



Original research article

At the German coalface: Interdisciplinary collaboration between anthropology and journalism

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ABSTRACT

For an understanding of the recurrent ‘coal conundrum’ and the German Energiewende, we applied a collaborative research method involving, anthropological and journalistic practices in villages in East Germany, where the expansion of open-cut lignite mines is contested. We conducted an in-depth study of the local socio-political effects of changing energy production forms at the coalface of prevailing and transforming energy production sites, with human life-worlds as a focal point. Working interdisciplinary with methods of radio journalism and social anthropology helped to provide insights into how national agendas based on political will, techno-economical parameters, social life-worlds and the factor of time intersect.

Despite commonalities between journalism and anthropology, this approach to energy research posed methodological challenges. Our work led to questions of how to collect and make sense of scientifically sustainable information that would allow us to understand the impact of the Energiewende. It resulted in reflections on the limits of building trust, eliciting quotable statements, dealing with scripted narratives, our own roles as interlocutors, the limits of interdisciplinary work and the impact of these factors on interpreting information in larger contexts of global climate debates and energy policies.

1. Introduction

In mid-2017, villagers in the small Eastern German village of Kerkwitz, in the region known as the Lausitz (Lusatia) close to the border with Poland, installed a somewhat unusual monument in the main street of the village. In the future, this monument may come to be seen as a modest, but significant early artefact of the material culture of the global climate movement. The monument is a lump of rock, dug up during a routine excavation at the nearby Jänschwalde open-cut lignite mine, and recently mounted on a small patch of grass at the top of the village where the main street branches into two forks. Inscribed on the rock are the words “...und niemand soll ihn mehr bewegen” (“Never again shall it be moved”) and two dates, ten years apart. The first, in 2007, was the date on which the villagers learned that Vattenfall, the Swedish state-owned company which owned the Jänschwalde coal mine, had sought approval to extend the mine, which would have meant the demolition of Kerkwitz and two neighbouring villages, Atterwasch and Grabko, and the relocation of their inhabitants. The second date, March 30th 2017, was the date on which they learned that their ten-year struggle to stop the mine extension, and save their villages, had been successful.

Those ten years, and the struggle to stop the mine, were the broader context for a research collaboration between an anthropologist and a radio journalist. In the following article we discuss and reflect on this collaboration, which involved three years of fieldwork in the Lausitz, the second-largest coal-mining region in Germany, where the above-mentioned villages are situated. This collaboration was itself part of a larger international and comparative interdisciplinary research project entitled “The Coal Rush and Beyond: Coal Reliance, Climate Change and Contested Futures in Australia, India and Germany”. In this larger project we seek – together with colleagues from political economy, sociology and anthropology – to draw connections between the local contestation of coal and the global politics of coal and climate change. Coal currently accounts for forty-five per cent of global CO₂ emissions [50]. Four-fifths of the world’s remaining coal reserves must remain unburnt if the world is to meet the climate targets agreed at the 2015 Paris climate summit [49]. Despite this stark reality, industrial countries have failed to reduce its dependence on coal, and China and India have massively expanded coal consumption, pleading the need to alleviate poverty and provide electricity to hundreds of millions of their citizens without it. India’s former Environment Minister, Jairam Ramesh, presents his country’s reliance on coal as an inescapable

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necessity; what he calls his country's "cruel coal conundrum" [47].

Our project is driven by a conviction that effective action to combat climate change is not simply a technocratic issue, but a social process. As Ortwin Renn has written, "a better understanding of the human drivers for initiating, promoting, or hindering political change in this arena is as crucial to effective decision-making as are the findings of the natural and climate sciences" ([1]: 165), and as Sovacool has argued, social science methods remain underutilized in energy studies research [2]. In order to better understand these "human drivers" we undertook ethnographic research employing participant observation on the Liverpool Plains in Australia, in the central Indian state of Chhattisgarh, and in the Lausitz. This methodology, drawing together ethnographies of three different communities fighting to protect their homes, farmlands, forest and way of life from the expansion of coal mining, aims at a holistic understanding of the affected societies. We seek to identify both the barriers to an exit from coal, and the emerging social formations which might support such an exit and a future transition to a decarbonized economy.

In the research on which the current paper is based, we approach the "global coal conundrum" and its German variant [3] from the ground up. In terms of method and output, our research was relatively unusual, in that it generated both scholarly publications ([4–6], Müller forthcoming), and a series of radio documentaries in English broadcast on the Australian Broadcasting Corporation's *Science Show* [7], as well as a radio documentary in German broadcast on the Deutschlandradio's *Dossier* [8]. The two of us – Tom Morton, an Australian journalist and journalism academic, and Katja Müller, a German social anthropologist – conducted fieldwork both separately, and together, at the field site. From this fieldwork we have produced an ethnographic study of the local contestation of coal, carried out between July 2014 and May 2017 in the form of participant observation, mostly during, before and after protest events, with stays lasting between a day and two weeks.

Although these individual visits to the field site were comparatively short, we believe our methods generated an ethnography which delivered thick descriptions [9] and fruitful analysis of the local contestation of coal and its relationship to the wider context of climate and energy policy. As discussed later in the text, not all ethnographies now involve prolonged single stays at a field site (see for example [10,11] on doing digital anthropology), and our repeated visits to the area provided for a long-term perspective, trust-based relationships and immersion in local contexts. During our research we recorded more than 30 semi-structured interviews, and conducted countless informal conversations, both with opponents and proponents of the mine. This research was complemented by tours through the operating Jänschwalde mine and re-cultivated mining fields in the Lausitz, as well as a close monitoring of media reports and press releases between November 2014 and March 2017. We essentially combined ethnographic fieldwork with the gathering of audio material for the radio programs (including location sound, which proved, as we shall see, to be a fruitful part of the research process).

This combination of methods itself reflects a lively scholarly debate that has developed in recent years about the commonalities and differences between ethnography and journalism ([12–16]). While there has been a fruitful exchange about methods and methodology between scholars in both fields, actual example of concrete collaboration between anthropologists and journalists in the field are rare. Our work enabled us to put some of the insights of the scholarly literature to the test in a practical setting, and to reflect on both the advantages and limitations of such a collaboration. This methodological reflection forms the core of this article.

As we will show, journalism and anthropology can contribute to, and complement each other. We explore questions of similarity and difference between the disciplines as they relate to aspects of data collection, objectivity, sense-making, and, most importantly, time. In the process of sense-making we identified a number of common 'scripts' or narratives in the responses of local actors to the proposed mine, and

these scripts in turn informed the narratives of both the radio documentaries and the scholarly research ([5–7]). In this process – as is the case for interdisciplinary work more broadly – there was space for disagreement and negotiation. Working together beyond the tight borders of one's own discipline requires a rethinking of established ideas and terms, and to some extent a modification of conventional methods. This approach might invite a critique of flawed or insufficiently rigorous methodology; but the cooperation might also be a way to generate data that otherwise would not have been accessible. Our methodological cooperation in particular helped to highlight – to make visible, or indeed audible – the aspect of time in the villagers' struggle against the mine extension. Over time, strategies of waiting and delaying came into focus, strategies which themselves are intertwined with larger contexts and timeframes of climate change, climate politics, energy policy, and "energy transition".

Our reflections in this paper on collaboration at the field site take the form of a dialogue between an Australian radio journalist/documentary producer and a German social anthropologist, since that is who we are. We believe this dialogic approach can help to create a richer methodological conversation between the two disciplines, grounded in a specific case study, while highlighting what is distinctive and different about each. Before embarking on this dialogue, however, we give a brief overview of the existing scholarly literature on anthropology and journalism. We also provide some details of the field site in Lusatia, a region whose history and identity have been bound up with coal mining for over a century, and which is now in the process of dramatic structural transformation away from coal and towards a decarbonized future, as part of the German "energy transition" or *Energiewende*.

2. Scholarly debates: ethnography and journalism as cousins in craft?

In the introduction to their 2006 co-edited special issue of the journal *Ethnography*, entitled "Worlds of Journalism", Boyer and Hannerz make the case for a closer engagement between anthropology and journalism. Such an engagement, they suggest, can yield benefits for both disciplines. For journalists, it can provide the basis for theoretical reflection on questions concerning journalism's role in the public sphere and political communication, the state of journalistic objectivity, and its "agency in a new technical ecology of mediation" ([17]: 6). For anthropologists, studying the ways in which journalists work can provide comparative perspectives for reflecting on ethnography, as studying the practice of journalism is "studying sideways" a craft that is similar to their own (ibid.: 9).

Since the publication of that special issue in 2006, a lively scholarly debate has ensued, comparing and contrasting the methodologies of anthropology and journalism (see for example [12–14,18]). One of the commonalities between the two disciplines, at a very basic level, is that both journalists and ethnographers have traditionally worked in the field. As Singer writes, "the researcher goes to the data, rather than sitting in an office and collecting it" ([14]: 191). This usually means an engagement with people and places that are socially or spatially remote. Boyer [18] argues that certain kinds of news journalism and ethnography are "distant cousins". Both "have a minimally *translocal* and *epistemic* orientation as practices of making and communicating knowledge about the world across social and spatial distance" (ibid.: 6). Put more simply, anthropologists and journalists often cross borders – sometimes actual geographical or political borders, but also borders of race, class and gender – and strive to make intelligible to their audiences the lives, concerns and motivations of people in settings which are spatially or socially remote.

Their respective processes of data gathering in the field, however, may appear very different at first glance. Anthropologists study "people's actions and accounts...in everyday contexts", usually through participant observation with mostly informal conversations forming a

crucial source of data [19]. They thereby generally focus on a few small-scale case studies, perhaps in a single setting or group of people; usually involving the total immersion of the ethnographer in the community she or he is studying. Participant observation as part of an ethnographic method has traditionally been an activity which takes time; typically, ethnographic fieldwork has been conducted over a period of months, or even years. Only through immersion in the rhythms and rituals of everyday life, and a process of careful and sustained observation of the interactions between individuals, can the social structures in which they are enmeshed be discerned and their role in shaping and giving meaning to the particular social setting be understood.

On the face of it, this approach to gathering data might appear diametrically opposed to the work practices of daily journalism. Journalism has traditionally been an activity focused on the immediate present; it is “the systematic, independent attempt to establish the truth of events and issues that matter to society in a timely way” ([20]: 8). Daily news reporting aims to produce an account of contemporary events based on verifiable facts, authoritative sources and the testimony of eyewitnesses. There is, however, a constant tension between timeliness and accuracy; competition to be the first to break a story may trump any systematic attempt to establish the truth of events. The twenty-four hour news cycle, the rise of social media such as Twitter, Facebook and Instagram, and above all the ubiquity of mobile phones, have all intensified this tension. They have also made it harder and harder for journalists to “go to the data”; more and more journalism is done in front of (multiple) computer screens, rather than in the field where stories actually happen [20,21].

Ethnographic fieldwork through immersive participant observation has not been uncontested, either. Anthropology, too, has been touched by the rise of the internet and social media, and the development of a digital anthropology (see [10,22]) raises, at least in parts, questions of the feasibility of long-term participant observation, particularly within fields characterized by reaching online and offline worlds. Conversely, there are journalistic genres with a long and venerable tradition which have involved journalists immersing themselves in the life-worlds of their subjects, sometimes relied on taking months or even years to research a story [12,15]. So the difference between anthropology and journalism in data collection might be – at least regarding to time spent in the field – not so large after all.

Scholars identify commonalities between anthropology and journalism not just in the methods of data-collection, but also in the ways the disciplines make sense of the data gathered in the field. As Vesperi argues, both journalists and ethnographers engage in an active process of reflection and interpretation: the journalist’s “scramble to observe people first-hand and to describe both ordinary and extraordinary events in ways that illuminate larger issues” has much in common with ethnographic practice ([13]: 9). For anthropologists as well as for journalists, transforming these observations into various forms of output, whether journalistic or scholarly, involves the practice of narration. They construct a story around, and on the basis of, the collected data. Narrative – or what is now commonly referred to as ‘storytelling’ – is a central feature of both (ibid.: 7). While journalism and ethnographic anthropology may use different forms and representational registers, both are “social analysts” [18].

Adding to this apparent convergence between the disciplines is the emergence of ‘ethnographic journalism’, where ethnographic methods represent an explicit ideal for reporters who aim at portraying human environments from within [12]. Singer speculates that ethnographic research seems to hold a strong appeal for journalism scholars, “maybe because it fits so reassuringly within their comfort zone. Ethnography involves on-site observations and interviews, making it the closest method to journalistic work that may have been done in the researcher’s previous professional life” ([14]: 192). But, she argues, ethnography is not journalism; the differences between the disciplines outweigh any superficial similarities:

Most journalism is primarily descriptive. Its aim is to accurately represent what was said and done. Ethnographic research is descriptive, too, but it uses what scholars call “thick description” of the contextual significance of actions for the performer. The aim of ethnographic research is to probe for meaning, to understand what is going on in the lives of the people being studied. The level of description should go well beyond merely relaying what the researcher saw or heard ([14]: 192).

While conceding that notions of journalistic objectivity are increasingly under challenge, Singer argues that most Western journalism still maintains a clear separation between the reporter and the participants or stakeholders in what is being reported (ibid.). In other words, the journalist stands outside the events and setting on which they are reporting; the anthropologist, by contrast, acknowledges his or her presence, and with it, the subjectivity of what is being reported. Anthropology, moreover, is inherently reflexive; it involves an “ongoing examination of what one knows and how one knows it” ([14]: 192-3), whereas journalism, by implication, does not.

Singer’s strictures follow from a notion of journalism which is excessively narrow, and which does not accurately reflect the history, diversity and intellectual reach either of journalistic practice, or scholarship in the field of journalism studies. As Nash argues in his recent monograph *What is Journalism? The Art and Politics of a Rupture*, “the transition of journalism to a methodologically self-aware, critically reflective practice in the production of knowledge” has been underway for at least half a century ([23]: 9). Nash cites Gaye Tuchman’s influential 1978 study of newsroom production, in which she concluded that news itself could be described as a theoretic activity, producing “pertinent information gathered by professionally validated methods specifying the relationship between what is known and how it is known” (Tuchman quoted in [23]: 26–27). This is not to say that all journalism – or, for that matter all other professional practices, such as law or medicine – automatically produce new knowledge or deliberate practices, but rather that certain forms of journalism practice, such as investigative journalism, are both critically reflexive and consciously employ a rigorous methodology.

Moreover, certain kinds of journalism can yield thick description, describing “ordinary and extraordinary events in ways that illuminate larger issues” ([13]: 9). As Hermann [12], shows, there is a long tradition of journalists using ethnographic methods when they go into the field. As early as the 1880s, Nellie Bly, a reporter at Joseph Pulitzer’s *The New York World*, simulated insanity to study a mental institution from within ([12]: 261).¹ George Orwell’s *Down and Out in Paris in London*, published in 1933, in which Orwell “goes undercover” as a tramp in England and a waiter in Paris, can be seen as a canonical text of ethnographic journalism. Both Bly and Orwell sought not only to relay what they saw or heard, but to understand what was “going on in the lives of the people being studied”, to use Singer’s description of ethnographic practice. Orwell, for example, analyses the social structures and everyday rituals which exist within the life-world of tramps, as well as their interaction with the larger structures of class and ideology in British society which shape how tramps are ‘governed’. Until today, journalists and documentary-makers employ similar methods in print, film, video, and radio – the latter especially relevant to this article, since the “Coal Rush and Beyond” project included the production of radio documentaries by Tom Morton.

In sum, it can be argued that journalists have been employing ethnographic methods from around the time that ethnography itself emerged as a 20th century humanistic science, and continue to do so. Journalism of this kind probes for meaning, delivers thick description,

¹ The newspaper articles and book she wrote, based on what would subsequently be termed participant observation, may be the earliest example for journalistic ethnography (Hermann, ibid.).

and an interpretation of what people's actions mean in the social and political context in which they unfold. Journalism's focus on the immediate present, and the imperative to establish the truth of events is not thereby weakened or abolished, as it continues to play an important role in everyday news making. Long-form journalism and "slow journalism" function as a counterbalance to the 24-hour news cycle, and allow various forms of self-reflection.

Time, it becomes clear, is a crucial element in determining whether anthropology and journalism can be considered cousins in craft. This relates not only to the actual time spent researching, but also to methodological questions. Following Tuchman, Nash identifies the "web of facticity cast in time and space" as an important methodological tool for journalism, one that does not simply reproduce a crudely empirical rendering of the here and now ([23]: 28). Rather, the kinds of long-form journalism discussed above seek to reflect and understand "movement, change, process in time and space" ([23]: 113). This formulation resonates closely with Boyer's description of anthropology and journalism as practices with a "translocal and epistemic orientation" which seek to make and communicate knowledge about the world "across social and spatial distance" ([18]: 6).

These multiple aspects of time are also important for research on environment and climate change. Analysing the actions of stakeholders involved in coal mining and protests against coal mining requires interlacing current, short-term developments with the larger time frames of mining, global warming and international environmental politics. It also interweaves different scales of space, combining local protest with national and international actions and decision making. Engagement with both the local and global dimensions of climate change across different timescales have consequently been a distinctive feature of our research and is reflected in the methodology we have employed. Or, to put it differently, the research on environment and climate change that we conducted, and the findings we arrived at, were only possible through our methodology and its relation to time. This methodology threw up challenges for both anthropologist and journalist, and evolved through critical reflection and dialogue between us. Despite, or precisely because of its challenging character, this method allowed us to encompass and analyse a local ethnography in contexts that transcend both the "ethnographic present" ([51]: 80) and its journalistic counterpart, the "here and now".

3. National frames and local settings

3.1. The German energy transition and the "coal conundrum"

One of the most important contexts for the local struggles we examined is the German *Energiewende*, or energy transition. Since its inception, the *Energiewende* has become emblematic for an approach to climate policy which recognizes the urgent need for emissions reduction, and seeks to bring about a decisive shift away from reliance on fossil fuels towards a low-emissions economy. It has been described as "one of the most ambitious national energy transition initiatives worldwide" ([24]: 1547); a comprehensive policy framework which sets a target of 35% of national electricity generation to be provided by renewables by 2020, and 80% by 2050 [25]. Germany aims to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 40% by 2020 (relative to 1990 levels), and by 80–95% by 2050 (ibid.). Long-term ambitions implied in the *Energiewende* are full de-carbonization of the economy and the transition to an energy system fully based on renewable energies ([26]: 51).

The energy transition also commits Germany to a phase-out of all currently operating nuclear power plants by 2022. This dual emphasis on de-nuclearization and support for renewables has its origins in the environmental and anti-nuclear movements of the 1970s. While the German term *Energiewende* was originally coined in 1980, it did not become the "official headline of the new German energy paradigm" until 2011, after the Fukushima nuclear disaster ([26]: 51).

There is, however, a paradox at the heart of the *Energiewende*, one

which Jungjohann and Morris describe as the "coal conundrum" ([3]: 4). The coal conundrum can be expressed as follows: while renewables' share of the German energy mix has been growing, so too has that of brown coal (lignite), one of the most polluting and carbon-intensive fossil fuels of all. As Renn and Marshall point out, a paradoxical situation has emerged: "the more that Germany invested in the *Energiewende* (it poured in more than 27 billion Euros in energy subsidies, financed by energy consumers), the more the amount of CO₂ increased because lignite remained competitive in the liberalized energy market" ([27]: 230). Germany is the world's largest producer of lignite, and overall, coal (both lignite and metallurgical coal) accounts for 36.6% of current electricity generation [28]. After the passing of the energy transformation laws in 2011 and the beginning of the nuclear phase-out, consumption of brown coal for electricity generation actually increased, from 25.4% in 2013 to 25.6% in 2014 [29,30]. This led some commentators to argue that coal had made a "comeback" [31,32]. There has been vigorous debate amongst policy analysts about the coal conundrum – sometimes referred to as the "dark side" of the energy transition – and the future role of coal and coal-fired power in the German electricity market [26,33,34]. More recent figures suggest that coal consumption is static or gradually declining [28], but coal still remains a key component of the national energy mix, with strong political support from unions, sections of the Christian Democrat (CDU) and Social Democrat (SPD) parties, and some state governments. Our research approached the "official headline" of the energy transition, and national debates about the future of coal, from the perspective of local people in the Eastern German region of Lusatia.

3.2. The field site in the Lusatia (Lusatia)

Germany has four coal-mining areas of which the second largest is in East Germany, close to the border with Poland. The area is called the Lusatia (Lusatia), and mining has been going on here for at least 150 years.² There are four currently operating open cut mines in the Lusatia, which supply three nearby coal-fired power plants. They produce about 8,000 megawatts directly per year (both in the region, and in Berlin and Chemnitz).

In 2007, the Swedish state-owned company Vattenfall, which at that time owned the mines and power plants, sought approval from the state governments of Brandenburg and Saxony to expand existing open-cut brown coal mines, or open new mines, at five locations in Lusatia. This would have enabled the mining of an additional 750 million tonnes of brown coal over the life of the mines [35,48]. Nearly all this coal would be burnt in local coal-fired power plants to generate electricity. This initiative has been vigorously supported by workers in the coal industry, trade unions and sections of the local community, who see coal and the coal industry as central to the identity of the region and its economic viability (see [36,6,37]). The state governments of Brandenburg and Saxony have indicated strong in-principle support for the mine extensions, and a continuing role for coal mining and coal-fired power in the regional economy.

However, the new mines and mine extensions have been steadfastly opposed by residents of the five villages facing demolition if the mine expansions go ahead. They are supported by a range of local community groups, and a coalition of local, regional and national environmental groups – all of whom argue that any expansion of coal mining runs counter to the fundamental aims of the *Energiewende*. The destruction of villages and resettlement of residents are nothing new: during the Socialist period between 1945 and 1989, 71 villages were demolished and a total of 13,453 people forcibly relocated to make way for mining, ([37]: 18). Opposition to coal mining today takes on different forms and builds on different social constituencies than in the GDR – when

² See [46] on the history of German mining, especially vol. 3 and 4 on coal mining.

protests were rare – or in the aftermath of German reunification. Contemporary contest over coal in Lusatia has the potential to polarize local populations, finding both supporters and opponents to mine extensions, with protests attracting participants from across Germany and beyond, and reaching a national and international audience.

Our research focused on the Jänschwalde mine, which opened in 1971. It started operating in 1976, and now produces almost 12 million tons of lignite a year (<https://www.leag.de/de/geschaeftsfelder/bergbau/>). At current rates of production, Jänschwalde will be exhausted by the 2020s. In order to feed the nearby Jänschwalde power plant, the largest coal-fired power plant in Germany, which consumes around 82,000 tons of coal a day when running on full load [38], the mine would need to be extended.

If approved, the extension, known as Jänschwalde-Nord, would have resulted in the demolition of the villages of Kerkwitz, Atterwasch and Grabko. Altogether around 900 residents would need to be relocated, and large areas of farmland and forest would be swallowed up by the mines. Since 2007, when they received notification of Vattenfall's application, residents of all three villages have been fighting to stop the mine extension and protect their homes, fields and surrounding forests with all means they deem appropriate. In recent years this has also meant a collaboration with national and international environmental organizations such as Greenpeace and Friends of the Earth. This collaboration resulted in actions such as the human chain against coal in 2014, and the *Ende Gelände* protests in 2016, involving a mass blockade of the Welzow-Süd coal mine and the adjacent power plant Schwarze Pumpe, south of Cottbus. Here civil disobedience was introduced as a tactic in the anti-mining struggle in the Lausitz for the first time. While not all the villagers supported this tactic, many see the campaign to stop the mine extension as a struggle to defend the goals of the *Energiewende* and the Federal Government's climate targets as well.

4. Cousins in the field: the journalist's and anthropologist's dialogue

Combining reflections on our interdisciplinary method with our experiences in the field, we invite the reader now to follow the dialogue which unfolded between us while working in the Lausitz. This dialogue is based on many conversations over the period of our fieldwork, and a paper given at the Australian Anthropological Society Conference in December 2016. We chose the dialogue form firstly because it echoes the actual nature of interdisciplinary work. Secondly, we hope that it allows the reader to become immersed in our conversations, and gain insights into the concrete challenges and overlaps we faced in the field. Thirdly, the dialogue form seems appropriate to us because our research was not only a back-and-forth between disciplines and methods, but also between theory and its practical implementation. Hence this dialogue sees itself to some extent in the tradition of maieutics as Socrates employed it, perhaps with the difference that critical thinking and epistemic value lies not with one discipline or primarily with one partner, but is encouraged and developed in equal measures. By drawing on some of the theoretical discussions and debates outlined above, the dialogue form allows us to demonstrate how we could apply these debates in practice, while also identifying instances where we experienced differences and limits to commonality in our practice. While reflecting on our methods, we also suggest some ways in which our collaboration was able to generate unique and fruitful insights into the “coal conundrum”, and the issues of energy policy and climate change which frame our study.

4.1. Listening, looking, keeping quiet: entering the field and collecting data

The Journalist (Tom Morton): It strikes me that there is one fundamental difference between the ways we work, and that involves the tools of our trade. For you the most important tool is a notebook, for

me it is a microphone.

The Anthropologist (Katja Müller): Yes, that is broadly true. Sometimes I will record interviews, but more often than not when I'm doing participant observation I am simply talking to people in casual, everyday settings. Whereas for you, the microphone is always on.

The Journalist: Yes, documentary-makers let the microphone and their ears lead. It's what the great Australian radio documentary producer Tony Barrell called “researching the zone” through sound; being alert to the unpredictable nature of what emerges through close listening [39]. It's what I call “listening to the life-world”. Whereas for you, I think, the microphone can get in the way.

The Anthropologist: Yes, I often felt it could interfere with the immediacy, perhaps even the authenticity of what I was observing. But let's come back to that. Give me an example of this “listening to the life-world”!

The Journalist: OK, I'll tell you a story from quite early in our fieldwork. I was in Atterwasch one morning in September 2014, interviewing Ulrich Schulz, a local farmer. We spoke for around an hour as we walked around his farmyard. Ulrich showed me the various farm buildings, the cowsheds, the chicken coops, his tractors. He talked about his family's history on the farm, and his feelings about the proposed mine extension, which he described as a “disaster” and a “sword of Damocles” hanging over the heads of himself, his extended family, and the whole village. We walked out to the edge of a freshly-harvested field, and as we stood talking, the bells of the village church began to ring for noon. Putting a finger to my lips, I signalled to Ulrich that I wanted to record some of the sound of the bells. We stood listening to them for about a minute; the low hills which surround Atterwasch make a natural amphitheatre, so that the bells reverberate across the fields strongly and clearly. I was thrilled to be recording so much of this evocative sound.

As the sound of the last bell died away, Ulrich asked “Can I say a few words about the bells?” “Of course” I replied. He began to tell me the history of the three bells in the church tower. The youngest bell had been cast as recently as 1990, in Karlsruhe, to replace one of two bells which had been melted down to manufacture canon barrels in the First World War. A second bell had allegedly come from a church in a nearby village which had been demolished to make way for a coal mine. The third bell was the oldest. This bell, the largest, and the one with the deepest pitch, Ulrich told me, had been heard in the village by his ancestors before Columbus discovered America. This history is still very much alive for Ulrich:

It makes my head spin just to think about it, but the date up in the church tower is 1464 or '65. Those are the sorts of things that make you proud – to think that same bell stood by us at the time of the Swedish invasion in the Thirty Years War, to warn our ancestors, and I guess it will do so again today (Interview Schulz 2014).

I ended up using this story at the very beginning of the radio series *Beyond the Coal Rush*, because I thought it resonated on so many levels.

The Anthropologist: Why? What was so important about these bells?

The Journalist: The story of the bells evokes a whole local history of dispossession and resistance. According to local legend, when the Kaiser decreed that the bells had to be melted down during the First World War, the village pastor defied the decree and his own parish council and refused to let them take away the oldest bell, on the grounds of its historical and cultural significance. The story of the second bell alludes to the Socialist period, and the destruction of numerous villages and displacement of populations to make way for coal mines – though of course that didn't begin or end with the GDR.

The story of the third bell is the most telling. When Ulrich says that the bell stood by his ancestors at the time of the Swedish invasion in the Thirty Years War, he is also making a contemporary allusion. In 2014, Atterwasch was also facing a “Swedish invasion”: Vattenfall, the Swedish state-owned company which owned the nearby Jänschwalde coal mine, had been pressing since 2007 for approval to expand the

mine, which, if granted, would have meant the demolition of the village and much of Ulrich's farm.

Earlier in the interview, Ulrich had told me that his family had "deep roots" in the village, and that his ancestors had lived and farmed in the village since before the Thirty Years War. Tradition is a source of pride and belonging which also supports the villagers' resistance to the mine extension in the present. But Ulrich would never have told me the story that revealed so much of his ideas of relating past and present, belonging and fighting, had I not paused the interview to record the sound of the bells. Through this act of listening, attending not just to what is said, but what we call soundscape, new facts, meanings and experiences emerge.

The Anthropologist: This anecdote, and what it also tells about your methods, show why it mostly worked well when we were together in the field or trying to make sense of what we experienced: There are a lot of similarities between anthropology and this form of journalism. What you do is engaging in sustained observation with your ears. Anthropologists, similarly, engage in profound observation, even if they focus on different senses. We both, to put it in casually, hang around and keep our eyes – and ears – open. We do not know in advance what is going to happen, but we are consciously paying attention to what is going on around us. So I think it is quite accurate to say that 'listening to the life-world', as you put it, and 'participant observation' are closely related. Listening and observing helped in Atterwasch, Kerkwitz and Grabko (AKG) to get a sense of the locals' ideas of history and protest as well as how they are actively living the energy transition.

I would add, though, that anthropologists observe with all our senses, with a strong focus on the visual. We "wait around for something to happen" usually with certain "foreshadowed questions" in mind, to use Malinowski's term, which guide what we observe when something does happen. But we do it without a clear set of structured questions and without the context of an interview. As an anthropologist I'm slightly more sceptical of the spoken word in interviews, as compared to observed practice, which I mostly rely on.

The Journalist: Why are you sceptical?

The Anthropologist: Practices can sometimes underpin and sometimes contradict oral statements; and these practices are often revealed in, and structured by, the rituals of everyday life. So it is really that intertwining of the practice and the context that I observe. And through observing actions and settings, I might come up with findings that you do not necessarily come across when interviewing.

The Journalist: Can you give me an example?

The Anthropologist: Yes, let me illustrate this with an anecdote of my own. One of my attempts to 'enter the field' was admittedly unsuccessful in making a lot of contacts, but it demonstrates that local settings and actions 'speak volumes' about people's relation to mining and how this community works as a social structure.

I was at the *Dorfkrug*, the Kerkwitz inn, in November 2014. It was on the occasion of the *Kirmes*, where people come together in autumn to celebrate and dance. The air outside was already chilly, but inside it was warm, people were chatting, eating and drinking, in a large restaurant-cum-dancefloor space, that still spreads the charm of the 1970s or 80s with its interior design and unpretentious and relaxed atmosphere. A live band was playing hit-songs from the last four decades, catering to the taste of the local village people, and soon they started dancing in pairs. Young and old moved across the dancefloor of the large wood-panelled room adjacent to the restaurant. Parents danced with their grown-up kids, sometimes even women with women, and gossip was exchanged. I was sitting at the bar where people ordered countless shots, overhearing some of the conversations about who visited whom for a birthday or who is able to hold their drink. Not knowing the people, but being quite open-minded and talkative I tried to converse to numerous men and women, but hardly got beyond exchanging a few lines. Hence I was mostly confined to observing. After a few hours I left, feeling irritated and confused because I did not manage to make new contacts.

The Journalist: I'm surprised. It sounds like an ideal time and place to do so...

The Anthropologist: I'm telling you this story partly to describe what I observed: How people in the Lausitz celebrate – influenced by the seasons, localized in the village inn, incorporating both young and old dancing in the same place. But there is more to it than failing to make new contacts, which in the aftermath is very telling (even though in that moment I was disappointed).

Kerkwitz is a German village and conventionally, German villages are characterised by close social contacts and neighbourly help that are based historically on the villagers' spatial structure. To enter this village collective via one of 'their' festivals is very difficult for an outsider. Interactions do not happen on a superficial level; to establish new ones is not as easily done as in an urban setting, say in a bar in any German city. Life in rural areas is defined by common experiences of everyday life and festive occasions defined, and also by rituals and duties such as the duty of disclosure, for example at the time of harvest, or the duty of greeting [40]. These rules are not binding laws anymore, but they still contribute to a strong sense of identification with the community and the development of a village collective. And coal already started to interfere here, as I learned later.

People from the same village had at one point, a few years into the mining protest, ceased greeting each other on the street for some months. The reason was a disagreement about how to respond to the proposed mine extension. Some had suggested approaching Vattenfall with a precise plan for relocation, others wanted to protest against any relocation at all. In the context of a rural community, violating these basic rules of politeness demonstrates a crucial rupture in social relationships. It is a very severe social punishment, one which carries a totally different weight and meaning than failing to greet a neighbour in an urban context.

The Journalist: So conflicts and tensions are more out in the open, more obvious, even though they are unspoken?

The Anthropologist: Yes. But to go back to that evening at the *Dorfkrug* inn. It can also be situated and conceptualized in relation to coal mining.

The Journalist: But from what you were saying people didn't mention coal mining at all?

The Anthropologist: Yes, and its absence in the gossip I overheard is precisely the point I want to make. Even later, when Roland, the head of the village, introduced me to friends of his on another festive occasion as someone doing research on coal mining, the first reaction was: 'Oh no, not coal mining again. No talking of coal today.'

Seeing people dancing and celebrating, despite the 'sword of Damocles' hanging over them, like on that night in the *Dorfkrug*, allows us to understand how they cope or try to cope with their situation, with years of uncertainty and anxiety, by having a kind of 'Whatever!' or 'Nonetheless!'-attitude.

But you need to observe this in situations that are part of everyday life, and decidedly not at a coal mining protest. If you schedule an appointment for an interview, people know that this will be an occasion to touch on the subject of coal, and they talk accordingly. They engage in it. I don't want to suggest that interviews are all made up of pre-set narratives, but that certainly plays into it, especially in AKG, where we were not the first researcher or journalist people engaged with in the context of coal.

The Journalist: Sure, there's a sense in which people sometimes perform in interviews what they think the interviewer expects of them. But isn't everyday life a performance too?

The Anthropologist: Well, we could spend a whole day discussing that (and citing Goffman). But that's not my point here. I'm not saying – necessarily – that what I observe as an anthropologist is more "authentic" than what you record as a journalist. But through participating in regular festivals or everyday social occasions, as I did over the course of our fieldwork, I got an idea of how socially and psychologically challenging the long-term confrontation with coal mining and the

threat of resettlement can be. And yes, on numerous occasions people deliberately did *not* talk about coal and the mine, but tried to enjoy life without thinking about that.

The Journalist: So you're saying that silences, what people are *not* saying, can be just as significant as what they'll say into a microphone?

The Anthropologist: Precisely. I learned when to listen, when to ask questions, and when *not* to ask them. Participating in these occasions is only possible with a certain amount of trust, which has to be built up over time. So I was trying to get to know people, to establish relationships, and potentially build trust with informants. 'To get access to the field.'

4.2. Trust and quoting: relationships with sources

The Journalist: Perhaps that is an example of a clear difference in our methods, which also produces different results. I could not produce a whole radio documentary of silences – interesting though that might be!³ But it seems to me that what you've described, and the whole issue of building trust, leads us into another of the key differences between the way journalists and ethnographers work, namely the relationship with sources, the status of interview material, and the way interviews are quoted.

Hermann argues that "while the journalist's primary responsibility is to serve the public, ethnographers' primary responsibility is to protect informants" ([12]: 269). This is a misconception about the journalist's relationship with her or his sources; one of the central principles of journalistic ethics is that journalists must protect the identity of sources when those sources have asked to remain anonymous. In a number of high-profile court cases in Australia, journalists were threatened with jail terms if they would not reveal sources – which they refused to do.

However, once a journalist and a source have agreed that the source can be quoted "on the record", the source can be identified, and their comments quoted in full. When I switch on the tape recorder, the interview is "on the record"; any part of it can be quoted, and the speaker is always identified.

The Anthropologist: I also don't agree completely with Hermann's statement. The ethnographer is not obliged to anonymize her or his sources. If you and your interlocutors want to say something about an area or talk about distinctive features or political situations – as is very prominent in what is called action anthropology – you can clearly attribute statements. And often in such situations, when your informants become public figures – in our case, for example, by being a spokesperson for a citizens' initiative, speaking at demonstrations, talking to the media – it's so obvious who they are that anonymizing them in research publications is very complex and might not lead to complete anonymity of the sources. So it is really a case-by-case decision, which does not get easier when you combine participant observation and informal interviews with formal, "on-the-record" interviews, sometimes with the same person, as we did in our research.

Having said that, not using direct quotes and anonymizing the case-study means that interviewees can be more frank with the ethnographer, especially in a situation like that in the villages, and in the Lausitz region more broadly. This is a social environment saturated with political conflict and tensions between miners and opponents. While it's hard enough to grasp or understand the controversies which are openly staged in public, the conflicts going on behind the scenes – between the protest groups, in the local village structure, between Vattenfall and protesters – are even more elusive. A microphone – especially the larger microphones you use to get good quality recordings – can quite literally get in the way.

No-one says that directly, as we always asked people if they consent

³ The German writer Heinrich Böll actually imagined such a thing in his short story "Dr Murke's Collected Silences", in which a radio producer edits together all the pauses and silences he has cut out of interviews into a single long silence.

to being recorded, but I felt that the microphone might not be a good way to build trust and relationships with people, and find out what is going on socially and behind the scenes. That did not change further into the research. Even at later stages, when I knew people and accompanied them on protest rallies or demonstrations, and was sure that they would not close their doors on me, I still felt slightly uncomfortable when they were asked by journalists (whom I also knew) for an official interview. Contributing to this feeling is certainly also the specific context of protest against a large company that we were working in.

This did not lead us to change our method, since I also went to the villages numerous times by myself, but I felt that the presence of the microphone could undermine the trust I had established with them.

The Journalist: Yes, I can understand that. Part of the journalist's or documentary maker's craft is to make their subjects forget the microphone is there. But there's another crucial difference between journalism and anthropology, which is not so much to do with method, as their relationship to the public sphere.

When someone says something in an interview knowing that it may be read, heard or seen by others from their community, they know that they can be held accountable for what they say, especially if they are acting as a spokesperson for that community. For the journalist, what people say on the record, knowing that they will be identified, carries more weight and authority than unattributed quotes, precisely because the speaker can be challenged and made to account for what they've said. In circumstances where anonymous sources are used the media organization publishing the report usually has rigorous internal verification processes (though there have been a number of high-profile instances where journalists were found to have fabricated sources, see for example [41–43])

Thus it could be said that, journalists, broadly speaking, require a higher level of verifiability and accountability from their sources than anthropologists; but this is because journalists are generally seeking to establish facts, or at least a "web of facticity cast in time and space", to use Tuchman's phrase, whereas anthropologists are seeking insights into the minds of their subjects, their intentions, motivations, understandings of the world and relations to their surroundings and fellow human beings.

So some individuals may, as you've argued above, be reluctant to state in an interview with a journalist what they might be prepared to divulge off-the-record or through their actions to an anthropologist. On the other hand, knowing that a larger audience may learn about their struggle may actually encourage some people to give interviews to journalists. A broader audience is an advantage, and journalists are usually the mediators creating or communicating to that audience. Furthermore, in the case of our project the audiences are not only in their own country, but on the other side of the world, too. That can evoke a feeling of connectivity; it can make them feel that their concerns are being listened to by people beyond their immediate region, which is very much appreciated, especially when they feel that local or state politicians and decision-makers are not listening. In that sense, perhaps, we are contributing to the "emergence of new modes of translocal social experience such as those experienced by mobile, cosmopolitan professional groups" ([17]: 5).

The Anthropologist: I agree. I think that both methods complemented each other more than they obstructed our work. That is, I have to come back to it, also due to the context. There were quite a few journalists in the area before us, two filmmaking projects followed the struggle over years.

The Journalist: So in a sense, the media had itself become part of the "life-world", the social environment of the field-site where we were working?

The Anthropologist: Yes, you could say that. So outsiders wanting something were not exactly a new thing, which can lead to the locals getting fed up with always providing them with what they want or need – even if they anticipate something in return. The anthropologist Töpert

described that neatly when he tried to do an ethnographic study in Horno, a village 12 km south-west of AKG that was demolished and whose population was resettled to make way for the Jänschwalde mine in the early 2000s. Töpert relates that it was really difficult for him to get access to the field, because the whole situation was physically and psychologically challenging for the people. By the time he arrived on the scene, people's reserves of trust and hospitality were already depleted. Töpert managed to do his work, but it was very difficult for him to find local supporters who would vouch for him and introduce him to the community [44].

In our case, it actually happened that the local priest vouched for me at the beginning, because he had previously met you, the journalist, in an interview situation. The involvement of journalism does not need to deter people from opening up, but can – as awkward as being interviewed might sometimes feel – also help to open doors.

Which leads me to the influences that we contribute as individuals, and not just through the methodologies of the disciplines we are positioned in. I think it plays a major role that you, Tom, worked in the Lausitz as an *Australian* journalist, not just because it brings a potential international audience, but because it gives the extra bonus of being the exotic Other. You furthermore speak fluent German, which makes access easier. And being a professor definitely comes with a certain amount of symbolic capital, which enabled several meetings with officials, for example when we had a tour of the mine with the Vattenfall's head of public relations himself.

The Journalist: I'm not sure being a professor carries quite the same symbolic capital in Australia! But you brought advantages of your own to the field-work, I think.

The Anthropologist: Yes, being a young woman certainly made it easier to talk to women and young people in particular. It also helped that my grandparents live in the region, so people felt I had some connection to it, and some familiarity with coal mining and the prevailing issues. So depending on whom I met and in what context, as well as on the information I revealed about myself, the villagers gave me slightly different social placings.

4.3. Objectivity: an epistemological challenge?

The Journalist: We've discussed some of the similarities and differences in the way we work in the field. Perhaps we should also talk about assumptions we bring with us to the field – the foreshadowed questions, if you like – and the way we analyse and interpret our data once we've gathered it. I'm talking about the thorny issue of objectivity.

The Anthropologist: Yes, I was a little surprised by your approach to this. I know that objectivity is supposed to be an important journalistic value, and the academic literature supports this: Cramer and McDevitt, for example, argue that "...for journalists, objectivity is typically construed as detachment from the object or persons being reported, along with the assurance of balanced perspectives" ([15]: 132). But that did not completely hold true for our research, which from the start, and throughout the project, clearly sought to identify ways of moving beyond coal mining, connecting it with questions of climate policies, global warming and the future of our planet. Is it fair to say, that for you as a journalist, this attempt to create an objective view was not necessarily in the foreground?

The Journalist: Yes, that is probably true. I see the radio series I produced as an example of what Tony Barrell calls the radio essay; a sub-genre of the radio feature or documentary which has an idea at its heart and a strong authorial voice. This does not mean that it only presents one side of the story; in the broadcast programs we hear the voices of Vattenfall employees, and the spokesman for *Pro Lausitzer Braunkohle*, a local organization which advocates for a continuing strong role for the coal industry, as well as coal advocates such as the CEO of the World Coal Association, and the Secretary of India's Ministry of Coal. But from the beginning, the series asks the audience to confront a dilemma: coal is the principal source of climate change, yet

developing countries such as India claim they have no choice but to burn even more coal to maintain economic growth, reduce poverty and provide electricity to the poor. In my narration I make it absolutely plain that we have to stop burning coal; the question I pose is how we do that.

The Anthropologist: Anthropologists also grapple with these questions of objectivity and neutrality. If we look back to the Writing Culture debate that anthropology saw in the 1970s and 1980s, we can say that even as researchers aiming for neutrality and 'objectivity', we are individuals producing data, making sense of it and telling a story on the basis of it, and hence we can never be neutral. We are socialized in a particular way, are culturally embedded and situate ourselves permanently in social contexts – not least the researching or academic one – and hence can never produce an objective output. In anthropology there is no obligation to be objective, which, as a matter of fact, cannot be reached anyway when we engage in the act of story-telling. There is rather an emphasis on immersion and understanding the standpoint of the group being studied as good as possible. By aiming at a holistic description, we can try to incorporate multiple perspectives; I emphasized that we also need to understand the views of coal miners in our research, since the Lausitz is an area whose identity has been deeply bound up with coal mining for the last 150 years.

The Journalist: Many journalists and journalism scholars now argue that 'balance' is a "strategic ritual", an ideal which is unattainable and even deceptive. Instead of pretending to be 'balanced' or objective, they say, journalists should aim for "transparency" about their sources, research methods, and even their political and ideological commitments, rather than pretending to an of balance [20,45]. In a way, my approach to researching and producing the radio series *Beyond the Coal Rush* exemplifies the strategy that Hermann describes, in which the scope of inquiry is broadened by catering to context and balancing an angled approach with a more flexible focus. In the research process for this project, and in editing and scripting the documentaries once all the interview material had been gathered, I saw my role as a reporter, as Hermann puts it, changing from „a detached, skeptical narrator to an immersed and empathetic observer, similar to, for instance, intimate journalism and public journalism.“ ([12]: 273). Perhaps journalism and ethnography are moving closer together in this regard.

The Anthropologist: Yes, perhaps so. I have to add, that in the course of our research, my role as an anthropologist also changed from a 'neutral observer' to one taking up a stance against coal mining. The research allowed me to develop a deeper insight into coal's entanglements both locally, nationally and globally. That is not to say that I do not understand the troubles and concerns of the miners, but the time we spent on the coalface and working on this project, trying to collect data and making sense of it, reinforces in us the conviction that we need to exit coal. The case study is one example on how to contribute to this phase-out.

The Journalist: That leads us back to our findings, where the methods of our inquiry and what we discovered come together. And here we can resume speaking with one voice.

5. Anthropology, journalism and time: a conclusion

Our methodological cooperation in particular helped to highlight – to make visible, or indeed audible, in the case of the radio series – the aspect of time in the villagers' struggle against the mine extension. It was not only an aspect that our interlocutors referred to, but turned out to be significant for the fate of the Jänschwalde-Nord mine. Ultimately, the villagers of AKG were successful in preventing the mine extension. In 2017, LEAG, the new owner of the lignite mines and power plants in the Lausitz, announced it would not proceed with the extension of the mine. The villages were saved.

Whilst LEAG has not disclosed the reasons for the decision, for the villagers this represented a final victory after ten years of struggle. Time was crucial to their victory, as they employed what we would call a

politics of waiting and delaying. These politics can be both active and passive. They involved an active attempt to slow down the process of mining approval, through the use of all the available bureaucratic and legal means to challenge the approval sought by Vattenfall. These means included petitions, citizens' initiatives, and the lodging of objections or critiques of the documentation tendered by the proponent in support of the mine. This active politics of waiting and delaying manifests itself in the repetitive local protests and rituals which help to bind a community together, such as the annual *Stermarsch* (the protest march starting simultaneously from Grabko, Kerkwitz and Atterwasch, taking place in January since 2008). There were also larger protest actions carried out in alliance with other civil society groups and environmental organizations, such as the "human chain against coal" in September 2014 and the civil disobedience and direct action in the course of the *Ende Gelände* protests in 2016. But as time wore on, the politics of waiting could also become passive; simply "waiting it out", hanging on, and seeing who has the greater patience. Opposition becomes a process of enduring and persisting, a process that may also be described as a war of attrition between the opponents and proponents of the mine. Either way, the politics of waiting come at very considerable emotional (and financial) cost for both sides. Many of our informants emphasized the psychological stress of continued uncertainty, not being able to make plans for the future, and also having to delay financial decisions such as repairing or renovating a house or investing in new farm machinery.

It was not the local politics of waiting and delaying alone which stopped the Jänschwalde-Nord mine. A number of important developments took place, beginning with Vattenfall's decision to sell its entire holdings in Lusatia in late 2014 (itself a result of the outcome of elections in Sweden), and including the intense controversy in Germany over the "Klimaabgabe" (climate contribution), national debates over climate policy in Germany, and the 2015 Paris climate summit. Doubtless these shifts in the larger political manoeuvres and policy settings surrounding coal played a part in LEAG's decision not to proceed with the mine extension. Yet, had the villagers not hung on for as long as they did, those larger shifts might not have occurred in time to stop the mine. The interaction between the local struggle and the German "coal conundrum" is a dynamic one; in delaying any new lease of life for coal, the villagers won time for the energy transition to make further gains.

As researchers, time was also crucial to the methods we employed and the conclusions we drew. Our approach was neither that of conventional ethnography – a single, sustained period of immersion in the field site – nor conventional journalism, with its focus on the here and now. As we have shown, the form of journalism we employed – radio documentary – is particularly close in its methods to anthropology. Both have a lot in common in the way they collect data, make sense of it, and produce accounts of that data for their respective audiences. Both anthropology and long-term journalism include an in-depth study that may take months or years of research at the field site. Data is collected through an approach that does create interview situations intentionally, but also observes or listens and records situations that take place in the given context. It is probably safe to suggest that the differences between news production for a daily newspaper or website, and the creation of a one-hour radio documentary, are larger than those between the last mentioned and an ethnographic article.

The instruments used may differ, as radio documentary production requires the arrangement of sound recordings done with the microphone, while written anthropology observes actions that it uses to create vignettes as part of a thick description. Journalism is also able to generate forms of thick description. It can go beyond merely relaying what the journalist/documentary producer saw or heard, and try to get at the contextual significance of words and actions. But differences lie in the arrangement and sense-making of the descriptions: in general, anthropology places a description first and turns it into a thick description second – that is making sense of it theoretically in its

particular context. This inductive approach is slightly different from the deductive approach in journalism, which arranges the (aural) description according to an argument or to illustrate and explore an idea, as in the case of the "radio essay".

In this instance, the "idea" explored, albeit with different emphases, in the radio series and our scholarly publications, relates to the complex and multidimensional nature of what we might call "climate time". The large rock which the villagers of Kerkwitz have placed in the main street is an embodiment of this. It was carried into the landscape of the Lausitz by a glacier during the ice age, uncovered by the process of coal mining which began in the 19th century but only reached Jänschwalde in the 1970s, and now stands as a monument to a local – and global – struggle to end the mining and burning of coal as an urgent and unavoidable step towards preventing catastrophic climate change. Geological time, human historical time, and ten years lived experience of time as "waiting and delaying" come together in this otherwise unexceptional lump of rock.

As our research shows, overcoming the German coal conundrum and ensuring the future of the *Energiewende* are not purely technocratic or economic questions. Rather, they are bound up with the fabric of everyday life in settings like the Lausitz, with social practices and processes, the making of meaning, and the experience of time. Collaboration by journalists and anthropologists can lead to a better understanding of the human drivers in these processes, creating a body of knowledge that can help to disentangle and clarify the influences of policy making, climate change, economic considerations and social contexts. This knowledge is highly important in confronting the challenges of energy policy in a climate-constrained world.

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