

RESEARCH VISION

Department of Anthropology
University of Copenhagen

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The Department of Anthropology is one of the larger anthropology departments in Europe. Its staff comprises around professors and fifteen associate professors, as well as around ten postdoctoral researchers and thirty doctoral students, mostly financed from externally funded research programs hosted at the Department of Anthropology. We see fieldwork as the cornerstone of anthropological knowledge production and pride ourselves with covering all major ethnographic regions of the world. For decades, the Department of Anthropology has maintained a strong focus on sub-Saharan Africa in particular but also on other regions, including Latin America and the Caribbean, Asia, and the North Atlantic/Arctic region. More recently, regional expertise has been built up on the Middle East and Europe including Denmark, where anthropologists have gained an increasingly vigorous voice in public discourse, policy development, and the business sector in recent years.

The Department aspires to be a regional hub for ethnographic research in all guises and a powerhouse for generating anthropological theory. At the heart of our collective research vision lies a shared commitment to an *engaged* anthropology, which seeks to combine, in different and often *experimental* ways, a critical attention to pressing social problems and their potential solutions with a strong desire to formulate cutting-edge anthropological theories based on solid bodies of *ethnography* originating from creative combinations of new and old methods. Thus, our vision boils down to what we like to call The Triple E:

Engagement. Research at the Department of Anthropology aspires to be collaborative, critical, and consequential. People with whom we work matter to us, and we try to matter to them. We are moved by the world and want to move it in turn.

Ethnography. Research at the Department of Anthropology aspires to be empirically detailed and yet broadly comparative in scope. We believe in difference, in the ethical, epistemological, and political value of diverse peoples and places.

Experimentation. Research at the Department of Anthropology aspires to be methodologically innovative and theoretically explorative. We see it as our mission to experiment with our methods, our concepts, and our scholarly identities.

In order to abide to and actively practice the common research vision formulated in the “Triple E’s,” the staff at the Department of Anthropology collectively strive to pursue and fulfill four overarching research aspirations:

1. Toward comparative cosmopolitanism

At the the Department of Anthropology, we value regional ethnographic expertise highly and remain committed to a vision of anthropology as a comparative social science that aims to produce generalizable insights about human life in all its guises. The fact that many of our staff return over decades to conduct fieldwork in the same places means that we have built up an extensive network of scholars and other professionals in the countries where we work. To further tap into the unique research potential of this global ethnographic network, we aspire to further strengthen our already significant involvement in joint research and teaching activities with colleagues and students from research institutions in the countries where we conduct our research. The Department’s long-term involvement in Enhancement of Research Capacity programs in Vietnam and Uganda offers a very useful model for this, as do several more incipient initiatives that also aim to foster novel forms of collaboration. Such communities of cosmopolitan scholars will provide a stimulating milieu for critical comparisons along dimensions of current concern.

2. Toward co-creative collaboration

While many anthropology departments focus either on contributing to influential debates in top-notch international academic research fora or on putting the discipline to use to answer different kinds of more or less pre-defined questions for various public and private stake-holders, the Department of Anthropology has a strong track record for combining, and going beyond, such institutionalised divisions and scholarly stereotypes, notably but not exclusively in conjunction with its strong research tradition within the field of medical anthropology. More recently, the Department of Anthropology has established a self-financed collaboration and consultancy unit, *Anthropological Analysis*, whose purpose is to match external partners with in-house staff and students in the co-creation of research projects and consulting tasks, which in turn feeds into both research and teaching activities within the Department. For only by continuously problematizing and experimenting with what counts as “practical engagement” and “analytical abstraction” can we break down the obsolete barrier between basic research as something restricted to the academy and applied research as something that happens outside it, and fully embrace the new methodological and analytical forms that are being invented outside academy by ethnographers involved in problem-solving and creative work.

3. Toward an expanded anthropological method

At the Department of Anthropology, we consider method to be a core anthropological competency. Crucially, anthropological method is thus for us much more than field methods. While we continue to consider long-term fieldwork to be the hallmark of our scholarly identity, we aspire to master (and therefore to teach) a broad palette of practical and analytical methods, which comprises all stages of the anthropological research process, including the identification, formulation, and application of new theories on the basis of our ethnographic materials - in short, anthropological method is also about the making of ethnographically grounded theory. To explicate and further develop this expanded model of anthropological method, staff at the Department are involved in a number of initiatives that serve to straddle and even complicate the divide between empirical object and theoretical model, including internet-based mappings of scientific controversies, computational analyses of experimentally generated data on social networks, and cross-disciplinary ethnographies of global climate change. What such initiatives underscore is that, for us, method is not only about cultivating a reflexive awareness of the epistemological, political, and ethical implications of fieldwork practice, although it is that too. Anthropological method is also about examining what an analysis is: to question and experiment with how concepts and theories are used, by whom, on what grounds, and to what intended or unintended effects.

4. Toward teaching-based research

At the Department of Anthropology, we believe that a significant untapped research and didactical potential can be released by experimenting with new platforms for "teaching-based research", where staff and students join forces in the co-creation of ethnographic data and anthropological knowledge. Concretely, the staff at Department of Anthropology are now working together with students and researchers from other departments in the development of new kinds of teaching/research platforms, including, among several recent initiatives, the *Ethnographic Exploratory* (EE), which is an collaborative research space established at the premises at the former Department library. Managed in collaboration between staff, doctoral researchers, and students, the objective of EE is to allow people who are working and studying at the Department of Anthropology to experiment with new forms of collaborative research ranging from for-credit courses over ad-hoc research groups and playful ethnographic experiments to serious research projects and intensive workshops. As such, EE together with several other new initiatives aim to energize student-teacher interactions by providing an attractive physical and institutional space for experimenting with anthropology as research practice within and outside the curriculum and indeed the academy, by pursuing, developing and pushing staff members' own research by strengthening their teaching efforts and methods, while at same time generating publicity via the presentation of findings and the housing of outreach seminars.