

Fieldwork Meets Crisis

DGSKA autumn school

Location: Online
Time: 21-23 October 2020

Target group: Interested doctoral candidates from all anthropology departments
Deadline for applications: 07 September 2020

Brief description:

The Autumn School takes its starting point in the current pandemic moment, which substantially affects our discipline. (Field) research cannot be conducted or changes significantly, the mobility of researchers is limited, physical proximity on-site is replaced by online contacts, planning security gives way to uncertainty.

The current situation is particularly challenging for doctoral students and early-career researchers who cannot carry out their research as planned and are exposed to professional uncertainty due to temporary employment limitations. This autumn school aims to address these challenges and support doctoral students in seeking solutions for their research projects and academic careers.

Even if corona-induced changes in ethnographic research will (hopefully) not remain a permanent condition, they provoke important questions and discussions that go beyond the pandemic moment and remain relevant for social and cultural anthropology as a discipline. This autumn school focuses on contemporary data-saturated life worlds and enquires into the social consequences of digitization and its methodological and epistemological impact.

Program:

Day I: Wednesday, 21 October 2020, 4 – 6 pm

Module 1: Open module

This kick-off module is a discussion forum in which the participants report and discuss the corona-related changes and challenges in their respective research fields. How does COVID-19 change your research? What shifts in research content are taking place? What methodological challenges (or opportunities) are emerging? Which ethical questions must be asked? What structural difficulties are you confronted with? What should be the outcome of this autumn school?

Organisation/moderation: Mirco Göpfert (Frankfurt am Main), Andrea Behrends (Bayreuth)

Day II: Thursday, 22 October, 10 am - 4.15 pm

Module 2 (9 am – 12 pm): Methods and cooperation

In this module, we want to exchange views on the current research situation and discuss how to deal with fieldwork interruption. In particular, the module will ask about possibilities for cooperation in fields that are frequently (media-technologically) reconfigured. We will consult texts that deal with digital methods in ethnographic practice, question the limits and delimitations of the ethnographic field (Amit 2000, Horst 2016) and develop modes and theorizations of media-supported field research (Beaulieu 2010, Postill/Pink 2012). The new inequalities created by digitalization infrastructures will also have to be addressed and ways of counteracting them will be considered. To conduct field research as a situated practice in space and time, we aim for concrete methodological adjustments which, given the current pandemic, will enable cooperation over distance and thus realize “remote fieldwork” involving research partnerships. Drawing on the discipline’s traditions of continuing research cooperation beyond the field (e.g. Mead 1977), concrete examples and possible ways of conducting fieldwork will be discussed, focusing on the participants’ research contexts. We will also address ethical questions.

Participants are asked to share a reflection of their current field research situation in advance on the boasblog “fieldwork meets crisis”. Together with the basic texts to be prepared, the participants' boasblog contributions will serve as the basis for the module.

Organization/moderation: Anna Lisa Ramella (Cologne), Martin Zillinger (Cologne)

12 - 1 pm Lunch Break

Module 3 (1 - 4.15 pm): Research infrastructures and emotional challenges

This module addresses the existential challenges and uncertainties of doctoral research in times of a pandemic.

The first 90 minutes session provides a platform for questions related to the structural conditions of pursuing a doctorate in social and cultural anthropology during COVID-19. How are fixed-term contracts affected by the pandemic? What opportunities (and how much time) are granted to doctoral students to re-enter and adapt to changing fieldwork structures? We invite a DFG (German Research Council) expert who attends to the participant’s questions.

The second session addresses the emotional challenges of (not) conducting field research in times of pandemic crisis. The module offers space for participants’ flash presentations (max. 7 minutes) and structured Q&A. Finally, we will present supportive formats in the context of supervision workshops and affective scholarship.

Organization/moderation: Thomas Stodulka (Berlin), Minh Nguyen (Bielefeld)

Day III: Friday, 23 October 2020, 9 am – 4 pm

Module 4 (9 am - 12 pm): Data Worlds

Data infected worlds affect our life worlds. Research can focus on different forms of digitization: as modes of communication and control (e.g. through the registration of personal data), as economic activities or as digitally transformed government measures used on computers and other (mobile) devices. At the same time, an increasing transformation of social, political or economic practices to digital technologies such as smartphones, biometric authentication technologies and platforms based on internet applications accompany everyday usage. What

is the significance of datafication in different contexts? What does it make visible, what does it render obsolete?

The module deals with the social and environmental consequences of digitization. We include both theoretical contributions and case studies from concrete research contexts. How do environments that are recorded with data and controlled by data acquisition affect our daily perception? What research topics result from these interdependencies? Are “real” and “digital” worlds even separable? How is access to new technologies negotiated, and where do these negotiations end? In what ways could digital technologies better facilitate access to the “good life” and in particular to global goods and ideas, to political decision-making processes, academic platforms, the development of health, educational and other infrastructures? And where are the obstacles and problems that limit or call into question the hopes, promises and goals of digitization?

Organization/moderation: Andrea Behrends (Bayreuth), Magnus Treiber (Munich)

12- 1 pm Lunch Break

Module 5 (1-4 pm): An Anthropology of Anthropology in Times of Digitalization

Social and Cultural Anthropology has been dealing with cultural and societal transformations brought about by digitalization for quite some time. The Covid-19 pandemic boosts increased urgency to this research interest. Social forms of interaction are increasingly shifting to virtual spaces, changing social relationships previously based on physical co-presence. At the same time, digitalized measures of pandemic control (e.g. contact tracing by Corona-APPS) play a central role in governmental bio-politics and state surveillance. Moreover, many debates about Covid-19 as a global pandemic event take place in social media networks. Hence, debating cultures are subject to the infrastructural and subcultural logics of digitalized communication.

Against the background of these complex developments, the module addresses the effects of digitization on the subject of social and cultural anthropology. Digitization is to be regarded both as a focus of ethnographic research and as an instrument of knowledge construction. What epistemological effects does digitization have on the subject? How does the study of this topic and/or the increasingly relevant methods of virtual ethnography affect research ethics, research designs and ethnographic modes of representation? What can we learn from other disciplines, such as media studies? What could be the genuine anthropological contribution to this field of research? What new tasks and responsibilities are anthropologists facing?

Organisation/moderation: Thomas Kirsch (Konstanz), Asta Vonderau (Halle).

Application Procedure:

We look forward to receiving your application to the autumn school by **07 September 2020** at the latest (herbstakademie@dgska.de). The organizers will get back to you by **17 September 2020** as to whether and how participation can be guaranteed. Please enclose a 2-3 pages exposé with your application letter, which contains a narrative on the following points: (a) institutional context as well as topic and question of your doctoral research, (b) information on the current state of your research as well as your motivation for participating in the event, (c) explanation of the research pragmatic, methodological and conceptual questions and challenges you are currently facing and which are related to the autumn school's topic.

Participants are expected to give an input of 7 to 10 minutes in one of the modules, and to reflect on their field and research situation in advance on the blog "fieldwork meets crisis". Please indicate in your exposé to which module you would like to contribute.

The deadline for blog contributions is **01 October 2020**. The format of the blog contribution is flexible, yet shorter, more pointed discussion contributions are very welcome. Please include at least one image that illustrates the teaser of your post on the blog landing page, which is introduced here via the first sentences. We expect that all contributions include a short biographical author note. It is possible to integrate images, video or audio files. For suggestions for the style of your blog post, please visit www.boasblogs.org. Please send your contributions to fieldworkmeetscrisis@boasblogs.org.

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* Module and preparation details, as well as weblinks to the online sessions, will be sent to the participants later. The organizers will provide tentative course readings and other materials.

**The event will be held mainly in German. Individual presentations and discussions can also be held in English if participants feel uncomfortable otherwise.