



Un/Commoning Anthropology.

Sozial- und Kulturanthropologie und die Frage, was – wem – gemein sein soll

Cologne, 29 September – 2 October 2025

Welcome Address

Social and cultural anthropological research engages critically with cultural, social, ecological, and political realities. For their work, social and cultural anthropologists rely on forms of cooperation that demand constant shifts in perspective from all participants and challenge both epistemic and political certainties.

This year's conference takes place in challenging and increasingly polarised times. At a moment when academic freedom is under threat, anthropology—like other critical disciplines in the humanities and social sciences—has become a target of political attacks. In Germany, too, it is crucial to defend universities as spaces of encounter and discussion where people of all backgrounds can live, debate, and work together freely and peacefully. We therefore look forward to creating shared spaces of dialogue in which plurality and disagreement are welcome, and where carefully reasoned and understanding-oriented perspectives can be expressed. To support this, we have provided all participants with a [Code of Conduct](#), guidelines for respectful interaction, and principles for well-moderated discussion. In addition, an awareness team will be available as a point of contact for difficult situations or experiences.

Our conference “*Un/Commoning Anthropology. Sozial- und Kulturanthropologie und die Frage, was – wem – gemein sein soll*” critically explores the possibilities and politics of un/commoning. In today's context of multiple crises, processes of *Ver-* und *Entgesellschaftung* (*socialisation and desocialisation*) are intensely debated – not only in relation to how we can build sustainable and just relations with our planet, but also with one another. At the heart of commoning lies the attempt to transform resources—often managed by states or commodified by markets—into the basis for new solidarities of varying scale and reach. Yet in today's ecological, economic, and political crises (or discourses of crisis), utopias of solidarity frequently clash with



authoritarian identity politics and intertwine with one another, producing new conflicts, ruptures, inclusions, and exclusions. In this context, the question of what may be held in common by whom has become a central element of contemporary *necropolitics*. Against this backdrop, *Un/Commoning Anthropology* invites critical reflection on the production of anthropological knowledge, asking which forms of knowledge can be articulated, by whom, and in what ways.

We look forward to plenary sessions that shed light on different aspects of this theme. Our colleague **Andrea Mühlebach (University of Bremen)** will open the conference with a **keynote lecture on “Planetary Commons”** in German; please note that an English translation will be provided. **The first plenary session, “More-than-human-uncommoning”**, will bring together scholars and activists to discuss indigenous land management, alternative conservation initiatives, and collaborative environmental movements that recognise animals, plants, and ecosystems as active participants in shaping socio-ecological relations. **The second plenary, “Authoritarian Publics. Anthropological Perspectives on the New Right in Germany”**, will focus on the rise of authoritarian publics and identity politics in Germany, which increasingly shift mainstream discourse on what may be held in common with whom, and who may be included or excluded. **The third plenary, “Un/Commoning Anthropology”**, will examine the conditions under which anthropology itself may practise or reproduce extractive forms of uncommoning, and when it might instead become a shared resource for knowledge production. **The fourth plenary, “Academic Freedom in Times of Crisis”**, will explore how academic freedom can be sustained at a time when it is being openly or subtly curtailed in many parts of the world, and when scholars face growing pressures of conformity and political attack both inside and outside the university.

More than seventy workshops will deepen these debates, discuss diverse forms of un/commoning, and showcase current research. We are particularly grateful to **Erella Grassiani** (University of Amsterdam) and to **Thomas Widlok and Franz Krause** (both University of Cologne), who, at the invitation of the board, will lead two in-depth discussions. The first will address the acute challenges of academic research in



contexts of war and violence, in conversation with both Jewish- and Palestinian-Israeli colleagues. The second will revisit Helmuth Plessner's warning study from the 1920s on the limits of community, and ask what lessons it holds for us today.

This year's **exhibition** of the Media Anthropology Network, ***"Out of Focus. Un/Commoning Curatorial Practices through Multimodal Engagements"***, will be presented at the Rautenstrauch-Joest-Museum. It gathers contemporary works that engage multimodally with multiperspectival knowledge production as a core concern of social and cultural anthropology. We look forward to experiencing these latest contributions and their methodological-theoretical interventions between 30 September and 2 October 2025 at the museum.

On **1 October at 18:30** we warmly invite you to the **dance activation *"Moving bodies – moving relationships: Practices of un/commoning"*** by students of our colleague Sevi Bayraktar (University of Music and Dance Cologne), accompanying the exhibition reception at the Rautenstrauch-Joest-Museum. We extend our thanks to **Nanette Snoep, Kristina Hopp, and their team at the museum** for making this intervention possible in collaboration with curators and artistic researchers.

The conference celebration will begin at the museum on 1 October at 20:00 (*sharp!*) with the **performance lecture *"Afrofuturistic Cuisine. The past and future of Un/Commoning the granary of Ngai"*** by **Chef Kabui**. This will be followed by a **conference dinner** prepared by Chef Njathi Kabui, Gifty Owusu ([Ama Twi Catering](#), Cologne), and students from the Institute of Social and Cultural Anthropology as part of the seminar *"Afrofuturistic Cuisine and Decolonial Practice"*.

From 22:00 onwards, we invite everyone to join us for ***Dancing Anthropology*** with DJ [C:Mone](#).

Commoning also means leaving the university and inviting wider publics into dialogue as partners. For this reason, both the exhibition and the opening keynote are addressed not only to the academic community but also to the broader public.



We warmly thank the University of Cologne, as well as our sponsors and partners, for making it possible to host this annual conference at our university.

We very much welcome you to Cologne.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Martin Zillinger'.

Martin Zillinger

On behalf of the Cologne Board

P.S.

Please allow around 20 minutes for travel to the Rautenstrauch-Joest-Museum.

Timetables for tram 9 from the University to Neumarkt are available here:

<https://www.vrs.de/am/admin/737cee672c77559f70d986112b961545>

Taxis can be ordered, for example, via Taxiruf Köln 0221 2882, Großraumtaxi Köln 01632400196, or Taxi17 Köln 0221170000, or booked through the Taxi App Köln:

www.taxi.eu/staedte/koeln/

On 1 October you can reach the museum by tram 9, departing at 18:07 from the University stop, among other times.

Due to fire regulations, no more than 230 people may attend the dinner. From 22:00 onwards, all 670 participants are warmly invited to *Dancing Anthropology* with DJ C:Mone. Tickets (€5) are available in advance at the conference office or at the door (cash only). Drinks will be available at cost price.