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## CONFERENCES

### **World. Knowledge. Design.**

**42nd Conference of the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Volkskunde, 7–10 October 2019**

***Felix Linzner***

The 42<sup>nd</sup> conference of the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Volkskunde (DGV), at the invitation of the Institut für Volkskunde/Kulturanthropologie at Hamburg University, took place from 7 to 10 October 2019. About 400 researchers followed the call to congregate under the conference's theme 'World. Knowledge. Design'. The organising institute and the University of Hamburg framed the conference with the celebration of their 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

Seven keynotes, ten panels and eleven sections offered various versatile inputs concerning theoretical and methodological approaches as well as current research projects. For the first time, the conference programme included three workshops, which took place in the run-up to the conference. The workshops discussed the management of research data, university education and teaching. The conference provided about 100 contributions focusing on global dynamics as fundamental processes. Understanding *world* as a globally interwoven and symbolically created habitat of humankind makes it possible to focus on the relations between 'small life-worlds' and larger entities. The diversity of ways in which the world is *known* contributes to the specific acquisition of knowledge about the world, which enables its perception and guides its *design*. These basic ideas were introduced by the organisers and elaborated on by the Chairman of the DGV, Johannes Moser (University of Munich). In his opening words to the conference, Moser discussed the common narrative of a world out of joint manifested in concerns about climate change and distrust in the scientific community and scientific research in general. Facing these challenges and topics is a task for future research and was a key issue of the conference.

The first keynote speaker, Kim Fortun (University of California, Irvine), expounded her views on late industrial anthropology, which she framed by the term Anthropocene and explained the way the Anthropocene can be understood and conceptualised by European ethnology. She described the Anthropocene as a narrative or 'novel' that European ethnologists need to focus on by intensifying interdisciplinary collaboration, building data infrastructures and changing universities' curricula to preserve a critical engagement of 'anthropologies on shifting grounds'.

Addressing shifts and transformations as challenges was the goal of the section *perspectivising sustainability*. Britta Acksel (University of Duisburg-Essen) studies concepts of a sustainable city and specific logics that are associated with sustainability efforts. She conducted field research in Malmö, Essen and Almada. Climate leadership and agency programmes are the topic of Valeska Flor's (University of Bonn) research. She asked how the production and negotiation of knowledge about climate and climate agency work. Visiting the Climate Reality Project, an NGO founded by the former US Vice President Al Gore, and qualifying as a 'Climate Leader' were major components of her ethnographic access. The third contributor of this section, Geoffrey Nwaka (Abia State University, Uturu), gave a lecture on the achievement of new sustainable development goals in Africa. He examined how indigenous knowledge and practice might support the possibility of 'decolonising' climate science by reflecting on and exploring local traditions.

The keynote speaker Gisela Welz (University of Frankfurt) underlined the Anthropocene as a key concept in causing a paradigm shift in anthropologies but emphasised the consideration of more-than-human futures. She discussed the current situation of German anthropologies and gave an overview of the concepts of human-animal studies, naturecultures and anthropology beyond the human. She explicitly mentioned German researchers whose work has been of great significance in the context of these approaches. She brought up Ina Maria Greverus, whom she described as a researcher who 'dares to link ethnology with biophysics', discussed Friederike Gesing's, Michi Knecht's, Michael Flitner's and Katrin Amelang's anthology *NaturenKulturen* and paid tribute to Stefan Beck, who unexpectedly passed away in 2015. Welz highlighted and honoured Beck's pioneering work on collaborative approaches focusing on the entanglement of ecological and cultural processes in relational anthropology.

Corrie Eicher and Lukas Fehr (University of Tübingen) were the first speakers of the section *negotiating resources* and gave insights into their interdisciplinary project on biobased economy in the context of wood economy. Through the cooperation between forestry and European ethnology, their project aims to establish transformative and dialogical processes. Also focusing on resources, Lars Winterberg (University of Regensburg) described his research project on tracing and tracking meat. In a remarkable and certainly touching way, Winterberg described how he had accompanied pigs on their journey of becoming a resource. He described this process of objectification in relation to diverse and complex knowledge systems concerning the world, society, culture, history, religion, migration and social inequality, as well as to other discursive perspectives. The keynote of Sabine Kienitz (University of Hamburg) paid tribute to the organising institute of Volkskunde/European Ethnology.

She carefully reconstructed the history of one of the oldest academic institutions within the larger family of Volkskunde/Cultural Anthropology in Germany, especially the formative figures Otto Lauffer (1874–1949) and Walter Hävernick (1905–1983), who were chair-holding professors and directors of the Museum for Hamburg History. Kienitz described Lauffer and Hävernick as significant for the essential orientation and methodological positions of the former Seminar für Deutsche Altertums- und Volkskunde but also outlined the reorientation of the institute after National Socialism.

Tuesday's last section titled *rethinking* featured three speakers, all of whose presentations focused on knowing and learning. Irina Arnold (University of Würzburg) highlighted the complex and contested knowledge discourses accompanying the 'return of wolves' to Lower Saxony. She reflected on processes of negotiation and learning human-animal interactions using sensory ethnography and inputs from future studies. Julia Fleischhack (University of Göttingen) focused on learning and teaching digital competences, illustrating the possibilities of the concept of 'participatory cultures' (Jenkins 2006, 2012). She especially referred to hate speech, manipulated information and digital propaganda.

As in previous DGV conferences, the student panel gave junior researchers the opportunity to present their work in innovative ways. For example, Sabine Eggmann (University of Basel) and Mirjam Niedhart (University of Zürich) used a performative experiment to discuss the representation of anthropologies by referring to the 'Turning Test'. Other students created a certain sense of closeness to their field by having project members read out significant quotes from their field from among the audience.

Keynote speaker Gertraud Koch (University of Hamburg) reflected on anthropological research in the context of the 'datalogical turn'. Focusing on the increased transformation of cultural materiality into cultural data, she discussed the effects of such transformations in museums, archives, libraries, and organisational and legal frameworks, pointing out how digitalisation affects the ways of knowledge production.

In her keynote, Ina Dietzsch (University of Basel) outlined how cultural anthropologists can investigate water – as a research perspective as well as a research subject. By focusing on approaches in the anthropology of knowledge, Dietzsch examined different ontologies of water. Based on current empirical findings, the keynote discussed the diverse and current heuristic potentials of already existing research projects and examined new perspectives for an anthropology of the present and the future that makes water an explicit object of investigation.

The last keynote of the conference by Katharina Eisch-Angus (University of Graz) addressed the neoliberal changes towards a society of security, oscillating between control and vulnerability. She described this state as a permanent liminal borderline situation, which challenges people's everyday lives as well as the work of employees in public institutions.

The official programme ended with concluding remarks, final words and an invitation to the next conference of the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Volkskunde at the University of Regensburg in 2021.

Addressing changes and challenges as well as pointing out the possibilities of approaches of ethnological and anthropological research were the key issues of this conference. The presentations of current projects as well as pertinent results proved the significance of ethnology in an impressive manner. Various studies focus on the crisis, transformation of everyday life in the demanding times. Therefore, the concept of the Anthropocene plays an important role in the recent discussion in German ethnology.

#### **AUTHOR**

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