



HealthXCross Newsletter 2024-03

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WHAT WE HAVE DONE

HealthXCross is now heading towards the end of the third year! HXC team is completing the second round of fieldwork. During these last eight months, [Roberta Raffaetà](#) has done research in the Pacific during March and April on Indigenous microbiology. [Valentina Marcheselli](#) is back from her fieldwork in the US, where she has looked into the many interfaces between biology and geology. [MK](#) has spent five months in Hong Kong following the translational practices of scientists in a lab focusing on the gut microbiome. During summer, [Victor Secco](#) and [Marta Scaglioni](#) have been in the field. In June Victor joined a sampling expedition around Europe focusing on mapping environmental microbiomes and is now following bioinformatic practices in the laboratory. Marta has conducted fieldwork in Ethiopia in July, where she has collected data on the connection between microbiome science and social and racial equity, especially regarding environmental justice.

We met in person at the end of May in Naples, kindly hosted by the ERC-funded project [CoEvolve](#) (P.I. [Donato Giovannelli](#)) at the [University of Naples Federico II](#). We had great fun collecting samples from geothermal sources, enjoying local food, the wonderful landscape and the lively atmosphere of the city! Roberta presented the Italian translation of Elizabeth Povinelli's graphic novel "[L'Eredità](#)" at the book store [TAMU](#).

At the end of August, we met in the Alps for a writing retreat in the Adamello Brenta national park, where we also exchanged views with the members of the PRIN (Research Projects of National Relevant Interest) project [WilDebate](#). This latter project is not on microbes - rather on bears - but what the two projects have in common is analyzing specific biopolitics of the living.

Finally...HXC goes to Antarctica! Roberta has obtained a new grant from the Italian Ministry of Research (PNRA - Programma

Nazionale di Ricerche in Antartide - National Antarctic Research Programme). [The project](#) is in partnership with two microbiology labs: [Segata Lab](#) at Trento University (leader) and [Claudia Coleine](#) at Tuscia University. It started in June 2024 and will explore human microbiome transmission in Antarctica, at the [Mario Zucchelli Station](#), through a multidisciplinary approach. It will integrate metagenomics and culturomics with an anthropological approach, advancing novel methodological grounds. For this project three new members will join our discussions: Prof. [Elena Bougleux](#), professor of anthropology at the University of Bergamo who will stay three months in Antarctica, [Eleonora Nigro](#), microbiologist and scientific illustrator and communicator, and [Anna Sustersic](#), who will coordinate the project's communication.

Pic: *Sampling gasses from geothermal seeps in Campania region with the CoEvolve team.*



WELCOMES

The team is welcoming a new member: [Antonia Majaca](#), transdisciplinary curator and researcher. She is a doctoral student at the Department of Philosophy and Cultural Heritage at Cà Foscari University of Venice. Her work spans from environmental philosophy to political epistemology and critical Anthropocene theory.



ORGANIZED EVENTS AND OUR GUESTS

19.02.2024

[Alba L'Astorina](#) (Cnr IREA), [Cristina Mangia](#) (Cnr ISAC), [Alessandra Pugnetti](#) (Cnr ISMAR)

NICHE Dialoghi: Scienza, Politica e Società: l'approccio post-normale in teoria e nelle pratiche

The Cnr group "Scienziati in Affanno?" presented its last publication "Scienza, Politica e Società. L'approccio post-normale in teoria e nelle pratiche" (Cnr Edizioni, series "Scienziati in Affanno?"). *Scienziati in Affanno?* is a series which aims to disseminate studies and research on science transformation addressing issues of responsibility and ethics, and the relation between science, society, and politics.



15.05.2024

Nicola Manghi ([EHES-CREDO](#); [University of Waikato](#))

Lo 'stato che affonda'. Crisi ecologica e infrastrutture della sovranità a Tuvalu

Nicola presented his research on the environmental crisis in Tuvalu archipelago which is endangered by the rising seas. He analysed what this means for national sovereignty, in the case of Tuvalu this is projected into the virtual, datafied world. This made us reflect on the relation between computational and real spaces, and their politics. To check the recording please follow the [link](#).



10.06.2024

Candace Fujikane (University of Hawai'i at Mānoa)

Presentation of the book "Mapping Abundance for a Planetary Future" as part of NICHE New Books in Environmental Humanities.

Candace presented her book entitled "Mapping Abundance for a Planetary Future" giving us an understanding of the socio-political dynamics at work in Hawaii across science and activism. She discussed capitalism as an economic system thriving on the creation of a sense of scarcity; recognizing the abundance of indigenous economies and cosmologies thus becomes a way to think beyond the competition of resources and imagine more inclusive practices.



13.06.2024

Lyle Fearnley (Singapore University of Technology and Design)

FARE SHK_HealthXCross project - Disputed augury: Live poultry markets, zoonotic viruses, and contested signs of risk

Lyle held a talk about the material semiotic strategies deployed by scientists and shoppers in Singapore for evaluating risks to health in live poultry markets, where viruses such as avian influenza jump from animals to humans.



NOTES FROM THE FIELD

"It was an early crisp morning in late April 2023, I got in the back seat of the Hillux (large car) with the other field scientists heading to our sampling site of the day on the north coast of Belgium. We sat in silence in the car, part of the early morning mood and a sign of how tired and overworked we felt most days for the last month. Outside the window urban and green fields landscapes alternate on our way. As we reached closer to our destination the song *A horse with no name* by George Martin started playing on the radio (the lyrics also match the journey into the environment mood). Slowly the lead-scientist in the field started humming the song and then singing along quietly, as we all followed her humming, the mood inside the car completely changed, we were now ready for another long day of sampling on the beach, with thorny bushes and some light rain, out in the elements collecting soil, sand, water and air in the search of 'microbes with no name'."

Over the last year and a half, [Victor Secco](#) has been carrying out ethnographic fieldwork within a European centre for biosciences mainly looking at the institution's recent move toward environmental microbiome research. He has joined the laboratory's scientists as an anthropologist as well as a volunteer in their sampling expedition across the coastline aiming to map the microbiomes of Europe between land and sea. Following closely the sampling practices and everyday lives of scientists during the intense periods of the expedition field research has raised questions about the sources of data in microbiome research, considering the techniques, choices and politics that guide the material collection of samples and the logistical work to make samples into viable and valuable data in bioinformatics. Beyond that, the meta-fieldwork experience has called his attention to the intense sociality of such expeditions and the social and emotional work necessary for the success of sampling as the start of the data journey. Without the samplers there are no samples and consequently no data for biosciences, mainly in environmental sciences, and yet this tends to be one of the most

invisible parts of the scientific work as biology becomes an ever more digitalised practice.

What becomes of matter and materials of samples in current informatic dominant bioscientific context? How are these samples made to speak about the environments they are sourced from through the digital technologies of genomics? And how does the dis/entangling of matter-data shape a bioinformatic version of planetary health? These are some of the questions Victor is exploring through his ethnographic fieldwork for the HealthXCross project.

Pic: Samplers arriving at site to collect water, sediment and soil in the early morning.

NEW PUBLICATIONS

Burgio, V., Raffaetà, R. (2024) [Organizing Microbial Diversity and Interspecies Relations through Diagrams: Trees, Maps, and the Visual Semiotics of the Living](#), in *Biosemiotics*.

Barchetta, L., Raffaetà, R. (2024) [Data as environment, environment as data: One Health in collaborative data-intensive science](#), in *Big Data & Society*.

INVITED EVENTS

In these eight months since the last newsletter, Roberta has been invited to present the project at various venues:

20/02/2024 - "Fare ricerca su e tra discipline. Spunti di riflessione tra l'antropologia e la microbiologia".

Invitation by Prof. Patrizia Quattrocchi to speak about interdisciplinarity at the group "Gli Indisciplinati", University of Udine.

17/05/2024 - "The microbiome across data and across disciplines".

Invited talk at the Microbiome Friday Seminars, Institute for Advanced Study (IAS), University of Amsterdam.

21-23/05/2024 - "Ethical Dimension of Microbiome Research".

Roberta chaired the panel at the [MVIF](#) - Microbiome Virtual International Forum - online.



EVENTS' PARTICIPATION

We have also participated in these events:

19-22.03.2024

[LEAKAGE](#), STS conference, University of Dresden, Germany. Marta presented the paper titled "Whence the gaze? Observing Race Within a Tunisian Microbiome Research Project".

18-20.06.2024

[MAYS 2024](#) (EASA Medical Anthropology Young Scholars) conference, University of Bologna, Italy. Marta presented the paper titled "Race in sciences in the Global South: the case of a Tunisian microbiome research project".

16-19.07.2024

[EASST/4S](#), University of Amsterdam, the Netherlands. Victor and Valentina organized a panel titled "Making samples, doing science: transforming data and matter across landscapes".

and labscapes”.

Valentina gave a presentation titled “There is a microbe for every pollutant: the poetics and politics of bioremediation” as part of the panel “The Green Anthropocene? Transforming environments by transforming life”.

02-06.09.2024

IASS (International Association of Semiotic Studies), [16th World Congress “Signs and Realities”](#), University of Warsaw, Poland.

Valeria presented her paper: “New Microbial Natures: diagrammatic visions of biodiversity in the human body” as part of the panel “Internaturality and Meaning”.

23-36.07.2024

[EASA](#), Barcelona

Valentina gave a presentation titled “Ambiguous alliances: the attribution of agency to microbes beyond antibiotic and probiotic approaches”.

Roberta presented with [Luciano Ferrari](#) the paper “Capitalization and the Production of Value at the Nexus of Academia and Industry: The case of microbiome startup”.

Roberta also participated in a roundtable discussion with the contribution “Collaborations with Indigenous Microbiologists in Hawaii”.

30.09-02.10.2024

[VAD](#) (Verinigung für Afrikawissenschaften in Deutschland) 2024, University of Bayreuth (Germany)

Marta presented a paper titled “Looking good on paper: building microbiome research networks in Tunisia” as part of the panel “Reshaping Established Partnerships in African Studies: Can we Reconsider and Redesign the Relations between the “Global South” and “Global North”.

Pic: Luciano Ferrari (Roberta’s Master student and collaborator), Roberta, Victor and Valentina at the welcome party of EASA 2024 in Barcelona.

UPCOMING EVENTS

In the next months, we will host [Kriti Sharma](#) as a visiting fellow from the University of California Santa Cruz and the Canadian designer [Serina Tarhanian](#) as a visiting PhD student from the University of Oslo.

October, 30th, 2024 h. 10 AM, Ca' Bottacin, Yellow Room
[Anna Lora-Wainwright](#) (University of Oxford)

From Anti-incineration Activism to 'Sustainable Living': Some Reflections on Forms of Environmentalism in Contemporary China

Seminar by Anna Lora-Wainwright (University of Oxford). Chair: Roberta Raffaetà, Discussant: Francesca Tarocco and Mankei Tam.

November, 15th, 2024 h. 9.30 AM, Aula Biral, Malcanton-Marcorà

Bio-geo Interdependence

A discussion between Kriti Sharma (University of California Santa Cruz. HealthXCross visiting fellow) and Donato Giovannelli. Chair: Roberta Raffaetà, Discussant: the HealthXCross team.

November, 20th, 2024 h. 2 PM, Aula Biral, Malcanton-Marcorà

The classification of the living and our understanding and perception of health and well-being

Lecture by Maud Quinzin - Postdoctoral Consultant at the World

Maritime University (WMU) of the International Maritime Organization (IMO), a specialized agency of the United Nations, Malmö, Sweden. Chair: Roberta Raffaetà, Discussant: Kriti Sharma.

November, 25th, 2024 h. 5 PM, Aula Silvio Trentin, Ca' Dolfin.

When Microbes Speak, What Do They Say? On the Poetics of Scientific Practice

Lecture by Kriti Sharma. Chair: Roberta Raffaetà, Discussant: Shaul Bassi (TBC).

December, 4th, 2024 h. 4.30 PM, Palazzetto Tito, Fondazione Bevilacqua La Masa

Microcosms as Worldmaking: Reimagining Planetary Ecology in the Age of Interdisciplinary Praxis

Open Workshop with Serina Tarkhanian, Kriti Sharma, [Anicka Yi](#) and [Armin Linke](#).

HealthXCross asks: *how does health come to be reconfigured in a world entangled through microbial data?*

This project has received funding from the **European Research Council (ERC)** under the European Union's Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation Programme ([GA n. 949742 HealthXCross](#)).

Principal Investigator: [Roberta Raffaetà](#)

[Project homepage](#)



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