
CONFERENCES

Staying – Moving – Settling

15th EASA Biennial Conference in Stockholm, 14–17 August 2018

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The 15th EASA Biennial Conference took place at Stockholm University earlier this year, from the 14th to the 17th of August. It has been organized every other year since 1990 by the European Association of Social Anthropologists, but it is also a meaningful event for ethnologists. These two disciplines exist in very close proximity to each other, and sometimes ideas, theories, and methodologies spill over from one to the other – which is always an enriching occurrence. This transfer of knowledge is facilitated by ethnologists also attending conferences like EASA, and at least I personally feel that I have profited much from attending.

The conference's theme, "Staying – Moving – Settling," drew in about 1,500 researchers from around the world, who traveled to Stockholm in order to reflect on issues of mobility and stasis. As the first sessions started early on the opening day, many participants arrived straight from the airport on Tuesday morning. Also for myself, the conference began this way with the panel "Mobilizing materiality: theorizing the relationship between finance and infrastructural development." There, in a short introductory talk, one of the conveners noted the apparent current emergence of an *infrastructural turn* in anthropology and the related disciplines. Accordingly, as it turned out, the broad and multi-faceted topic of infrastructure – often in a dialogue with the theme of mobility – loomed in the background of many of the presentations I had the pleasure to hear in the following days.

Later in the afternoon, the keynote lecture "Walling, Unsettling, Stealing" by Shahram Khosravi of Stockholm University explored in an essayistic manner the effects walls and border regimes have on peoples and communities. Khosravi showed how the creation of barriers restricting people's mobility in one location can result in an unsettling of communities elsewhere. Hereby, his lecture touched upon many different examples from the Balkans, the Middle East, and the US/Mexico border; but he also shared his own experiences of being singled out and delayed at border crossings. After Khosravi's lecture, volunteers guided the conference participants to buses waiting outside, which would bring them to the welcome reception at the Stockholm City Hall. At these quite impressive premises, one had the opportunity to catch up with

colleagues and friends over wine and snacks, before retreating to the hotel in order to be well-rested for the coming conference days.

I started the second day of the conference by visiting the panel “The mobility of applied anthropologists: in and out of fields and between jobs.” As young researchers in the humanities are often worried and uncertain about their future in academia, it was very inspiring to see in this panel that anthropologists and ethnologists can also find adequate employment and apply their knowledge and skills outside the university, and this even in sometimes rather unexpected fields such as the banking sector.

After a short coffee break, I went to see the second session of the panel “Wastespaces: spatial justice and inequalities in contemporary cities.” The production and disposal of trash, waste, and left-overs is an aspect of the broader theme of infrastructure, and it also has strong connections to issues of social inequality, as the contributions in this panel also showed. In this session, I heard, among others, a presentation by Anna Karin Giannotta (Ca’ Foscari University of Venice) about waste-picking in Casablanca, a talk about waste and inadequate infrastructural provision in South Africa by Angela Storey (University of Louisville), as well as a presentation about the impact of waste regulations and recycling programs on the businesses and the community of market vendors in Brussels by Andrea Bortolotti (Université libre de Bruxelles). The panel’s theme of waste also represents an interesting avenue for future work done by ethnologists, in Finland and elsewhere, as trash and its disposal along with the practices and narratives surrounding them are deeply embedded in everyday life, and yet often unseen and unexamined due to their mundane nature.

On the third conference day, Thursday, I unfortunately could attend no other panels, as I had to be present as a convener for both sessions of the panel “Moving from, moving to, moving in the countryside: ethnographic perspectives on rural mobilities [SIEF panel].” This panel consisted of presentations about various ethnographic studies dealing with aspects of rural mobilities in different parts of the world. It was also organized for the sake of representing both the discipline of ethnology and EASA’s sister association SIEF at the conference. As said before, ethnology and anthropology are closely related, and thus an even closer co-operation, a stronger visibility of ethnology and ethnologists at anthropology conferences and vice versa, along with an exchange of ideas, are beneficial and meaningful for all involved.

On Friday, the last day of the conference, I had the opportunity to attend two fascinating sessions, which once again focused on different aspects of infrastructure. In the morning, I visited the first session of the panel “The spectacles, spectacle and speculation of infrastructure – Tracing the moralities of

movement along energy corridors.” Here, some papers dealt with the impact of the Chinese Belt And Road Initiative in countries like Laos or Pakistan, but we also heard about the effects of infrastructural projects in rural India and about how these projects are perceived and evaluated by the local rural population. After the coffee break, I attended the second session of the panel “Lines on the land: mobility and stasis in northern extractive landscapes,” which had a very interesting approach to the overarching conference theme of staying, moving, and settling. This panel – presumably inspired by Tim Ingold’s work – focused on various lines existent in northern landscapes, including for example seismic cutlines, fences, roads, and borders. As was shown clearly, such linear features of landscapes can have a strong impact on the everyday life and livelihoods of local populations, and hereby especially on indigenous people. Evelyn Landerer (University of Lapland) has for instance investigated the ways in which seismic lines and environmental changes brought upon by forest infrastructure impact the everyday life and hunting practices of a reindeer keeping community in the Siberian taiga. Franz Krause (University of Cologne) in turn explored the making, following, and keeping of trails in the Canadian Mackenzie Delta in his talk, and Gioia Barnbrook (University of Aberdeen) explained in her presentation how a hydroelectric development project has disrupted the aerial lines along which geese migrate through Northern Quebec – a disruption which subsequently also has strongly impacted the everyday life, customs, and hunting practices of the local Cree hunters.

After the lunch break, I went to hear the last plenary session of the conference. The title of the session was “Early Career Scholars Forum: im/mobility, uncertainty and hope – critical reflections on academic precarity.” It promised to be a rather sobering affair. The speakers Lara McKenzie (University of Western Australia), Martine Schaer (University of Neuchâtel), Vinicius Ferreira (École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales), and Christian Rogler (University of Vienna) explored various aspects of the precarious conditions that young researchers are facing today. The topics of the presentations included the affects and emotions arising due to the pressures and uncertainties of early academic careers, the strong imperative for continuous transnational mobility in order to improve career prospects, the difficult and exploitative working conditions of South Asian social scientists teaching in Europe, and also the often quite (self-)exploitative working situations of young researchers within academia more generally. This highlighting of precariousness among young anthropologists is meaningful for Finnish ethnologists as well. Young ethnologists are facing similar uncertainties and pressures, which are discouraging many from pursuing an academic career. Hence, it is imperative also for Finnish ethnologists to address these issues publicly and

to establish a dialogue with researchers of other disciplines, who are experiencing similar struggles.

After this final plenary session, the conference participants slowly made their way back to the city center of Stockholm. The farewell dinner would take place there, in the historic “Norra Latin” building. This building was once a school but now belongs to the City Conference Center of Stockholm. After the farewell dinner, the conference ultimately ended with the farewell party in the former school gym – an offer for those conference participants who also after these fully-packed and intense four days of interesting talks and discussions still had the necessary energy for a night of dancing and drinking.

The next EASA conference will take place in 2020, and this time the location will be the University of Lisbon in Portugal. Again, this will be an excellent opportunity also for Finnish ethnologists to get inspired and to present their research to an audience that can provide valuable feedback and different ways of looking at things.

AUTHOR

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