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Concerning the research project “Overheating: the three crises of globalization”

NESH (The National Research Ethics Committee for the Social Sciences and Humanities) has an advisory capacity, and does not issue formal approvals of research projects. The following constitutes NESH’s advice concerning the project “Overheating: the three crises of globalization”.

The sub-project submitted to NESH forms an integral part of the ERC funded *Overheating* project, and aims to explore perceptions and social practices relating to the Browse LNG plans on James Price Point, a proposal to build a gas hub on the Kimberley coast about 40 kilometres north of Broome, the only sizeable town in the region. The proposal, endorsed by the Western Australian government and planned by Woodside Energy and other major companies in the field, has been controversial since the beginning, and this project will explore the local discourses relating to the project.

The main research questions are:

- (a) How do local crises articulate with global or transnational processes (globalisation studies, historical anthropology);
- (b) How do local groups
  - perceive and interpret the crises (anthropology of knowledge),
  - act to mitigate their effects (anthropology of social process);
- (c) Under what circumstances do people make decisions based on assessments of long-term processes and large-scale systems rather than their world of immediate experience (theory of action).

Fieldwork will take place from November 2013 to April 2014. Provided the project gets the necessary permits, the researchers will mainly concentrate on five groups of informants:

- Local and regional politicians
- Industrial leaders
- Green activist groups
- The inhabitants of Broome
- Aboriginal communities near James Price Point

Some of the conflicting interests and dilemmas to be explored, are:

- Tourism versus economic growth (political decision-makers)
- Education/prosperity versus destruction of sacred sites/songlines (within aboriginal groups)
- Recreational and aesthetic qualities versus economic opportunities (Broome community)

- Ecological vulnerabilities versus accepting changes inherent in modernity (NGO world)

The material collected will largely consist of interviews, but the researchers will also use a variety of other sources, from media discourse to public events such as demonstrations. Informed consent will be obtained; all informants will be healthy adults; all informants will be anonymized; and informants will be allowed to check their quotations before anything is published.

The project will be registered with the NSD, and research permission will be sought from the Kimberley Land Council (KLC), which manages the interests of the indigenous groups in the area. The KLC has asked for an ethical evaluation from an independent body to be submitted with the application, and this is a main reason for approaching NESH.

The ethical issues involved, as identified by the project, mainly concern the indigenous groups. NESH is asked to consider the following questions:

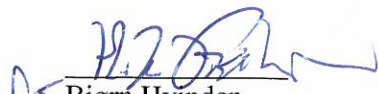
- Is the research project designed in such a way that it guarantees the Aboriginal groups integrity, anonymity and ownership of their own knowledge?
- Could the research contribute to harming them or making their situation more difficult?


Potentially, the vulnerable nature of Aboriginal knowledge, particularly cosmological and ritual knowledge, might raise ethical concerns (cf. NESH guidelines § 25). In the received documentation, it is stressed that the project does not aim to collect and record cultural knowledge of this kind; rather, the focus is on the political prospects faced by these communities and the ways in which they develop and mobilise knowledge enabling them to make decisions relevant to their survival as culture-bearing groups.

Based on the submitted documentation, NESH finds that the project seems responsibly designed from a research ethical point of view. For its recommendation of the project, NESH presupposes that the consent form be modified to conform to directions provided in the NESH guidelines § 8 (<http://www.etikkom.no/Forskningsetikk/Etiske-retningslinjer/Samfunnsvitenskap-jus-og-humaniora/B-Hensyn-til-personer-5---19/8-Krav-om-a-informere-dem-som-utforskes/>) and in NSD's online recommendations (<http://www.nsd.uib.no/personvern/meldeplikt/samtykke>) concerning which information should be included (in the current draft received by NESH, the information on the purposes of the research, e.g., is much too general to be informative).

For its evaluation, NESH also presupposes that relevant expertise is consulted to ensure that indigenous peoples' rights to protect their own knowledge are respected throughout the project.

On behalf of NESH,

  
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Committee leader, NESH

  
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