Anthropology: much more than the study of the exotic ‘other’

Social and cultural anthropologists study social processes and the perspectives of the actors involved. Combining an emic (insiders) and etic (external) point of view, anthropologists focus on the differences and similarities between people across the globe.

Initially, anthropologists were primarily interested in far-away, ‘exotic’ cultures and applied a method of participant observation or fieldwork – a trademark of classical anthropology – to carry out their work. However, contemporary anthropology has become much more than the study of the exotic ‘other’. You do not need to travel to remote places to be an anthropologist. Today, cultures are regarded as always ‘in-between’, informed and shaped by all sorts of influences. The global has adapted to the local and the local has incorporated the global. It is this interaction between cultures that captures the focus of contemporary anthropologists. Moreover, special attention is paid to economic, social and political implications. Despite this shift in focus, qualitative research methods are maintained.

As an anthropologist, you will study issues such as the impact of colonisation, the making and unmaking of identity, the relation between people and their environment and ethnicity. You do this by taking the perspective of the people involved, placing emphasis on the daily experience of everyday women, men, and children. This approach adds a different dimension to issues such as globalisation, ecology or migration. It often leads to unexpected insights or new questions: what is the impact of globalisation on family life? What symbols and rituals shape our daily life? What is superdiversity and what does it mean for the social dynamics of the city and its infrastructure? How do people shape their religious identity by means of social media, and how does this shape people?

How do people interpret natural disasters and which role does power play in that context? How does mining transform women’s understanding of sexuality and intimacy? How do diaspora organisations affect the development arena? How do people deal with violence and its consequences? The questions are many and complex.

Admission requirements

To be eligible for the MSc in Social and Cultural Anthropology, you must have obtained an academic bachelor’s degree in the field of human sciences. If you apply for the English-language programme, you have to provide evidence of your English proficiency. Students with a professional bachelor’s degree can apply for the preparatory programme (in Dutch only).

Programme admission: www.kuleuven.be/ma/mscael
General admission: www.kuleuven.be/admissions
Discover KU Leuven

Founded in 1425, the University of Leuven (KU Leuven) has been a centre of learning for almost six centuries. Today, it is Belgium’s largest and highest-ranked university as well as one of the oldest and most renowned universities in Europe.

As a leading European research university and co-founder of the League of European Research Universities (LERU), KU Leuven offers a wide variety of programmes in English supported by high-quality interdisciplinary research. Boasting an outstanding central location in the heart of Europe, KU Leuven offers a truly international experience, high-quality education, world-class research and cutting-edge innovation.

For detailed descriptions of the courses and for the course timetable, please consult www.kuleuven.be/ma/mscael/programme.

Application procedure

KU Leuven uses an online application system. You can download and submit your application form via www.kuleuven.be/application.

Students with a Flemish degree can consult www.kuleuven.be/inschrijven.

Student exchange opportunities

Are you eager to broaden your horizons by completing part of your studies abroad? You can do qualitative research abroad, attend a summer school, or study for one semester at a (non-) European university in the second stage within the context of the Erasmus exchange programme.

Career perspectives

Graduates of anthropology find employment in numerous areas. They work as diversity experts, cultural and political formation consultants, employees in non-profit organisations, educational consultants, healthcare workers, policy advisers, researchers, youth workers, professors, directors of socio-cultural organisations, journalists – to name only a few of the employment pathways open to you. Anthropologists are especially valued as highly critical professionals, who know how to analyse complex situations from different angles. They are well-versed in setting up, executing and evaluating (research) projects independently. In a highly diverse and international programme, graduates are able to communicate and report adequately in an intercultural environment.

Contact

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