



**Max-Planck-Institut für ethnologische Forschung  
Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology**

**Conference**

**THE "GUARDIANS OF PRODUCTIVE LANDSCAPES" PROJECT:  
PAST ACHIEVEMENTS AND FUTURE PROSPECTS**

**June 20 – 21. 2019**

**Organisers:** Günther Schlee and Ivo Strecker

**Venue:** Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology, Halle/Saale, Germany

**OUTLINE**

The "Guardians of Productive Landscapes" (GPL) project currently developed by the Department 'Integration and Conflict' at the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology, director Prof. Dr. Günther Schlee, can be seen as a contribution to an applied anthropology, which tunes in with the growing public awareness that a host of environmental developments are threatening the earth.

Today humanity is at the crossroads where life as we know it will soon cease unless we muster all our ingenuity for inward and outward persuasion to find ways to combat these *vicissitudes*. Because vicissitudes are unanticipated and beyond routine they test the nature and limits of cultural resources. They "call up inventive answers, and, in so doing, demonstrate the very nature of both culture and the human imagination" (Carrithers 2009). The GPL project is inspired by this rhetorical theory of culture change both theoretically and practically as currently it is engaged in the production of a series of ethnographic films on specific agricultural and pastoral traditions, which do not replicate written texts but are artistically constructed around the central theme of people's dedication to their landscape.

We have held several workshops already - both in Ethiopia and Germany – where we developed theoretical ideas and presented empirical findings, but **now** we plan to hold a more comprehensive conference that is meant to fulfil the following three tasks:

- 1) Present, discuss and clarify various strands in GPL theory.
- 2) Present, discuss and enrich the various empirical GPL studies and documentations that are currently under way.  
(Once our theoretical and empirical work has achieved the required quality, we will publish the results in the MPI Series "Field Notes and Research Projects".)
- 3) Present, discuss and contemplate ways in which the GPL initiative may continue and develop further in the future.

For this purpose we have invited eminent scholars and representatives of academic as well as development institutions and agencies.

In order to once again draw attention to the chief purpose of the "Guardians of Productive Landscapes" initiative we recall here some 'punch-lines' from our web site and earlier concept papers:

a) Pertaining to the title of the initiative:

Note that the attribute 'productive' is crucially important, and also note that the 'landscapes' are conceived here as agents, as subjects who are able to do things, - produce crops if you do not neglect and abandon them but caringly use them according to often age-old local values and knowledge.

b) Pertaining to the "Lands of the Future" initiative (LOF):

LOF research goes hand in hand with GPL visions and activities. With the common regional focus on Ethiopia, exchange of research findings, local knowledge based tenure solutions and with prominent voices from agro-pastoralists and people who study among them, active exchange between LOF and GPL will be beneficial for all involved (Echi Gabbert).

c) Pertaining to institutionalisation:

The GPL Project aims to generate empirical and theoretical knowledge that will eventually help to create the model for a global 'Guardians of Productive Landscape Program'. This would eventually be run by an UN agency or a combination of UN agencies, in coordination with national cooperation agencies (GIZ, SDC...) and research institutions (universities and research centres).

Speakers will be invited by the organisers.

**Contact:**

Günther Schlee, ([schlee@eth.mpg.de](mailto:schlee@eth.mpg.de))

Ivo Strecker ([istreck@uni-mainz.de](mailto:istreck@uni-mainz.de))

For further information on the "Lands of the Future" initiative see: <http://www.eth.mpg.de/lof>