



Anthropology of Global Climate Urgency  
Doctoral Network



- Home
- About
- Projects
- People
- News
- Training Series
- Results
- Contact
- Intranet
- More
- Log In



*The urgency of actions to meet targets of the reduction of greenhouse gases is frequently considered through the narrow lens of technical, economic, and policy drivers. Such a lens overlooks the nature of urgency itself.*

Katrien Pype, KU Leuven, visiting researcher CDU – Northern Institute  
Seminar May 18 2026



Stockholm Environment Institute



The Commission of the Indian Ocean

- DC1 Suranga Suranga Lakmal Hennadige
- DC2 Avishka Sendanayake
- DC3 Helena Böhmová
- DC4 Jonny Grünsch
- DC5 Matias Menalled
- DC6 Metztlí Hernández García
- DC7 Tito Muhindo Kakundika
- DC8 Amber Caine
- DC10 Rebecca Campbell
- DC9 Luisa Mohr



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### Supervisory team

Doctoral students in C-URGE are supervised by an interdisciplinary team of scholars from six prominent universities in Europe and beyond.



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- When and on what grounds does a sense of urgency arise?
- When does or when will a climate emergency produce a sense of urgency?
- And what are the social, cultural, political and economic contexts in which urgent times actually produce urgent decisions, beliefs and actions?

These pressing questions can only be answered with

**science that is attentive to ‘urgency’ as  
both a cultural and social imperative.**

- a felt, declared, or measured imperative to act *now*
- "urgency" is a social construct
- Vernacular urgencies
- Climate urgency is not a "fact" but a practice, a complex assemblage of actions, experiences, affects, power, texts, objects, landscapes, and temporalities.
- Importance of ethnography
  - grasp the complex ways in which senses of "urgency" are co-produced
    - by scientific expertise (O'Reilly 2017) and private experiences;
    - by state declarations and neighborhood WhatsApp groups;
    - by activists' campaigns, and insurance schedules;
    - by media images and private and collective memories (Martinez 2025).

- Eco-ethnography
- Grace-McCaskey, C. A., Iatarola, B., Manda, A. K., & Etheridge, J. R. (2019). Eco-Ethnography and Citizen Science: Lessons from Within. *Society & Natural Resources*, 32(10), 1123–1138.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/08941920.2019.1584343>
- EASA conference (July 2026) – double panel

P055

Citizen science and eco-ethnography: methodological possibilities in a polarising world



# Preliminary findings



## WAW CONGRESS 2025

**Antigua, Guatemala**

*Double panel:*

**Understanding Urgency in Climate Action:  
Reframing Time, Power, and Justice**

(and writing workshop in February 2025,  
Uppsala Sweden)

*in preparation: edited book volume on "a global  
anthropology of climate urgency"*

# 1. Amidst multiple temporalities

- Climate itself is a process, with its own timeline,
- co-shaped by seasonal rhythms (rains, harvests), infrastructural schedules (power cuts, water deliveries), bureaucratic calendars (budget cycles, election years), and ritual organizations

=> *Tito Muhindo Kakundika* (fishing camps and villages along the Congo River):

temperature, moon position, frequency of rains, migratory birds (minyenyengi), abundance of certain species of fish (makoko and mbesi), cries of crocodiles and hippopotamuses, etc. provide information on the evolution of the weather

**allows citizens to imagine action, and eventually to influence (and alter) the direction and pace of climate processes**



- urgency is **chronopolitical**—enacted and interpreted in an arena of power and struggle, where actors try to define whose time counts and which tempos govern (see also Saddington 2025)

⇒ Amber Caine – Nairobi (Kenya):

Kenya’s national tree planting days on 13 November 2023 and 11 May 2024 were presented to the Kenyan public as a response to climate urgency. They were widely publicized across social and news media, yet were also criticized for what was seen as a hurried, often performative, approach, and contrast with the “enduring care” method of volunteer conservationists.

**Delay does not always mean absence of urgency but sometimes it is a mode of managing risk and navigating obligations amidst pressure.**

## 2. Discourses and aesthetics

- Urgency is articulated along specific discursive and aesthetic forms, “**sensational forms**” (Meyer 2009), which combine aesthetics and ethics, and around which publics convene
- Metaphors (“tipping points”), framings (“climate emergency”), images (burning forests, cracked earth), and genres (documentaries, protest art, viral posts) generate calibrate attention and affect



⇒ Luisa Mohr, post-industrial Sicily

urgency is shaped through different narratives: for the industry and workers, urgency is about preventing economic collapse and job loss; for environmental organizations, it is about addressing long-standing pollution and the need for a radical shift away from fossil fuels. But these positions are not neatly divided. The workers and inhabitants are not separate groups: Many who suffer from the industry's toxicity also depend on it economically (Dörre, 2017).



- The aesthetics of urgency can enable action—but they can also foreclose it.

### **Why not experiment with discourses and aesthetics?**

=> *Luisa Mohr*: the sea emerges as both witness and tool. It is a site of contamination and extraction but also of relation, care, and imagination. In a landscape where toxicity is often unquantifiable, where official data is inaccessible, inhabitants turn to their own life-time observations of the sea to make sense of environmental change. They can recall shifts in its colors, currents, and fish, sensing transformation through their bodies and daily lives. Their knowledge is neither abstract nor detached but embedded in experience, shaped by intergenerational memory and rhythms of living with the sea. Through ethnographic experimentation (Estalella & Criado, 2018), I explored how these embodied ways of knowing can be mobilized not just to document damage but to co-produce forms of ecological repair.

### 3. Paces, rhythms, and the Emergency complex

- Crafting urgency is itself a temporal process
- interacts with emergency (“preparedness”)
  - Care, commitment, and craft
  - Quotidian labor
  - Gendered and racialized
  - rely on histories of mutual aid and improvisation forged under conditions of scarcity and neglect

=> *Tito Muhindo Kakundika* (fishing camps and villages, north-western DR Congo)

so remote, no maintained alarm system; complaints about letters with requests for assistance from the governor not arriving; fickle telephony infrastructures

## 4. Urgency produces social forms

- °ad hoc formations
- reorders authority

⇒ Metztli Hernandez Garcia (Argentina, El Impenetrable, a 40,000 km<sup>2</sup> tapestry of native forest nestled in the northwest of Chaco Province, Argentina):

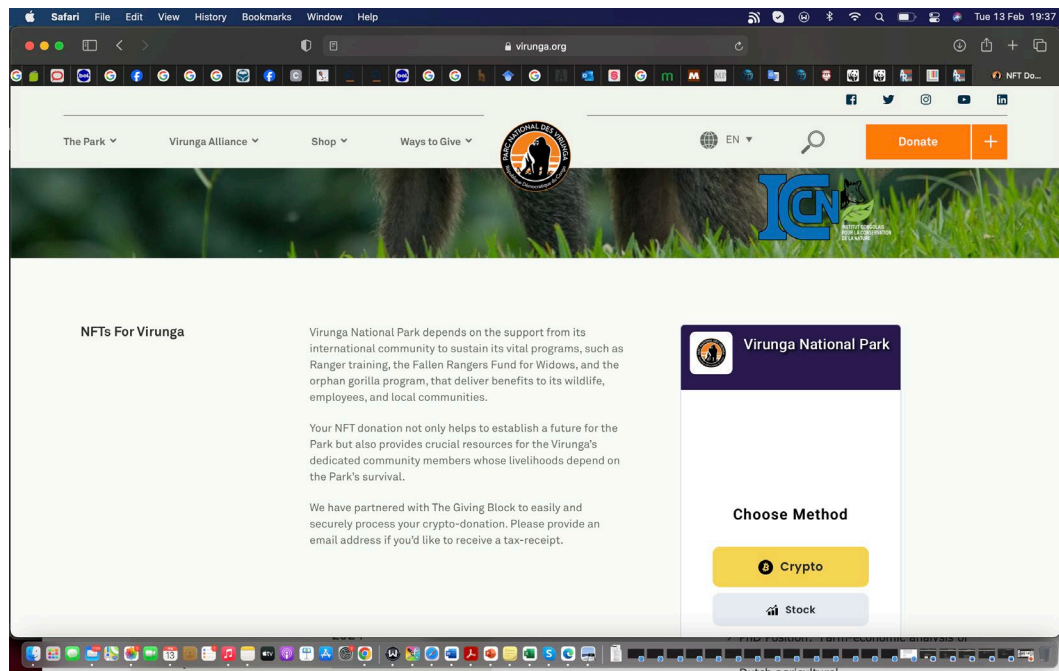
two conflicting narratives of urgency: one that promotes preventive measures, guided by a forward-looking logic of avoidance, and another that reflects on past events—an urgency grounded in endurance, mourning, and repair. This research explores how these narratives unfold, interact, and shape one another as they converge in the present, intensifying their **mutual call** for prompt and decisive action today.



Can produce exclusion

=> Katrien Pype (PI): the Digital Anthropocene – Virunga Park online

**inequalities of participation in climate change action**



Pype, K. (2024). Eco-Opportunism and Saviorism in the Digital Anthropocene. Invited by Mara Benadusi. Presented at the Living Otherwise: Environment Beyond the Climate Techno-Fix. Doctoral Seminar Series, Department of Political and Social Sciences, University of Catania



document

how “**governance of urgency**”

**redistributes**

**visibility, voice, and vulnerability,**

and

**how communities**

**tactically accept, resist, or repurpose these terms.**