



ENVIRONMENTAL RIGHTS IN MULTIPLE CONTEXTS – STOCKTAKING AND MOVING FORWARD

CONFERENCE

4–5 December 2025, Max Planck Institute for Social
Anthropology, Halle/Saale, Main Seminar Room¹

All information is in CET (Berlin time)

ORGANISERS:

Dirk Hanschel (Fellow, Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology)²

¹ The conference proceedings will be conducted in English. It will be open to registered participants in a hybrid format, both online and at the Max Planck Institute. Participation is subject to registration by 30 November 2025. If you are interested to participate please send an email to elspeth.burdette@jura.uni-halle.de, indicating whether you would like to join online or in person.

² Together with Elspeth Burdette, Marie Courtoy, Bayar Dashpurev, Jenny García Ruales, Abduletif Kedir Idris, Annette Mehlhorn, Jenni Viitala, and Yong Zhou.



Introduction

Environmental rights, whether of a substantial or procedural nature, whether shaped as human or more than human rights, play an increasingly important role in international law and governance, as evidenced by statements of UN organs and officials or advisory opinions of international courts and tribunals, as well as in constitutions around the world. At the same time, environmental rights are increasingly discussed in academic discourse. Yet, qualitative knowledge on local articulations of environmental injustice and how they relate to such guarantees of environmental rights has remained surprisingly limited.

It is precisely this lacuna which the research fellowship group on Environmental Rights in Cultural Context (ERCC) - based and funded at the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology - has sought to address during the past seven years. Combining methods of law and anthropology, the group has focused on places in China, Colombia, Ecuador, Ethiopia, Finland, Mongolia, Senegal, and elsewhere, to learn how exposure to environmental harm is expressed at the local level, and to what extent the human right to a healthy environment or similar guarantees may respond to such experiences of injustice or not. This work has been further invigorated by a grant from the Volkswagen Foundation, which has allowed further emphasis on eco-centric perspectives on environmental rights, such as rights of nature.

Over two days this conference will now take stock of what the group has found and discuss its results together with renowned international experts in the field. Beyond that, the intention is to look forward and take steps towards future endeavours, which may further integrate and inject law and anthropology perspectives into global discussions on environmental justice.

Programme



WEDNESDAY, 3 DECEMBER 2025

19.00 Informal get-together at Nexus, Kohlschuetterstr. 9, 06114 Halle (Saale)

THURSDAY, 4 DECEMBER 2025

08.00–08.30 Registration

08.30–08.50 Welcome Address

Marie-Claire Foblets (Director, MPI for Social Anthropology)

Ursula Rao (Director, MPI for Social Anthropology, online)

Stocktaking I: “Environmental Rights in Cultural Context” (ERCC)

Chair: Annette Mehlhorn (MPI for Social Anthropology)

08.50–09.00 Dirk Hanschel (MPI for Social Anthropology)
Introduction to the ERCC Project

09.00–10.00 Abduletif Kedir Idris (MPI for Social Anthropology)
Who Gives a Dam? Exploring the Limits of Environmental Rights for the Dassanech in Ethiopia

Comments: Dereje Feyissa Dori (Addis Ababa University) and Mizanie Abate (Senior Strategic Advisor, Ethiopian Human Rights Commission, and Addis Ababa University)

10.00–10.30 *Coffee break*

10.30–11.30 Bayar Dashpurev (MPI for Social Anthropology)
Nomadic Herders, Mining, and Environmental Justice in Mongolia: Human Right to a Healthy Environment from Perspectives of Law and Anthropology

Comments: Sunjid Dugar (Chief Commissioner, National Human Rights Commission of Mongolia) and Hedwig Waters (Palacký University, Czech Republic)

11.30–12.30 Yong Zhou (University of Oslo)
Glocalizing Indigenous Peoples’ Rights and Hydropower Development in China

Comments: Biao Xiang (Director, MPI for Social Anthropology, online) and Brian Donahoe (MPI for Social Anthropology)

12.30–13.00 Dirk Hanschel (MPI for Social Anthropology)
Wrap-up of morning session



13.00–14.00 *Lunch break at MPI*

Stocktaking II: “Environmental Rights in the Context of Nature”

Chair: Katrin Seidel (University of Halle-Wittenberg)

- 14.00–14.15 Dirk Hanschel (MPI for Social Anthropology)
Introduction to the rights of nature project within ERCC
- 14.15–15.15 Annette Mehlhorn (MPI for Social Anthropology)
Rights of Nature – Utopia and the Law in the Context of Planetary Destruction
- Comments: Olaf Zenker (University of Halle-Wittenberg) and Luis Lloredo Alix (Universidad Autónoma de Madrid, online)
- 15.15–16.15 Jenny García Ruales (MPI for Social Anthropology, online)
Living Forest Constitutionalism: Corazonando Amazonian Jurisprudence
- Comments: Andreas Gutmann (University of Kassel) and René Kuppe (University of Vienna, online)
- 16.15–16.45 Dirk Hanschel (MPI for Social Anthropology)
Wrap-up of morning session
- 16.45–17.00 *Coffee break*
- 17.00–18.45 Panel Discussion: How can new rights contribute to environmental justice – What are the limitations?
- Moderator: Katja Gelinsky (Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung/Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, Berlin)
- Panellists:
- David Boyd (University of British Columbia, online)
- Petra Dobner (University of Halle-Wittenberg)
- Sunjid Dugar (Chief Commissioner, National Human Rights Commission of Mongolia)
- Dereje Feissa Dori (Addis Ababa University)
- Ana María Suarez Franco (Director of FIAN, Geneva, online)
- Richard Wilson (Princeton University, online)
- 19.15–20.30 *Dinner at Restaurant Objekt 5, Seebener Str. 5, 06114 Halle (Saale)*
- 20.30–21.30 *Closing up*

FRIDAY, 5 DECEMBER 2025



Stocktaking III: Moving forward – Where to go from here?

Chair: Petra Dobner (University of Halle-Wittenberg)

08.00–08.30 Registration

08.30–09.00 Dirk Hanschel (MPI for Social Anthropology)
Introductory remarks

09.00–09.45 Elspeth Burdette (PhD candidate, University of Halle-Wittenberg, IMPRS MPI Halle)
Between Rights and Resources: Mining for Critical Raw Materials and Competing
Interests in Environmental and Indigenous Rights in Norway

Comments: Nandor Knust (Arctic University of Norway, Tromsø, online)

09.45–10.30 Abduletif Kedir Idris, Bayar Dashpurev (MPI for Social Anthropology)
Environmental Justice in Action – An Initiative for Improving Local Living Conditions

Comments: Zeray Yihdego (University of Aberdeen) and Lhamsuren Munkh-Erdene
(National University of Mongolia and MPI for Social Anthropology)

10.30–11.00 *Coffee break*

11.00–12.00 Dirk Hanschel (MPI for Social Anthropology), Belen Olmos Giupponi (Middlesex
University)
Unpacking the Right to a Healthy Environment

Comments: Zeray Yihdego (University of Aberdeen) and Veerle Heyvaert (London School of
Economics, online)

12.00–13.00 Dirk Hanschel, Annette Mehlhorn & Jenny García Ruales (MPI for Social Anthropology)
On the Special Issue: The Magic of Rights

Comments: Eleanor Shoreman-Ouimet (University of Connecticut, online) and authors of the
special issue, online