



Workshop Knowing the Anthropocene

Knowing the Anthropocene

Exploring knowledge practices of the Anthropocene

26th – 28th of July 2017

University of Tübingen, Germany

This workshop explores different perceptions, measurements and understandings of the Anthropocene. It encourages participating PhD candidates to engage with each other's ways of knowing the Anthropocene and thereby reflect on their own methods and epistemologies.



Location of workshop: Schloss Hohentübingen © Kulturreise Ideen

Rationale

The debate about the Anthropocene, initially held within the Earth system sciences and geology, is witnessing an increasing involvement of social scientists and humanities scholars. This pertinence of the concept across disciplines is intriguing not least because it has resulted in a diversification of what the Anthropocene means to different people in different places.

Interlocutors from the natural and social sciences and the humanities have sought to understand the Anthropocene in their particular terms – often those of their respective disciplines. Indeed, different academics claim that their





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respective field of study has a distinct methodological advantage in understanding the Anthropocene e.g. (Autin and Holbrook, 2012; Isendahl, 2010: 6007; Malm and Hornborg, 2014; Johnson and Morehouse, 2014).

As a result of these differences, current thinking on the Anthropocene has tended to focus either on *empirical* descriptions of the human influence on the Earth system or on *conceptual* propositions about the human–environment relations that characterise the Anthropocene. These two foci are not incompatible (Oldfield et al., 2013) but they lie at two ends of a spectrum and have received unequal attention from disciplines employing different methods and epistemologies.

Interdisciplinary cooperation has been called for to comprehensively study the cumulative effects that the Anthropocene describes (Ellis et al., 2013; Zalasiewicz et al., 2012; Gale and Hoare, 2012; Smith and Zeder, 2013; Castree, 2014). Yet, many of the practical attempts to cooperate in this way are limited to ‘narrow interdisciplinarity’ (Szerszynski and Galarraga, 2013) and, especially, to the integration of empirical observations from only natural science disciplines that share broadly similar paradigms e.g. (Steffen et al., 2011b).

Social scientists and scholars from the humanities have attended to the discourse by interpreting the concept of the Anthropocene e.g. (Crist, 2013; Yusoff, 2013; Clark, 2012; Szerszynski, 2012; Lövbrand et al., 2009; Castree, 2014). Although these contributions have provided reflections on the empirical insights on the Anthropocene in that they explicate their conceptual implications, the processes through which these empirical insights are produced are yet to open up to such reflections.

Aim of the workshop

Conceptual and empirical aspects of thinking the Anthropocene, therefore, have in an important way remained divided, their dialectic interplay left unexplored. The workshop approaches this gap by engaging with the existing plurality of methods and epistemologies through which the Anthropocene is thought.

The aim of the workshop is to facilitate an interdisciplinary engagement with the different ways of knowing the Anthropocene – without forcing to integrate multiple perspectives of thinking the Anthropocene. On the practical level of PhD research, it will explore the potential of the Anthropocene to render ideas





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from one discipline accessible to other ones (Gare, 1995), to break down the epistemic distinction between seemingly different approaches of studying the environment (Clark, 2012) and maybe to change the self-conception of different disciplines (Chakrabarty, 2009).

Submissions

Participation in the workshop is upon invitation. We would like to invite PhD students and early career scientists with backgrounds from all disciplines to submit paper drafts that provide an insight into their ways of perceiving, measuring and understanding the Anthropocene.

Your contribution can be a classic research paper that exemplifies knowledge production on the Anthropocene in your academic community. It should, however, indicate areas of reflection on the ways in which knowledge in that community is normally produced and can be challenged. In this sense, the papers should already begin to explore the methodological and epistemological problems central to their field of work and to do so in confrontation with the empirical – conceptual gap. The ‘break-out sessions’ of the workshop will then provide opportunities to continue this exploration and thus advance your paper in this regard.

The following questions (among many others) may be considered as ways of directing this exercise:

- How is knowledge about the Anthropocene produced and codified in your field (e.g. through record-keeping, oral histories, data practices, experiments, modelling)?
- What are the intermediaries through which the Anthropocene becomes known in your work (satellites, sensors, mathematical formulae, and climate models but also institutions such as nation states, NGOs, universities, etc)?
- What counts as 'evidence' in the setting of your research? Which processes, practitioners and outputs of knowledge production on the Anthropocene are credible?





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Workshop procedure

The workshop is organised in three panel sessions during which participating PhD candidates will present their draft papers on their particular ways of knowing the Anthropocene. After these sessions, participants will work in small groups (max. 4) to review their approaches to knowing the Anthropocene and explore common themes and challenges under the guidance of panel conveners, who will focus on related by different guiding questions (see overleaf). This process will conclude with a panel discussion about the results of these exchanges.

Through this procedure, the participants will not just be able to engage in interdisciplinary exchange but will also receive feedback on how to reflect on the knowledge production of their own work and how to narrow the gap between empirical and conceptual ways of knowing the Anthropocene. On the basis of these interactions, participants are encouraged to revise their initial papers, which will be considered for publication in conference proceedings.

Wednesday 26th of July	
	Arrival of participants
7:00 PM	Welcome reception
Thursday 27th of July	
9:00 AM	1st panel
10:30 AM	Coffee break
10:45 AM	2nd panel
12:15 PM	Lunch break
1:30 PM	3rd panel
3:00 PM	Coffee break
3:15 PM	4th panel
4:45 PM	Wrap-up
7:00 PM	Conference dinner
Friday 28th of July	
9:00 AM	Break-out sessions – 1st half
12:00 noon	Lunch break
1:00 PM	Break-out sessions – 2nd half
2:30 PM	Coffee break
2:45 PM	Panel discussion
4:00 PM	End of workshop





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Conveners & guiding questions of break-out sessions

Silke Beck Head of the Working Group on Governance and Institutions,
Helmholtz Centre for Environmental Research, Leipzig, Germany

Doing co-production: Who engages, why, how and with what impacts with the Anthropocene?

Eva Lövbrand Associate Professor for Global Change at the Department for
Thematic Studies at Linköping University, Sweden

Is the 'end of nature' a crisis or opportunity for environmental research and politics?

Thomas Potthast Professor for Ethics, Theory and History of the Biosciences,
University of Tübingen, Germany

What are the implicit and explicit values and norms in Anthropocene research?

Sam Randalls Lecturer in Human Geography, University College London, UK

How does one actually go about researching the multiple Anthropocenes?

Selection process

The number of participants is limited, so recruitment will be by refereed selection. Experience with interdisciplinary collaboration is not a selection criterion, but motivation should be visible.

Required documents for application are a CV, a 300 word abstract of your paper and a motivation letter of max. 500 words. Please also state in the motivation letter which break-out session you would like to attend and why.

Please send these documents by email to
anthropocene@izew.uni-tuebingen.de
before the 14th of April 2017.

We will inform you about the outcome of the selection process in the beginning of May 2017.





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Costs

The workshop is free of charge and it includes lunch and coffee breaks. Accommodation as well as one conference dinner will be arranged and paid for.

Please arrange and cover your own transport to and from Tübingen (the airport and long-distance train station in Stuttgart are both about one hour away)

Contact

Should you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact:

Johannes Lundershausen at

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