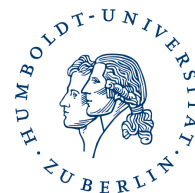


Press release
14th December 2020



For paradigm shifts in conservation science and urban anthropology

European Research Council approves Consolidator Grants for two HU researchers

Prof. Tobias Kuemmerle (Geography Department and IRI THESys) and Prof. Ignacio Fariás (Department of European Ethnology and IRI THESys) from the Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin (HU) are receiving an ERC Consolidator Grant. The renowned grant is worth up to 2 million euros and is awarded by the European Research Council to top researchers in Europe pursuing potentially ground-breaking projects in basic research.

Reconciling land use and conservation

The project SYSTEMSHIFT (Shifting to a Land Systems Paradigm in Conservation) by Professor Kuemmerle investigates how land-use impacts biodiversity, using the world's tropical dry forests as study case. The focus of the project is on the development of a new, socio-ecological approach to conservation assessments and planning that centres around land-use actors. This will make it possible to better understand the complex and diverse relationships between land users and their environment – and how this translates into threats to biodiversity. At the same time, Professor Kuemmerle and his team will develop novel methods to uncover the interactions between different threats to biodiversity that have so far mainly been studied in isolation, such as habitat destruction and poaching. Together, this will provide the foundation for developing new conservation strategies that reconcile land use and conservation goals. The project focuses on the unique dry forests of South America, as they are among the fastest disappearing ecosystems on Earth. Although agribusiness agriculture continues to expand rapidly into the last forest areas in these regions. Very little is known, however, how these land-use changes impact on biodiversity and how the ongoing loss of biodiversity can be effectively confronted.

How invisible waves affect people and the environment

The WAVEMATTERS project (Urban Vibrations: How Physical Waves Come to Matter in Contemporary Urbanism) by Professor Fariás studies cities as critical zones, in which environmental processes, infrastructures and human life are interwoven. The focus is posed on physical waves, such as thermal radiation, sound waves and radio frequencies, that expand through our urban environments, traversing human and non-human bodies. Although the effects of bodily exposure to waves are well known, waves are recurrently subject to major knowledge controversies and social conflicts. In his project, Professor Fariás explores the question of how sound waves, radio

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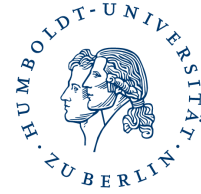
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frequencies or thermal radiation come to matter: what leads to certain waves being associated with certain bodies and environmental processes? How do they become the subject of public interest? Under what conditions waves lead to urbanistic interventions such as noise mitigation? How do political and social controversies such as that surrounding the construction of the 5G mobile network arise? The researchers working on the project supplement conventional ethnographic methods by also engaging in a multimodal collaboration with actors in the field, so as to actively participate in practices of knowledge production. The project is thus dedicated to a fundamental political challenge of our time: the question of how the mostly abstract, gradual and invisible environmental transformations of the Anthropocene are addressed, problematised and politicised by different actors.

Further information

Humboldt-Universität:

Working group of Prof. Kuemmerle:

<https://www.geographie.hu-berlin.de/en/professorships/biogeography>

Working group of Prof. Farías: <https://www.euroethno.hu-berlin.de/de/institut/personen/farias>

Integrative Research Institute on Transformations of Human-Environment Systems (IRI THESys): <https://www.iri-thesys.org/>

European Research Council: <https://erc.europa.eu/>

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