

Evidence Practices at the Interstice of Sciences, Humanities, and the Public: The Anthropocene Debate

Helmuth Trischler

When in 2000 atmospheric chemist Paul J. Crutzen and limnologist Eugene F. Stoermer introduced the term Anthropocene in a newsletter of the International Geosphere-Biosphere Programme, they launched a scientific debate which quickly gained momentum. Today, the Anthropocene has developed into an issue which is discussed by numerous academic communities. The geological sciences commissioned an expert committee, the Anthropocene Working Group, with the task of investigating the scientific evidence for the theory of a new geological epoch named after humanity. The debate has long escaped the realm of the natural and life sciences, being widely discussed in the humanities. In addition, the Anthropocene has become an issue of public debate which has featured heavily in the mass media, as well as in science museums and art galleries.

The project is part of a Munich research group on “Practicing Evidence, Evidencing Practice,” funded by the German Research Foundation. The project examines evidence practices on three interrelated levels: in the geo-, bio-, and earth systems sciences, which discuss the Anthropocene as a geological concept; in the humanities and social sciences, which debate the Anthropocene as a cultural concept; and in the (medialized) public which understands the Anthropocene as a societal phenomenon. The intricate entanglement of these levels has created new challenges and forced societal actors to leave their arena in order to negotiate evidence practices with other actor groups. Boundaries between nature and culture, humans and the Earth, and environment and society get blurred and so do long established disciplinary cultures of knowledge production, forcing actors to rethink traditional core assumptions of evidence practices. The Anthropocene debate develops into a *trading zone* to not only negotiate basic questions about human presence and our future, but also concepts of evidencing practice and practicing evidence. The project aims to investigate the forms and routines of evidence practices at the interstices of the scientific and public debates about the Anthropocene.