time between 2018-2021, including urban ecological inventory, visitor surveys as well as participant observation and in-depth interviews with activists. While former studies convey a rather positive picture of green space provision and access in Tallinn, we argue that the common focus on distributive justice conceals tangible inequalities for vulnerable social groups as well as limits to the creation of a fair and multi-species city. By bringing together environmental justice approaches and more-than-human theories, we explore the human and non-human user practices of informal green spaces and outline the underlying dynamics that result in higher vulnerabilities to environmental and climate changes of already marginalised groups and species. As a result, we question the common focus on distributive justice and urge for a careful consideration of procedural and interactional aspects of environmental justice that carve out the unequal exposure to environmental and climate changes, which will only grow in the future, as well as the political ecology it is embedded in.

Future Making – Future Taking: Environmental Change and Socio-Economic Transformations in Indonesian Borneo (Zoom)

Michaela Haug, University of Cologne

All over Borneo, vast rainforest areas are incorporated into new regimes of production and extraction, as well as related to new patterns of access to land and natural resources. Some of these changes are pushed in the name of environmental and climate protection, like for example Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD+) or recent attempts of peatland restoration. Others are being pushed in the name of progress, such as commercial logging, forest conversion for agro-industrial monocultures and mining projects, leading to further deforestation.

My paper carves out the diverse and sometimes contradictory visions of the future that underlie these current environmental changes and related socio-economic transformations in Indonesian Borneo. I place a particular emphasis on perspectives among the local population and explore how they experience deforestation, forest conversion and protection and what hopes, fears and aspirations they link with these endeavors. I further pay attention to the kinds of pasts, presents and futures that are being imagined, produced and taken away. The ability of an individual person or a particular group to put its visions of the future into practice depends on its positioning in a network of social relations and more generally on the specific configurations of power. As Barbara Adam and Chris Groves observe, the future making of

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some can all too easily become future taking when, for example, the depletion of certain resources make the future plans of others unattainable.

Temporal and spatial disorders in the alpine cryosphere – And what to do now and here? Herta Nöbauer, *University of Vienna*

My presentation engages with experiences of temporal and spatial disorders and divergences emerging as effects of climate and environmental change in the alpine cryosphere in Austria. Based on my research on the anthropology of snow in the high-alpine valley named Pitztal in the Tyrol I focus on how various people narrate and experience temporal and spatial orders as “messed up”, disordered, divergent and compressed. Drawing on these narratives I argue that they reveal a more nuanced understanding of why particular people are setting specific actions, or not, with regard to issues of climate change.

As it is the case all over Europe and beyond, the alpine cryosphere in the Pitztal valley is strongly affected by environmental changes due to tourism and climate change. Retreating and vanishing glaciers and thawing permafrost which appear as significant effects of climate change are affecting both the manifold seemingly “untouched” glaciers of this region and, even more so, the glacier ski resort (rising to nearly 3.500 m of altitude) which is highly commodified for tourist ends. During my fieldwork I have extensively studied how workers of the glacier ski resort who maintain the ski resort all year round, experience, cope with and adapt with technological means to the deep changes in snow cover, glaciers and permafrost in order to keep tourism running. In addition, I have gained deep knowledge about the perceptions of environmental changes from a wide range of local people, including mountain guides and passionate hikers and skiers, as well as from a number of tourists and environmental agencies and activists from Austria and other countries.

By illustrating some case examples of temporal and spatial experiences of my interlocutors I will demonstrate the complex relationship between time, space, environmental change and taking action.

Three Walks and a ZOOM: Researching, Imagining, and Walking with Rižana River in NE Adriatic

Nataša Rogelja Caf, ZRC SAZU

This paper aims to explore methodologies used as a means of thinking with the river Rižana in the NE Adriatic region, engaging with visible, non-visible, tactile, discursive and speculative forms of knowledge transfer. It focuses specifically on three research walks and a ZOOM lecture/discussion organized within the group of researchers working on the project “Experiencing water environments and environmental changes: An anthropological study of water in Albania, Serbia and Slovenia”. The majority of the research presented was conducted during the Covid-19 pandemic, which forced us to rethink the numerous ways of doing ethnographic research but also to reflect upon the troubling present and rapid environmental changes. Outdoor walks in smaller groups combined with research essays as well as ZOOM discussions and interviews were part of this endeavour, striving to include imagination, uncertainty and intuition into academic research. Combined with archival work and discourse analysis, a blue line on the map together with a weak river flow that we experienced in the summer months, is being slowly transformed into a rich reservoir of stories, narratives, experiences, expectations, aspirations and speculations that went far beyond the present moment. In this research-in-progress journey that refuses fixity, linearity and finality, this paper will take you

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across several sites through which I reflected on broader issues of infrastructure, development, relationality, ecology as well as social and environmental justice.

Session 4

Environmental Experiences and Attitudes of Older Czechs in the Time of Accelerating Climate Change

Vojtěch Pelikán, Masaryk University

Two profound changes are on their way in Europe, both expected to culminate sometime between 2030 and 2050: unprecedented population ageing and unfolding impacts of climate change. In response, 'climate gerontology' has emerged to meet the challenges of those two phenomena. Some scholars see the population's greying as one of the drivers of anthropogenic climate change; they perceive elders as those responsible for the current environmental problems and pose questions about intergenerational environmental solidarity and justice. The other position views older people as 'perfect climate allies' (Jewell 2017), embracing environmental generativity and pro-environmental attitudes and behaviours. Research I participate in is part of the project 'Ageing and Older People in the Time of Climate Change' and is currently taking place in one urban and two rural settings in the Czech Republic. At the end of the summer, preliminary findings should be available for discussion. Localities, where the field research is situated, were chosen in cooperation with the Global Change Research Institute of the Czech Academy of Sciences as places where impacts of climate change are becoming particularly apparent in recent years. Our attention focuses on our 65+ years old participants' perceptions, attitudes, feelings, experiences, and coping strategies related to climate change. The techniques of go-along ethnography and photovoice help to elicit their place-related memories and personal biographical contexts. How do our participants understand their life-long environmental experiences in the context of accelerating climate change? Do they feel – either personal or generational – guilt or responsibility for future generations?

Imagined Communities, Communal Imaginations: Land, Lineage, and (Non-)change

Veronika Zavratnik & Blaž Bajič, University of Ljubljana

Student's paper

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