

# ACTRACT THE ASCONA TRANSFORMATION CHARTER

Towards a vision and charter for a  
Transformative Anthropology

SEG INTERFACE COMMISSION

2024

# CHARTER

## CORE VALUES AND PRINCIPLES:

THE COLLECTIVE IDENTIFIES THE FOLLOWING POTENT VALUES FOR A TRANSFORMATIVE ANTHROPOLOGY. WHILE WE RECOGNIZE THAT SUCH VALUES ARE FREQUENTLY ALLUDED TO, AND SOME HAVE EVEN BEEN HOLLOWED OUT BY THE NEOLIBERAL REFORM, WE CALL FOR A SYSTEMATIC EFFORT TO REAPPROPRIATE KEY VALUES SUCH AS CARE, RESPECT AND NON-EXTRACTIVISM, AND FOR A CONVERSATION ON INCLUSIVE AND TRANSFORMATIVE WAYS TO REDEFINE THESE VALUES.

## INTERNALLY ORIENTED VALUES:

WE GROUPED THE FIRST SET OF VALUES AS INTERNALLY ORIENTED, MEANING THAT THEY CONCERN HOW WE WORK AMONG OURSELVES IN OUR RESPECTIVE ANTHROPOLOGICAL CIRCLES, COMMUNITIES AND INSTITUTIONAL SETTINGS. THE VISION IS TO RECUPERATE AND CONSOLIDATE THE PRINCIPLES OF CARE, RESPECT, COLLABORATION, FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION AND DIVERSITY AS BASIC PRINCIPLES IN OUR RESPECTIVE INSTITUTIONS AND POSITIONS.

CARE  
RESPECT  
COLLABORATION  
FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION  
DIVERSITY

## WORK PROCESSIONAL VALUES:

THESE VALUES CONCERN OUR WORK PROCESS AND THE CONDITIONS UNDER WHICH WE ENGAGE WITH COMMUNITIES AND SOCIETY IN BROAD TERMS. THE AIM IS TO TRANSFORM OUR WORKING AND EPISTEMOLOGICAL RELATIONSHIPS WITH PARTNERS FROM NEOLIBERAL DYNAMICS OF EXTRACTIVISM TO THAT OF INTEGRITY AND RECIPROCITY.

INTEGRITY  
NON-EXTRACTIVISM  
CRITICAL REFLEXIVITY  
MULTIPLICITY  
POLYPHONY

## SOCIETAL COMMITMENTS:

THESE VALUES AND THEMES REFLECT OUR WIDER COMMITMENT TO ENGAGE WITH WIDER TOPICAL, NATIONAL AND GLOBAL CHALLENGES. THE AIM IS TO SCALE UP THE TRANSFORMATIVE CONTRIBUTIONS OF ANTHROPOLOGY BY ENGAGING WITH ALTERNATIVES AND ADDRESSING STRUCTURAL INEQUALITIES AND POWER ASYMMETRIES HEAD-ON. THIS NOTABLY CONCERNS COMMITMENTS TO:

ADDRESSING STRUCTURAL INEQUALITIES & POWER ASYMMETRIES  
ALTERNATIVE VISIONS & PRACTICES  
ENVIRONMENTAL & SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT  
INDIVIDUAL AND COLLECTIVE RESPONSIBILITY  
HOPE AS A DUTY





# THE TIME FOR TRANSFORMATION

In this 21st century, the enormous scale and extent of social inequalities and ecological devastation prompt us to revisit the relevance and positionality of anthropology as a discipline and a societal project. How then to address systemic change and transformation both within and outside the discipline of anthropology?

We, as a collective of anthropologists from Switzerland and Europe, including members of the Swiss Anthropological Association (SAA), the European Association of Social Anthropologists (EASA) and the Swiss Graduate School of Anthropology gathered in Ascona from June 3 to 5, 2024. Hosted by the SAA [Interface Commission](#) at the Centro Incontri Umani, we deliberated on the need and potential pathways for a transformative anthropology considering the triple planetary crisis, structural inequalities and deepening conflicts. Drawing on initial discussions hosted by the Interface Commission in 2022 around the theme of "imagining new anthropological futures", the Ascona meeting sought to take stock of contemporary conversations on the future of anthropology, and of practices aimed at transforming the discipline to tackle current challenges.

Specific challenges raised ranged from (post)colonial entanglements, rising authoritarianism and climate change to mental health challenges and rampant precarity in academia. In response, we consider that our discipline has much to offer. We are also sensitive to calls for anthropology to be transformed, just as the need to interrogate the nature of transformation in our increasingly interconnected societies, lifeways, and futures.

These concerns tie into wider dynamics of scientific freedom, changing university policies and the marginalization of anthropology as a discipline.

Faced with the closing of departments, de facto censorship and the stigmatization of critical analysis as unscientific, transformative anthropology today is under huge pressure. We see this as a paradox of marginality despite clear relevance in addressing global challenges and development agendas - such as the SDGs, the green energy transition and 30 by 30. Under hegemonic neoliberal governance, many anthropologists are deeply affected, individually and collectively, by the increasing precarisation, exclusionary practices and prevalence of toxicity in academia.

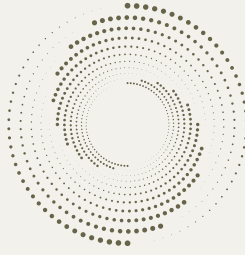
# THE TIME FOR TRANSFORMATION

In response, we call for a shift from an individualistic mindset to collective responsibility, deliberation and action. To effectively navigate the challenges within and outside academia, it is vital to establish and adhere to shared values, principles and commitments, and to reappropriate them where they've been hollowed out. This will not only guide our work but also ensure that anthropology remains relevant, impactful, diverse and ethically grounded. In this context, we place great importance on and reiterate the fundamental role of our teaching, collective professional values and participatory research in better understanding and addressing the current crises. Instead of reproducing individualism in knowledge production, we call for commoning our research agendas and approaches that attend to care, respect, and justice in our engagements with local communities. This aligns with the need to develop shared visions of education and reconsider the institutional organization of knowledge.

Drawing from our experiences and engagements, we advocate for the deepening of collaborative approaches in research, teaching, communication and solution-building. While these engagements lead to good science and offer hope for practical alternatives to the current intersecting crises, we are concerned about the erasure and frequent denial of such knowledge, often stigmatized as non-scientific, biased, partisan, and irrelevant trouble-making. By building upon ongoing initiatives that tackle precarity, academic freedom and human rights, we emphasize the need to safeguard existing spaces and create new ones that promote reflection, vision, and the strengthening of collective efforts. The Ascona Charter spells out a set of generic values and concrete commitments to inspire hope, collective deliberation and catalyze transformative change.







## COMMITMENTS

PRIORITIZE THE WELL-BEING AND FUTURES OF OUR COLLEAGUES, STUDENTS, RESEARCH PARTNERS AND WIDER COMMUNITIES, FOSTERING A SUPPORTIVE AND NURTURING WORK ENVIRONMENT

DEVELOP GUIDELINES FOR ACADEMIC FREEDOM AND NURTURE ACADEMIC SPACES WITH ROOM FOR ENGAGED ACTION APPROACHES, DIFFERENCE OF OPINION AND POSITIONALITIES

STRENGTHEN THE DEVELOPMENT OF ALTERNATIVE CAREER PATHS, INCLUDING CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT AND TRAINING FOR APPLIED ANTHROPOLOGY AND OTHER FORMS OF EMPLOYMENT

COMBAT PRECARITY AMONG ANTHROPOLOGISTS IN ALL ITS FORMS AND ITS EFFECTS

OPERATIONALIZE THE DORA DECLARATION IN RELATION TO TRANSFORMATIVE PRACTICE

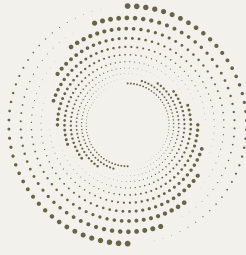
PREPARE AND PROTECT COLLEAGUES AND COMMUNITIES BEFORE, DURING AND AFTER FIELDWORK IN CONTEXTS OF VIOLENCE AND OTHER RISKS

VALUE ENGAGEMENT WITH AND ACTIVELY PROMOTE INCLUSIVE DIVERSITY POLITICS THAT ACTIVELY COMBAT RACISM, SEXISM, LGBTQIA+ DISCRIMINATION, AND ABLEISM

NURTURE COLLECTIVE REFLECTION ON ETHICAL STANDARDS AND PRACTICES

## INTERNALLY ORIENTED VALUES

CARE  
RESPECT  
COLLABORATION  
FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION  
DIVERSITY



## COMMITMENTS

ENSURE CONDITIONS FOR CONDUCTING SLOW SCIENCE INSTEAD OF NEOLIBERAL IMPERATIVES SUCH AS  
“PUBLISH OR PERISH”

PROMOTE THE COMMONING OF SCIENCE AND COLLABORATIVE WORK, WHILE SECURING COMMUNITIES IN  
RELATION TO DATA ACCESSIBILITY AND MANAGEMENT

CHALLENGE CURRENT RESEARCH ASSESSMENT METRICS AND PRACTICES AND WORK TOWARDS ALTERNATIVE  
MODELS

RETHINK TEACHING PRACTICES AND CURRICULA IN RELATION TO TRANSFORMATIVE VALUES AND  
COLLABORATIVE MODES OF ACTION

CONNECT CORE TRAINING IN ANTHROPOLOGY BASICS WITH CONTEMPORARY ISSUES AND TRANSFORMATIVE  
PRACTICE

RECOGNIZE AND PROMOTE THE VALUE OF ALTERNATIVE (MULTIMODAL) MODES OF KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTION

MAINTAIN AND REINFORCE OUR COMPETENCES, AND ESPECIALLY THOSE OF OUR STUDENTS, UNDER THREAT  
WITH THE ADVENT OF AI BASED ON LARGE LANGUAGE MODELS (LLM)

FOSTER SOLIDARITIES AND CONNECTIONS WITH LIKE-MINDED ACTORS AND INSTITUTIONS, AND PROMOTE  
ALLYSHIP FOR TRANSFORMATIVE ANTHROPOLOGY WITHIN AND BEYOND ACADEMIA

REFLECT ON SETTING UP AN OMBUDSMAN FUNCTION AND MEDIATION MECHANISMS

## PROCESSUAL VALUES

INTEGRITY

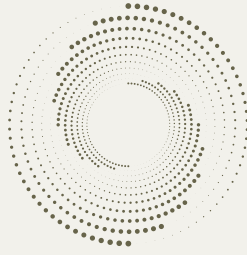
NON-EXTRACTIVISM

CRITICAL REFLEXIVITY

MULTIPLICITY AND PRACTICALITY

POLYPHONY





## COMMITMENTS

ENGAGE WITH AND VALUE GRASSROOTS VISIONS, INNOVATIVE BOTTOM-UP INSTITUTION BUILDING AND CREATIVE PRACTICES. HIGHLIGHT HOW THE ALTERNATIVE VISIONS & PRACTICES THAT WE ARE STUDYING CAN INSPIRE CONCRETE POLITICAL ACTIONS AND PREVENT CO-OPTATION AND APPROPRIATION.

EXPAND THE TEACHING OF ANTHROPOLOGY IN WIDER FIELDS AND MUCH EARLIER IN THE NATIONAL EDUCATION SYSTEMS

BUILD NETWORKS AND POOL REGIONAL AND THEMATIC EXPERTISE AMONG ACADEMIC AND NON-ACADEMIC ANTHROPOLOGISTS

CREATE AND STRENGTHEN COMMUNICATION CHANNELS AND TOOLS FOR PUBLIC ANTHROPOLOGY (PODCASTS, BLOGS, MEDIA INTERVENTIONS, ENGAGEMENT WITH POLICY MAKERS)

VALUE CONCRETE OUTCOMES AND SOLUTION BUILDING INCLUDING IN THE MEDIA

PROMOTE DEBATE AND STRENGTHEN TRAINING AROUND INDIVIDUAL, COLLECTIVE AND INSTITUTIONAL RESPONSIBILITIES

PROMOTE ANTHROPOLOGY AS A TOOL TO DISRUPT INJUSTICE, OPPRESSION AND POWER INEQUALITIES, NURTURE HOPE, RECLAIM SPACES FOR REFLECTION, AND SHAPE BETTER FUTURES

## SOCIETAL COMMITMENTS

ALTERNATIVE VISIONS & PRACTICES  
ENVIRONMENTAL & SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT  
RESPONSIBILITY  
HOPE AS A DUTY







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DRAFTED & SIGNED BY

DR.PETER BILLE LARSEN  
DR.DORIS BACALZO  
DR.ANA IVASIUC  
DR.EDA ELIF TIBET  
DR.ROBERTA COLOMBO  
KYLIAN HENCHOZ  
DR.CLAIRE VIONNET  
DR.ALEXANDRA OANCA  
PROF.TOBIAS HALLER

Charter by Swiss Anthropology Association's Interface Commission.

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Further details: [www.seg-interface.org](http://www.seg-interface.org)