

PANEL 6: NATURAL AND CULTURAL HERITAGE IN NORTH-WESTERN AUSTRALIA

The unique heritage of the Kimberley (Western Australia) aligns diverse actors in a collective response to large-scale industrialization in the region. The Kimberley region is a unique tourist destination advertised as the 'last frontier' of Australia. Apart from its magnificent scenery, it holds significant natural and cultural values. Additionally, a creolization process brought forth by Aboriginal, European and Southeast Asian migration (notably Japanese pearl divers) spans back to the late 19th century.

All of this today forms the basis for a unique transcultural heritage. This heritage is put under significant pressure due to the proposal of large-scale explorations of natural resources: coal, iron-ore, uranium and bauxite, but also shale gas, extracted throughout the Kimberley with use of the controversial technology of fracking. Rising conflicts between (1) resource industries that aim to exploit nature and (2) transcultural heritage initiatives designed to preserve it have activated new and situated debates about the future of the region. To put it differently, the conflicts between diverse actors (scientists, politicians, NGOs, parts of the indigenous and non-indigenous population, and the resource industry) have also generated diverse collaborations and 'cosmopolitical' engagements with the local environment. In light of the predicament of the anthropocene, what are their alternative models for a common future for the Kimberley?

Panel presenters conduct ethnographic projects that address these issues from diverse perspectives. They are members of the interdisciplinary research group [“The Transcultural Heritage of Northwest Australia: Dynamics and Resistances”](#) at Heidelberg University.

Topics addressed in this panel include, but are not limited to:

- the distribution of natural, economic and social resources
- different cultural understandings of “nature”, “environment” and “wilderness”
- challenges and opportunities for sustainable development, and social opportunities in present-day Australia
- literary and artistic articulations and negotiations of environmental issues
- Aboriginal environmental knowledge and a new assessment of rituals and practices
- the role of the media in ecological debates
- debates over Australia’s cultural and scientific heritage
- environmental justice and the law, including land right claims and mining disputes

Bio

Carsten Wergin leads the Research Group “The Transcultural Heritage of Northwest Australia: Dynamics and Resistances” at Heidelberg University. His academic background is in sociocultural anthropology, media and transcultural studies with a wider thematic interest in Digital and Environmental Humanities research, and a regional focus on the Indian Ocean World. His monograph *Kréol Blouz: Musikalische Inszenierungen von Identität und Kultur* (Boehlau, 2010) is an ethnography of the transcultural music scene of La Réunion (DOM-TOM). Further publications include the edited volume *Musical Performance and the Changing City* (Routledge 2013), and the special journal issue *Materialities of Tourism* (Tourist Studies 2014/3).