**Anthropology of Infrastructure**

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Course content

Promises of infrastructure development, as well as conflicts over the construction, functioning, and decay of infrastructure, are at the forefront of political debates across the globe. In anthropology, too, recent years have seen a proliferation of ethnographic studies of infrastructure. Here, infrastructure is often a lens to address broader issues: social relations; forms of political or discursive power; categories and standardizations; ontological transformations; the social imaginaries of material development projects; relations between built and non-built environments; and anthropogenic climate change.

Introducing this rapidly growing literature, this course explores what infrastructure is, and what infrastructure does – and what the study of infrastructure can contribute to anthropological knowledge. Topics include: the promise of infrastructure; how infrastructure can broaden our understanding of the political; what happens when infrastructure do not work, remain unfinished, or fail; how infrastructure challenges or supports social inequalities and discriminations; and how alternative infrastructure can be imagined.

Drawing on a range of ethnographic case studies, the overarching aim is to advance our capacity to interpret existing materialities and structures, including their failures and unintended consequences; as well as to gain a solid understanding of some of the key theories and analytical approaches that inform this field of study as well as their methodological and ethical implications. Some questions that frame our inquiry include:

* What is an infrastructure and what is its significance for social life?
* What does it mean to approach infrastructure from an anthropological perspective?
* How are infrastructure projects leveraged for both state-making and geopolitical purposes?
* What are some of the key methods to study infrastructure from an anthropological perspective?
* How can an anthropological approach to infrastructure help up understanding the current climate moment?
* In the Anthropocene, can we draw a line between human infrastructure and nonhuman environment?

Learning Outcomes

Knowledge

* Read and interpret case studies of infrastructure development with a critical lens of analysis
* Gain a foundation in the key anthropological literature on infrastructure
* Understand the social, historical, and environmental processes that underlie infrastructure development
* Identify how political power is leveraged via investment and development of built environments
* Identify and discuss different trends (new materialism, ontological turn, multispecies ethnography, etc.) that contribute to various approaches to infrastructure in anthropology today

Skills

* Ability to competently assess some of the potential social, political, and cultural impacts of specific infrastructure projects
* Mastery of methodological approaches to the study of infrastructure in the social sciences
* Ability to engage in debates on the environmental components of infrastructure development, and on possible alternative infrastructure forms

Competencies

* Develop tools and techniques of critical communication through reading, writing, and discussion
* Achieve independent academic thought, and he ability to set forth theoretical arguments based on case studies
* The ability to construct and express analytical arguments both verbally and in the written form

Examination

Students are graded on the basis of a 4-day take-home exam. The exam paper must consist of 3500 words (+/- 10%) including cover page and foot- or endnotes.

Recommended previous knowledge

It is recommended that students have completed the following courses:

* SOSANT1000 – Innføring i sosialantropologi