

# DEA Guest Speaker Series

20.4.2022, 16:00 CET

**Mark Goodale**

“Productive Potentialities Within—and Beyond—Lithiumphilia”

*IN PERSON: Seminar room of the Institute of Ethnology, Czech Academy of Sciences  
Na Florenci 3, Prague  
5<sup>th</sup> floor*

*ONLINE: [MS Teams](#)*

**Abstract:** This talk is structured by two parts. It begins by reflecting critically and more generally about the ways in which the study of energy, climate change, and mobility must resist a tendency to conceive of research questions, frame research projects, and develop scholarly interventions that mirror the underlying urgencies that define energy and climate processes. As an illustration of this tendency, the talk describes a particular underlying urgency described as "lithiumphilia," an obsession with lithium as both resource and panacea given that lithium forms the productive core of a set of interconnected technologies that include "battery grade" lithium carbonate, cathodic material, lithium-ion batteries, and electric vehicles (EVs).



The talk's second part describes what happens when lithiumphilia is resisted as an ethnographic imperative.



Based on ongoing research conducted largely in Bolivia, which contains the world's largest known lithium reserves, the paper examines the ways in which the country's lithium industrialization project must be understood differently when viewed beyond the global allure of lithium extraction and its promise of a so-called green energy transition. Approached ethnographically beyond the epistemological tunnel vision of lithiumphilia, the actually existing productive relations around lithium in Bolivia look quite different. Instead of a centralizing project that properly reflects its wider value, the lithium industrialization process in Bolivia takes the shape of simply one among several

"productive potentialities," that is, micro political economies that are unfolding according to distinct—and incompatible—productive and ideological logics.



**Bio:** Mark Goodale holds a chair at the University of Lausanne, where he is Professor of Cultural and Social Anthropology and former Director of the Laboratory of Cultural and Social Anthropology (LACS). Before moving to Switzerland in 2014, he held teaching positions at George Mason University, where he was Professor of Conflict Analysis and Anthropology, and Emory University, where he served as the first Marjorie Shostak Distinguished Lecturer in Anthropology. He currently directs a four-year research project (2019-2023) on lithium industrialization, energy materialities, and green energy politics, with a focus on Bolivia, financed by the Swiss National Science Foundation.

He is the recipient of the 2017 International Geneva Award and his writings have appeared in both disciplinary and interdisciplinary journals, including *Current Anthropology*, *American Anthropologist*, *American*

*Ethnologist*, and the *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, among others. In addition to his academic work, his general essays have been published in journals such as *Boston Review* and *The Paris Review* and he has been interviewed and quoted as an expert in major publications such as *The Guardian*, *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *The Nation*, and *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*.

The author, editor, or coeditor of fifteen books, his most recent is *A Revolution in Fragments: Traversing Scales of Justice, Ideology, and Practice in Bolivia* (Duke University Press 2019). Forthcoming volumes include *Reinventing Human Rights* (Stanford University Press 2022) and *The Oxford Handbook of Law and Anthropology* (Oxford University Press 2022).

**Photos:** Mark Goodale's archive

**Organizer:** Department of Ecological Anthropology, Institute of Ethnology CAS in cooperation with Czech Association for Social Anthropology (CASA)