C-URGE

Anthropology of Global Climate Urgency

Eco-Ethnography: A methodological protocol for an anthropology of global climate urgency

DELIVERABLE 2.1

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Deliverable 3 – PDF of protocol on eco-ethnography

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Description
Description of protocol on eco-ethnography as developed during the C-URGE project.

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Project summary

C-URGE is an interdisciplinary Doctoral Network (DN) focused on the Anthropology of Global Climate Urgency (2023–2027). Its overarching aim is to respond to the growing call—expressed by European research councils, funding agencies, governments, civil society, and students—for the social sciences to play a more active role in addressing climate change.

Rather than taking the concept of 'urgency' for granted, C-URGE critically investigates how climate urgency is socially and culturally constructed, perceived, and lived. In doing so, the project takes on a dual challenge: first, to deepen our understanding of the diverse ways in which urgency is shaped and mobilized in relation to environmental change; and second, to train a new generation of researchers equipped to bridge academic knowledge with practical skills—fostering dialogue across research, policymaking, and civil society.

C-URGE is rooted in a strong and diverse partnership that spans both academic and non-academic worlds. The network connects four European universities—KU Leuven (Belgium), Martin Luther University Halle-Wittenberg (Germany), the University of Catania (Italy), and Uppsala University (Sweden)—with six non-academic partners and the support of an interdisciplinary advisory board. Together, they create a rich environment for learning, exchange, and co-production of knowledge.

The project's research unfolds across four continents, with 10 Doctoral Candidates (DCs) conducting in-depth ethnographic fieldwork in regions where the effects—and perceptions—of climate change take on complex, locally grounded forms. Through this work, the project explores how different temporalities and meanings of climate urgency emerge and are negotiated in everyday life, while also tracing their broader global entanglements and far-reaching implications.

But C-URGE is more than a research program. It is a space for experimentation, dialogue, and capacity building—where academic training is combined with hands-on experience in organizations engaged in science communication, environmental policy, social transformation, and grassroots activism. This approach ensures that researchers are not only well-grounded theoretically and methodologically but also equipped to move across sectors and contribute to climate action in concrete, context-sensitive ways.

In line with the aims of the European Climate Pact, C-URGE strengthens the links between knowledge and action, offering a transdisciplinary response to the multiple urgencies brought about by climate change. The perspectives and insights it generates aim to inform both public debate and policy innovation—within and beyond Europe.

Introduction

Climate change poses complex and entangled challenges that are situated in local lifeworlds, underscoring the crucial insights generated by anthropological research. To rise to the task of our main objective—to pioneer a social science that attends to the notion of 'urgency' itself, we advance eco-ethnography as a tool to this end. Eco-ethnography combines an ethnographic and anthropological approach to citizen science that understands socio-cultural-environmental relationships through a wider perspective and attends deeply to context. It offers a collaborative approach to knowledge production, that is, co-creation among scientists, citizens, and citizen scientists, and a transdisciplinary lens which fosters novel insights. Employing eco-ethnography as a methodology will therefore provide rich data that yields profound understandings of the complexities at stake. It is instrumental in working toward the project's commitments to public engagement and open science. This present document serves as a preliminary protocol prior to the launching of fieldwork that will facilitate the latter.

[3]

Methodology

Eco-ethnography, aside from its engagement with mixed-methods, prescribes first and foremost ethnographic methods. Ethnography is an explorative, situated, immersive, abductive research methodology that is deeply rooted in everyday practices and life experiences of research interlocutors. Eco-ethnography maximizes this approach through three main pillars: collaborative research methods, open co-learning processes, and a specific reflexive focus on socio-ecological relations.

These measures aim to gauge how different actors (fishermen, journalists, common citizens, farmers, activists, young generation social entrepreneurs, etc.) define, perceive, imagine, plot, adopt climate change, and prefigure climate resilience, and, on the discourses, technologies and forms of knowledge climate change generates. However, it is important to say that the above-mentioned considerations provide the DCs with methodological inroads rather than a rigid prescription for conducting anthropological research. A narrow and formulaic methodology risks overlooking particularities or may not even be applicable in the fields being researched.

Flexibility is strongly needed also in the identification of those groups which in eco-ethnography are called "citizen scientists" (CSs). This is indeed a complex category that should be managed with caution by DCs, depending on the specificities of their cases and fields of research. In urban areas, for instance, it is more common to meet groups that identify themselves as citizen scientists, while in rural internal areas, and in certain regions of the world this may be uneasy. If the aim is to work with groups or collectives who organize themselves to respond to the challenges created by the changing climate in their life contexts, these could easily be ordinary people who face shared problems by finding solutions with the knowledge they have at their disposal; therefore people who may not identify themselves either in the category of "science" or in that of "citizenship" as far from their *emic* perspectives. Only a flexible stance would allow that anthropological inclusiveness

of local points of view that is a harbinger of ethnographic discovery.

Eco-ethnography, in our formulation, presents as a toolbox from which DCs can source relevant methods in an iterative and flexible manner throughout their projects. It is through this expansive methodological stance that we can encompass diverse cases and that new kinds of expertise of climate urgency will be built. For example, several sessions during the kick-off event provided fruitful directions for further development of eco-ethnography: 1) Prof. Mara Benadusi's session on Collaborative Action Research, 2) Prof. Jennifer Deger's Keynote: Attuning to Co-Creativity, 3) Prof. Paolo Favero's session on Multimodal Fieldwork, and lastly 4) Dr. Tine Huyse's session on ATRAP Citizen Science Project (An integrative and inclusive approach toward studying and controlling snail-borne diseases).

Furthermore, we envision the Uppsala University PhD course 'Anthropology and the Anthropocene' will contribute further regarding important methods and methodological considerations for the anthropology of global climate urgency.

The main instrument through which we will gain data regarding Objective 2 (to develop novel transdisciplinary methods and approaches to qualitatively investigate climate urgency) is eco-ethnography[1], an experimental and reflexive transdisciplinary method inspired by the empirical and theoretical concerns of anthropology. Eco-ethnography opens up a discursive space where hybrid solutions and analyses are possible, where we integrate and synthesize methods and disciplines to foster critical knowledge about climate urgency; a topic that is not bound to one discipline alone. It draws from the storytelling character of anthropological research and its longstanding history to tell stories from an inside (*emic*) perspective and is therefore well-suited to foster a hybrid space where knowledge from realms as diverse as from the fields of human and economic geography, media studies, digital humanities, international relations, environmental sciences (human geography, hydrology, meteorology), STS, and political sciences merge and intertwine.[2] DCs will develop the notion of eco-ethnography as a novel transdisciplinary approach to qualitatively investigate climate urgency and establish disciplinary synergies to produce an understanding about climate urgency beyond any discipline-based exegesis.

Eco-ethnography is also an improved form of citizen science, which works with interlocutors as co-designers of research projects and as co-creators of 'common knowledge.' It builds upon Appadurai's highly influential book *The Future as a Cultural Fact*,[3] in which he proposes to take seriously the kind of knowledge that our interlocutors deem necessary for their survival as human beings and to their claims as citizens.

In dialogue with media and literature experts and practitioners, DCs will collect and analyze a variety of media texts—including radio broadcasts, television segments, newspapers, online posts,

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[1] Grace-McCaskey, C. A., Iatarola, B., Manda, A. K., & Etheridge, J. R. (2019). *Eco-ethnography and Citizen Science: Lessons from Within*. Society & Natural Resources, 32(10), 1123-1138, https://doi.org/10.1080/08941920.2019.1584343;
Palmer, J. (2017). *Ethnography as transdisciplinary inquiry: two stories of adaptation and resilience from Aceh, Indonesia*. In D. Fam, J. Palmer, C. Riedy, & C. Mitchell (Eds.), *Transdisciplinary Research and Practice for Sustainability Outcomes* (pp. 190-204). Routledge, DOI:10.4324/9781315652184;
Appadurai, A. (2013). *The Future as Cultural Fact: Essays on the Global Condition*. Verso.

and blogs—using approaches such as emplotment, entextualization, remediation, and discourse analysis, all drawn from literature and media studies. Some projects will also engage with 'ecocriticism,' an approach that examines how media and expert discourses represent the entangled relationships between humans and the physical environment.

Drawing on methods from human geography, DCs may choose to employ mapping techniques to visualise key data from their fieldsites. In collaboration with citizen scientists, they have the option to produce both paper-based and digital 'climate maps' that document—depending on the focus of their individual projects—environmental hazards, historical and ongoing biodiversity loss, the impacts of climate change on livelihoods, local perceptions of toxicity and vulnerability, and so-called 'situated inconveniences' such as odours, noise, waste accumulation, or the presence of stray animals. Some maps may also reflect the occurrence of climate-related diseases. When relevant, these visual tools can be triangulated with interview data to better understand how people interpret the 'health' of their environment, their perceived role in contributing to climate change, and the gaps between perception and measurable reality.

Protocol for eco-ethnography in C-Urge

By working in close collaboration with CSs or other practitioners, the DCs will generate "important cultural data that scientific instruments, quantitative surveys and geospatial representations cannot capture otherwise."[4] The work with CSs is complementary with our other qualitative methods such as participant observation (in environmental activist movements, with individuals and groups that circulate narratives about climate denial, etc.), interviews and apprenticeships. This means that the DCs will also mobilize other methods apart from the work with the CSs!

This protocol is limited to the work with the CSs.

1. Pre-fieldwork

1.1. DCs try to map the main themes around climate change that they find to be represented and debated online regarding their subproject; and they repertoire the dominant voices around these debates.

1.2. DCs reach out to these main actors and set up a (remote) conversation about ongoing activities regarding climate struggle and resistance, especially they identify the main desires, goals and objectives of these actors; and try to understand what these same actors

[4] Grace-McCaskey, C. A., Iatarola, B., Manda, A. K., & Etheridge, J. R. (2019). *Eco-ethnography and Citizen Science: Lessons from Within*. Society & Natural Resources, 32(10), 1123-1138. https://doi.org/10.1080/08941920.2019.1584343

would expect from eco-ethnography (though no explicit agreement yet is made regarding intense collaboration during fieldwork—this is all part of a partial prospecting phase).

1.3. DCs read about citizen science projects around the world, and learn from their best practices, and things not to do (in particular. https://citizensciencetoolkit.eu/stories/research-protocol/; https://digitalcommons.lmu.edu/cate/vol7/iss2/4/ https://pressbooks.pub/sustainabilitymethods/chapter/citizen-science/ ; and to be added by the DCs). DCs write a 3-page report (Times New Roman, 12pt, single-spaced) about what they imagine will work best in the field and submit this to their supervisors at the latest one month before they travel to the field, and discuss it with their supervisors.

2. In the first weeks of fieldwork

2.1. DCs encounter the people who have been identified in the pre-fieldwork stage.

2.2. DCs inquire about other political actors whose voices are influential regarding climate change, but who may for one reason or the other, be silenced, marginalized, or not represented online. They set up a conversation through which they can identify the main desires, goals and objectives of these actors; and try to understand what these same actors would expect from eco-ethnography (though no explicit agreement yet is made regarding intense collaboration during fieldwork—this is all part of a partial prospecting phase).

2.3. DCs decide with whom to work for the development of their eco-ethnography, give more information about what eco-ethnography can be, share a collection of texts about eco-ethnography and citizen science, and obtain explicit consent from the selected interlocutors who will participate as research collaborators, either in the case they self-identified themself as citizen scientists (CSs) or not—each DC should collaborate with at least 8 of these key interlocutors in the field.

2.4. DCs and main representatives of the selected group of co-creators of academic research reflect (a) on the research question, (b) on its relevance for the studied community, and, (c) if necessary transform the research question in order to meet local concerns better, (d) identify main steps (and technologies) for data collection and decide on an appropriate division of tasks; (e) agree on the appropriate means of non-academic dissemination of the results, and who will be in charge; and (f) make an agreement on the politics of authorship and ownership of the data (e.g. the PhD dissertation will be single authored, while the chapter for the edited book volume is co-authored with several CSs, or will the DC and the CSs set up a collective like Miyarrka Media; or they will cooperate not in academic publications (thesis and volume article) but on other forms of public restitution of their research results as well in the co-writing the policy paper coming out from the research).

3. Main part of fieldwork

3.1. Phase of data collection—while adhering to the basic ethical principles of anthropological inquiry, and the key characteristics of citizen science;

3.2. Phase of data analysis: DC and a select number of citizen scientists (in the large open sense we have discussed above) explore the retrieved data, identify main themes, and co-produce analysis.

4. Near the end of fieldwork

4.1. Intermittent data dissemination: coupling back of data to the studied community through community events in which community members can provide feedback before certain materials are posted online, or published about in local and global media outlets (radio, television, etc.)—all of this obviously will provide also significant data for the DC;

4.2. Collecting and publishing documents that the studied community agrees with—on online platforms, and in local and global media outlets;

4.3. A reflexive moment between the DC and the representatives of the CSs in order to evaluate the process, the co-created data and output. DC writes a report about this (minimally 3 pages, Times New Roman 12 point, single spaced);

4.4. DC and representatives of the CSs agree on how to move forward once the DC has exited the field (what kind of continued interaction is expected from both sides?; what kind of data collection, analysis, or dissemination still needs to be done, and who will do so?; etc.).

5. Post-fieldwork

5.1. DCs write a post-fieldwork report of 10 pages;

5.2. In the report DCs reflect on their fieldwork, and explain if and how they worked adherence to what described in the report they had submitted before traveling to the field. In case of discontinuity/divergences they give justification of their choices;

5.3. DCs write academic chapters, and articles, and disseminate their findings in academic conferences;

5.4. DCs share drafts of their intermittent PhD dissertation writings, conference papers, and articles with some of the CSs who have agreed to provide feedback;

5.5. DCs follow up on what is agreed in 4.4;

5.6. DCs carry out non-academic secondment for three months;

5.7. DCs try to establish connections between that space and the studied community IF the latter desires this;

5.8. DCs transfer relevant knowledge and contacts obtained during the non-academic secondment to the CSs;

5.9. DCs defend their PhD dissertation;

5.10. CSs are invited to attend, at least remotely;

5.11. CSs get a copy of the dissertation;

5.12. DCs and CSs consider potential future collaborations, if mutually desired.

List of abbreviations

CS	Citizen Scientist
DC	Doctoral Candidate
STS	Science and Technology Studies