

# Program: Ecologies and Infrastructure in Eastern Europe and the Black Sea

UCL Anthropocene and the UCL Institute of Advanced Studies, 19th/20th October 2023

Organizers: Andrew Barry (UCL), Evelina Gambino (Cambridge), Alexander Vorbrugg (Bern)

Countries in Eastern Europe and the Black Sea have, over the past years and months, (again) become places experiencing intensified, disruptive changes with complex ecological implications. Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine has not only unleashed a humanitarian crisis but caused ecological havoc within Ukraine and led to complex direct and indirect effects on environmental and energy policies at different scales, including the international. Longer-term and broader trends in the Eastern European region have included authoritarian shifts in countries such as Georgia and Hungary. The consolidation of power in authoritarian systems has ramifications for both environmental governance and activism. Moreover, the climate crisis is also increasingly being felt in the region, with impacts on the environment, agriculture, and long-term water and food security, and so the articulation and possibilities of any eco-politics.

Nonetheless, despite the importance of environmental change and environmental politics and science in Eastern Europe, these topics tend to remain marginal to historical, geographical, and anthropological studies of the region. In this context, the aim of this workshop is modest. Our ambition is to bring together researchers working on 'East European environments' to establish connections and develop an explicit field of research.

The workshop will consist of short presentations (**max 7 minutes**) and round tables to allow plenty of time for discussion and informal conversation. **Presenters may speak directly to the theme of each session or briefly present their own research.** Sessions will be hybrid to allow participation of researchers who cannot attend in person. Our conversations will be directed toward a collective publication, and we will discuss the details and format during the workshop.

## Thursday 19<sup>th</sup> October

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**11-1130: Coffee**, Common Ground, Institute of Advanced Studies UCL

**1130-12: Introduction**, Andrew Barry, Evelina Gambino, and Alexander Vorbrugg

**12-1 Infrastructure and Transition 1: Law and Government** (IAS, Common Ground)

Sanja Bogojevic (Law and Lady Margaret Hall, Oxford), Monica Vasile\* (Environmental History, Maastricht) and George A Iordachescu\* (Biosec, Sheffield), Saska Petrova (Manchester), Andrew Barry (Geography, UCL).

Moderator: Alexander Vorbrugg

The reconstruction or re-development of infrastructure has been at the heart of the politics of 'transition' throughout former socialist states. Major international financial institutions such as the World Bank and the EBRD have supported huge investments in energy infrastructures in the name of transition. While the immediate post-socialist period has often been described as a time of 'transition', the term today is shifting to describe and call for a transition to a 'post-carbon' and 'nature protection' economy. This 'green' shift is associated with new demands for infrastructure

development, transformations in existing infrastructure, and new sites of contestation. In this session we consider the geopolitics of infrastructure, the centrality of infrastructure to transition, and the relation between infrastructure, law and legality.

## **1-2 Lunch**

### **2-3 Georgian hydropower (TBA)**

Lela Rekhaviashvili\* (Leibniz Institut für Länderkunde, Leipzig) Giorgi Tsinstsadze\*, Elisabed Gedevanshvili (Ilia State University, Tbilisi).

Moderator: Evelina Gambino

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, hydropower has been placed at the centre of Georgia's developmental strategies and trajectory towards energy independence. With over 100 projects in the pipeline, sponsored by international financial institutions such as the EBRD, EIB, AIB, and a range of foreign companies, the country figures itself as a future hub for the production and export of "green" energy. Yet many of the projects have proven to be environmentally, socially, and economically risky for the country and its populations. In the past decade, opposition to hydropower extraction has grown, giving rise to a multifaceted movement that binds together populations living near future dams, environmental campaigners, scientists, and a complex and often precarious alliance of other publics including students, migrants, and religious figures. This heterogeneous and divided movement, which has seen its peak in its successful opposition to the planned Namakhvani HPP, has been depicted by the current government as working against the national interest. In the aftermath of the halting of the Namakhvani project, this panel will centre the recent history of hydropower extraction and opposition in Georgia in order to reflect on the potential for a more sustainable energy politics in Georgia.

### **330-430 War and Environment (TBA)**

Tetiana Grabovska (Bila Tserkva University, Ukraine & Agroscope, Switzerland), Sofia Sadogurska\* (National Academy of Sciences Ukraine, Botany & NGO Ecoaction, Kyiv), Iryna Doronina\* (ETH Zurich), David Henig (Anthropology, Utrecht)

Moderator: Alexander Vorbrugg

Many of wars' huge environmental impacts are directly related to infrastructures. Indeed, in Ukraine, major infrastructures, including pipelines, hydropower plants, electrical networks, and the internet, have been the target of Russian military action or sabotage - and their breakdown, disruption, and leaking have had wide-ranging environmental, socio-political, and economic impacts. If we understand infrastructure as a process of sustaining worlds or systems of reproduction, we see how such attacks target vital systems. But war also damages the living infrastructure of soils, water, and ecosystems. Infrastructures of warfare, such as minefields, extend war effects far into the future. This session invites reflections on the relationship between war, infrastructure, ecology, and health, and on the possibilities that such a focus may bear for solidarity and learning between conflicts at different times and places.

**Tea, IAS Forum**

### **445-545 Food and Agriculture (IAS Forum)**

Susanne Wengle (University of Uppsala/Notre Dame) and Vitalii Dankevych\* (Polissia National University, Zhytomyr), Mihai Varga\* (Sociology, Free University Berlin), Eszter Kovács (Geography,

UCL London), Kateryna Polianska\* (Environment-People-Law Kyiv) and Alexander Vorbrugg (Geography, Bern)

Moderator: Andrew Barry

Russia's war has disrupted Ukrainian food production and exports, with immediate and longer-term consequences for the Ukrainian economy and farmers, food systems in neighbouring countries, international food prices, and food provision. Rural communities, as well as soils, silos, ports, irrigation systems, and other elements of the food system, have become targets or suffered collateral damages from Russian aggression. Infrastructures broadly understood, further play an important role in reactions to the new conditions created by the war, such as the rerouting of exports, and future scenarios, such as reconstruction plans or use options for land that will not be suitable for agricultural production in future.

## **6-7 Break**

**7 Speakers' Dinner**, Little Georgia, Barnsbury

<https://littlegeorgia.co.uk/>

## **Friday 20<sup>th</sup> October**

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### **IAS Common Ground**

**10-11 The Socialist Anthropocene** (IAS Common Ground)

Jonathan Oldfield (Geography, Birmingham), Egle Rindzeviciute (Criminology, Politics and Sociology, Kingston University), Maja Fowkes and Reuben Fowkes (IAS, UCL), Tamuna Qeburia\* (Ilia State University)

Moderator: Evelina Gambino

The engineering of energy infrastructures and their environmental impacts, which include the Chernobyl nuclear disaster, form crucial parts of the political history of the region. At the same time, the development of the geo and environmental sciences and environmental activism in the socialist countries took a distinctive form. The long history of science, engineering and environmental politics during the socialist period continues to have resonances in the present, while socialist projects have been repurposed and reinvented.

Screening of the *Stone of Hell* (Aslanishvili and Gagoshidze, 2021)

**12-1 Ecologies and the East European Anthropocene** (IAS Common Ground)

Jonny Turnbull (Jesus College, Oxford), Andrew Barry (Geography, UCL), Evelina Gambino (Girton College, Cambridge), Kärge Kama (Geography and Environmental Sciences, Birmingham)

Moderator: Eszter Kovacs

The Anthropocene highlights the “unruly edges” of human endeavour (Tsing 2015), inscribing human action onto a geological and biological plane, and reconfiguring the margins between the social and the natural, humans and animals, people and environment. Yet, at the same time, although the Anthropocene is often understood as a global process, epoch or event, it is also manifested in distinct regional and local forms, entering into national projects of sense-making. As an appreciation

of inescapable entanglements between human and non-human life, marked by climate catastrophe and pollution, the Anthropocene carries “a sense of undoing” (Hetherington 2019). Can we speak of an East European Anthropocene? (cf Hecht 2018)

#### 215-330 **Infrastructure and Transition 2** (IAS Common Ground)

Stefan Bouzarowski (ENPOR project, Geography, Manchester), Zsuzsa Gille\* and Quinn O’Dowd\* (Sociology, Illinois Urbana-Champaign), Tamta Khalvashi\* (Anthropology, Ilia State University, Tbilisi), Saska Petrova (Geography, Manchester), Andrew Barry (UCL Geography).

Moderator: Evelina Gambino

While the immediate post-socialist period has often been described as a time of ‘transition’, the term today is increasingly linked to the idea of a post-carbon or green economy. Yet the ‘green economy’ is associated not just with the macro-politics of energy transition, and the development of new energy infrastructures, but also with the transformation of urban ecologies and domestic infrastructures of energy supply. Infrastructural transformations are not just a product of the investment strategies of corporations and IFIs, but form part of the everyday experiences of inequality and poverty, and associated with everyday practices such as repair.

Tea

#### **IAS Forum**

#### 430-530 **Boundaries and Conclusions** (IAS Forum)

Ecologies and infrastructures disrupt and reconfigure territorial boundaries. Indeed, the environmental and infrastructural politics of Eastern Europe spill over the conventional boundaries of “the region”. In this context, we are particularly inspired by research on the Black Sea, which highlights the multiple flows between all those countries that border the sea. In what ways does a concern with ecologies and infrastructures shape how the boundaries and fringes of the region are understood? Can we follow the environmental leakages of the recent conflicts, wars, disasters and the projected impacts of planned infrastructures into a different conceptualisation of spatial connections? Can kinship to geological formations like mountain ranges or basins like the Black Sea form the basis for a new, transient, understanding of area? (Khalvashi and Frederiksen 2023)

The workshop overlaps with a UCL workshop organized as part of the [Socialist Anthropocene in the Visual Arts](#) project earlier that week, and participants may wish to attend both events.

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Please direct inquiries to [a.barry@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:a.barry@ucl.ac.uk), [eg666@cam.ac.uk](mailto:eg666@cam.ac.uk) and [alexander.vorbrugg@unibe.ch](mailto:alexander.vorbrugg@unibe.ch)