

## Leiden Anthropology Conference 14 February 2020

On February 14<sup>th</sup> the first Leiden Anthropology Conference took place. Over 80 anthropologists working at The Leiden University Institute for Area Studies (LIAS), Van Vollenhoven Institute (VVI), African Studies Centre (ASC), Leiden University College (LUC), Royal Netherlands Institute of Southeast Asian and Caribbean Studies (KITLV) and the Institute of Cultural Anthropology and Development Sociology (CADS) came together to exchange ideas, network and discuss. During the Roundtable 'Anthropologists in Leiden' six anthropologists reflected on the nature of anthropology in Leiden. In the breakout sessions on Methodology, Citizenship and Sustainability different presenters shared their experiences. To get an impression of the days you can read the notes written by the hosts of each session in this document.

The additional photo exhibition '[Anthropology at a glance](#)' shows the work of several CADS anthropologists.

### Notes on the Roundtable 'Anthropologists in Leiden'

With its strong humanities, area studies and law profile, Leiden University provides a unique setting for anthropology. Besides the Institute of Cultural Anthropology and Development Sociology, located in the Faculty of Social Sciences, anthropologists are employed in numerous institutes across the university. For this roundtable, we invited six anthropologists with various institutional homes, to reflect on the nature of anthropology in Leiden, in terms of its past and present, as well as its future potential. What are their experiences as anthropologists at Leiden University and at their respective institutes? What possibilities does their position offer and what challenges does it present? And what do they see as the future potential of anthropology in Leiden?

Radhika Gupta and Cristiana Strava, both from the Leiden Institute of Area Studies, discussed their experiences teaching area studies courses. They find that Eurocentrism and orientalist ideas linger, while there is hardly any discussion of colonialism or racism. They implicitly integrate anthropological work in their courses, but also find it very rewarding when students pick up the critical views these works convey.

Nadia Sonneveld, of the Van Vollenhoven Institute, wondered whether she should call herself an anthropologist, since she actually studied non-western sociology in Leiden, and went on to study law. The VVI is a socio-legal institute that offers much space for anthropological perspectives, for instance on questions of legal pluralism. She sees the visual anthropology as a distinguishing feature of anthropology in Leiden, also in the future.

Lidewyde Berckmoes shared the sense of the good fit between her anthropological background and her current institution, the Africa Studies Centre. Her experience working in environments where anthropology was less present did stimulate her to engage in other debates than anthropologists usually do.

David Kloos shares the sense of anthropology being at home in his institution, the Royal Netherlands Institute for Southeast Asian and Caribbean Studies. The multidisciplinary environment helps prevent anthropologists from turning into an internal dialogue.

Finally, Bart Barendrecht, who has been a mainstay of the Institute of Cultural Anthropology and Development Sociology, looked back at his 30 years career in anthropology in Leiden. As a student, structuralism and symbolic anthropology dominated the Institute. Much has

changed since then. Anthropology used to be mainly area based, with a Leiden focus on Asia and Africa. Now, attention has shifted to thematic issues, which is also reflected in the three “D’s” of the research program: Diversity, Sustainability (or Duurzaamheid) and Digitalization. This also means lines of cooperation with other Leiden institutes shifts, and that there is no given division of tasks. Anthropologists may look for partners from other disciplines, rather than anthropologists at other institutes.

Anthropologists are housed in very different institutional contexts across the Leiden and the Hague campus. We may learn from Radhika and Cristiana’s experiences of conveying anthropological insights in settings that may, at first, not welcome their more critical views, and where they are subject to more critical views, and have to be argued more forcefully. In contrast, other institutes provide anthropologists with a welcoming home, in which they can develop interdisciplinary engagements. We hope that the Institute of Cultural Anthropology and Development Sociology can continue to function as a central meeting points for these people and conversations.

*(Notes from Anouk de Koning)*

## **Notes on the breakout session on Methodology**

We organized this session because methodology is a strong pillar at CADS, and our ‘signature methodology’ is something that is important in our research and education. That is also why we have a RC on it. Another reason for this break out session is that methodology is very often what binds anthropologists. Even scholars working in more interdisciplinary fields, or working at institutes with other disciplines, connect to anthropology through their methodology, and very often make them stand out in the discipline they work in.

So in this session we explored questions around the interdisciplinary character of anthropology by zooming in on methodology. How are multiple approaches (social, cultural, historical, linguistic, audio-visual and multimodal etc.) taken up as part of the anthropological methodological and theoretical toolbox? How do anthropologists working inside and outside anthropology departments navigate intellectual boundaries between the social sciences, the humanities and other disciplines? Do anthropological methodologies and theories enhance research in other disciplines, and vice versa? Does our work in interdisciplinary fields change our methodologies?

We had three presenters sharing their experience of using multiple methods and methodologies;

- Dr. Cynthia Groff (LUC) – Multiple identities in educational linguistics research
- Dr. Caroline Archambault (LUC) – Students as Simulators: Challenges in researching and representing poverty in the classroom
- Dr. Mark Westmoreland (CADS) – Multimodal Methods for the Anthropocene

Cynthia and Caroline both work at LUC (The Hague). It were three very different presentations: Cynthia talking about doing ethnography as someone who is not trained as an anthropologist but as a linguist, because ‘face it’ she said “you have the best methods”.

Caroline shared her experiences with simulation in the classroom. The question that she poses is if we want to research and represent poverty in the classroom, are there other ways than doing fieldwork. And her simulations exercises proved to be very helpful in understanding these issues. She claims that this form of experiential learning challenges the students, while having the classroom is a safe space to fail. The simulation taught the students ways of relatability and 'de-othering'.

Mark Westmoreland shared his experiences with smart phone ethnography, something that he experimenting with as we speak, in the course media worlds.

Although the presentations seem to be very different, and touched upon very different topics, the questions and discussions were all geared towards the concept of ethnographic sensibility. What do we need to do, and what tools do we have to understand the social worlds that we are studying? There were discussion on perceptual attunement, embodied engagement and reflection, and ethnographic observation and theorization.

*(Notes from Jasmijn Rana)*

## **Notes on the breakout session on Citizenship**

The citizenship session had four presentations, starting with Sam de Schutter (Institute of History), who gave a presentation about his research on disability and citizenship in Kenya and Tanzania in the second half of the 20th century. His archival research shows how people with disabilities started petitioning their governments to claim their right to employment. Interestingly, some even reached out to global organizations such as the WHO, establishing a form of citizenship beyond the nation-state.

Nadia Sonneveld (VVI) followed with a discussion of her research on undocumented migrants' citizenship problems - especially with regards to official documents for birth, marriage and death. She pointed out how these migrants turned to different political communities, sparking a discussion among the audience on the difference and interrelations between citizenship and political community.

Anouk de Koning (CADS) presented her insights on Parent and Child Teams in Amsterdam that are tasked with reaching out to parents who might need help with raising their children. They do so in a caring mode, but their simultaneous role of surveilling those same parents for potential neglect or abuse of children makes the state-citizen relationship that they enact and try to establish double-faced, with the potential of care turning violent.

Wiebe Ruijtenberg (CADS) followed up on this with a discussion of Egyptian immigrant citizenship in the Netherlands. He zoomed in on parenthood as a mode through which Egyptian immigrants' uncertain relation to the state takes shape, and on divorce as a moment in which these relations are reconfigured again. The ensuing discussion with the audience on the concept of citizenship itself, the institutions people claim citizenship from, and the horizontal (nation-building) and vertical (state-citizen) relations created in the process, showed the enormous potential for interdisciplinary, and interfaculty, collaborations in this field of studies.

*(Notes from Annemarie Samuels)*

## Notes on the breakout session on sustainability

The session focused on the question of what anthropology can contribute to the interdisciplinary research programme 'the Liveable Planet'.

To kick-start the discussion, four researchers very briefly presented their main research focus. Shekhar Kolipaka presented his research on human-wildlife conflicts as human-human conflicts. Gerard Persoon discussed certification systems as instruments towards sustainability. Andrew Littlejohn presented his research on disaster protection in Japan, focusing on the ecological, economic and social sustainability aspects of disaster protection. Marja Spierenburg presented her research on the nature conservation – sustainable development nexus, focusing on land rights and livelihoods, and private sector involvement.

During a **roundtable discussion**, the presenters presented possible responses to the central question of the session. There was a very lively participation in the discussion by the audience. Below is a **summary** of some of the points raised during the lively discussion following the presentations

Climate change and other challenges to sustainability are so-called '**wicked-problems**'. These problems can only be addressed by involving not only different scientific disciplines, but also (knowledge from) different 'stakeholders'. As anthropologists we are well equipped to bring different groups together, but also to critically examine the ways in which sustainability challenges are framed by these different groups. These framings have political origins and consequences that need to be addressed.

**Power relations** between the various stakeholders are important to consider. Multi-stakeholder approaches may actually result in the further marginalization of already marginalized stakeholders. Anthropologists – especially those working in the political ecology tradition – can bring the different visions as well as the power relations to the fore, and assist in the development of ways to ensure the inclusion of hitherto marginalized voices. There is also a strong tradition in the field of critically scrutinizing and deconstructing dominant sustainable development narratives.

Power relations are also related to the different **valuations of different types and bodies of knowledge**. Within initiatives such as the IPBES, there is an increasing awareness of the contribution of a variety of what have been termed knowledge systems – including local and indigenous knowledge. Anthropologists can assist in the 'weaving' of these different knowledge bodies, paying attention to a diversity of visions on human-nature relationships, while taking into account the politics of knowledge production – also within local and indigenous groups.

Various case studies were discussed during the session – also by members of the audience. One of the interesting outcomes of one of these was the realization by engineers that technical fixes to environmental problems are perhaps not that difficult to conceive, but that

the **social consequences of implementing technical fixes** is the main challenge. These challenges are related to what has been discussed above, and unequal distributions of costs, risks and benefits among those impacted by the technical fixes. Anthropologists can render these distributions and other consequences visible.

The **importance of focusing on the social aspects of sustainability** is also demonstrated by a major finding in disaster studies: the most important success factor in disaster protection is the strength of social cultural networks!

Hence, the audience concluded **that sustainability research needs to be inter-** and, in many cases, also **transdisciplinary** – right from the start. Social sciences and humanities are not ‘nice to have’, or add-ons, but crucial to understanding sustainability challenges and designing ways to deal with those. Working with practitioners can increase awareness of this, as they often run into the socio-cultural aspects of sustainability issues.

As anthropologists we need to find a **balance between critical reflection and ‘getting our hands dirty’**. We have to (learn how to) communicate with practitioners and researchers from other disciplines, and engage in the co-creation of response strategies. The audience also identified a need for more dialogue between "academic" and "applied" anthropologists (though this distinction is, of course, quite fuzzy) and respect for and support of the latter.

Anthropologists can and should also contribute to the discussion about how to **up-scale responses**. An example was provided of the Ruimte voor water [Space for water] initiative that has been quite successful in the Netherlands in managing floods, whereas applying the same strategy in South East Asia resulted in forced evictions of many poor residents living in informal settlements in floodplains. **Context matters** – but anthropologists also need to be clearer about **which contextual factors** are important.

This also requires anthropologists to be **less shy about the strengths**, but also more **transparent about ethnographic and mixed methods** and the kind of data collected. In working together with natural sciences, some of the participants in the discussions experienced that natural science or interdisciplinary journals often require much more rigorous and transparent ways of presenting the kind of data that was gathered, and the methods used. This often led to the realization that a wealth of useful data had indeed been collected, and that being forced to be precise about this also offers a good defence against ‘N=1’ critique.

The group proposed to use the **CAOS website** to render the contributions of anthropologists in Leiden more visible by posting **strong key messages concerning sustainability challenges** – substantiated by references and key examples from research.

*(Notes from Marja Spierenburg)*