

Call:

Three **3 Ph.D. positions** (4 years, full time) are opening at the Faculty of Social Sciences of the **University of Liège** (ULiège) in a collective research project that explores intuitive interspecies communication and the collaboration with animal communicators and Indigenous knowledge holders in the development of novel multispecies methods.

This project is funded by the **European Research Council (ERC)** Consolidator programme.

Deadline for application: **7 October 2024**

Starting date: **1 February 2025**

Vanessa Wijngaarden

Research professor in social anthropology
University of Liège
Email: vanessa.wijngaarden@uliege.be

In attached piece:

- Project description
- Vacancies: Three Ph.D. positions with subprojects on localities in Africa, Europe, Asia and North America.

Project description:

Title: Animal Communicators: Intuitive communication as a key to dialogic multispecies methods

Acronym: ANICOM

Duration: Five years

Funding body: European Research Council (ERC) Consolidator Programme

Host institution: University of Liège (ULiège)

Principal Investigator: Vanessa Wijngaarden, research professor in social anthropology (PI)

Summary: As the ‘social’ in social sciences is rethought beyond the human, multispecies research across disciplines increasingly asks how to speak with and for non-human others. Intuitive interspecies communication (IIC), a strategy practiced by successful animal communicators to engage in explicit, detailed, two-way communication with non-human animals, may hold uncharted resources for doing research *with* rather than *on* animals. Research on IIC has been curtailed to specific domains and mythologized, while the worldwide boom in professional animal communicators has been ignored.

ANICOM’s unique engagement with animal communicators’ practical strategies for relating across nature/culture and mind/body dichotomies is ground-breaking in the often largely theoretical discussions of the ontological and species turns. It simultaneously unsettles continued divides between humans and animals as well as dominant and subjugated ways of knowing. The project triangulates participant observation, Q method, interviews and audio-visual methods (including video-diaries and video-elicitations) with natural science approaches, to collaboratively work with expert animal communicators, and a variety of animals in Europe, Africa, Asia and North America. It addresses unexplored possibilities for cross-fertilization between new materialism and posthumanism on the one hand, and Indigenous studies and knowledge systems on the other, while engaging with the latest insights in biosemiotics and animal cognition.

It thus develops transdisciplinary innovations that include non-human animals as full research participants, while achieving a deeper reflexivity on the limitations of humans thinking animals outside the human-animal relationship. Its ultimate objective is to establish the resources and foundation for dialogic multispecies methods (DMM), a dynamic set of conceptual, theoretical and methodological approaches and tools to engage with the views, experiences and knowledges of non-human animals in academia.

The team will include the PI (a social anthropologist with a double background in anthropology and political science), postdoc Dr. Ipek Kulahci (a biologist, specialized in animal cognition and behaviour), 3 PhD candidates, 8 collaborating animal communicators, and animal individuals from 12 species with a focus on mammals and birds. Each of the PhD students will undertake long term ethnographic fieldwork at two field sites to co-develop collaborative strategies with animal communicators towards the understanding and use of IIC in academic research. They will contribute to insight in the shared human aspects of IIC by identifying patterns in the subjective views and practices of diverse human practitioners (Stream 1); the development of novel multispecies methods, working with animal communicators and audio-visual tools (Stream 2); and accessing and engaging animal voices and perspectives on relationship, research and communication with humans (Stream 3). The different case studies will be synthesized by the PI with the support of the postdoc and in cooperation with the PhD candidates.

Vacancies:**Positions:**

Three Ph.D. positions in political & social sciences at ULiege, 100% FTE, 4 years. Researchers will receive a monthly salary and research funding. Starting date: **1 February 2025**.

Sub-projects of ANICOM:

- A. PI: IIC in Southern Africa 1. KhoiSan (Namibia); 2. Afrikaans (South Africa)
- B. PhD 1: IIC in North and South **1. Belgium; 2. Shona (Zimbabwe)**
- C. PhD 2: IIC in Europe **1. Sámi (Finland); 2. English (United Kingdom)**
- D. PhD 3: IIC in the East and West **1. India; 2. Cree (Canada)**
- E. PostDoc: IIC in the natural sciences (all locations)

The vacancies in this call are for sub-projects B, C and D. In case of strong incentives, the case studies may be divided differently, for example to maximize the local and language expertise of the Ph.D. candidates.

Tasks for each Ph.D. candidate:

- Conduct ethnographic field research (11 months in total)
- Write and complete a Ph.D. dissertation within four years
- Participate in the scientific activities of ANICOM and the Faculty of Social Sciences at ULiege
- Submit for publication a minimum of two articles or book chapters
- Present research results in international conferences

Requirements and preferred profile:

- An MA degree in anthropology, sociology, political science, human-geography, regional/area studies, Indigenous studies, human-animal studies, more-than-human studies or another relevant field.
- Relevant experience with ethnographic research, ideally in one of the locations of fieldwork or with Indigenous groups elsewhere. Experience in fieldwork with animals is also highly appreciated.
- Language skills: All applicants must be fluent in English. For the relevant case studies, French or Flemish, Shona, Finnish or a Sámi language, Hindi or Cree are desirable.
- Strong (academic) writing skills and experience with video are appreciated.
- Enthusiasm for the research subject and the ability to bridge and translate between different worlds.
- Openness to work across academic, disciplinary, cultural and species divides.
- Curiosity towards methodology and the development of cutting-edge research approaches.
- Competency and confidence to work proactively and independently on-campus and in field situations.
- Be a valuable, committed and generous contributor to an academic team.
- Responsible, ethical and trustworthy in the work they do.
- Candidates with non-Western, Indigenous or other minority backgrounds are especially encouraged to apply.
- Passionate candidates who do not fulfil all requirements (yet) are encouraged to apply.

Research environment and academic milieu

The doctoral student will start their employment 1 February 2025. Although the working language is English, they will be based at the French speaking Université de Liège, at the outskirts of Liège, Belgium. They will be integrated in the vibrant social science research milieu at the *Institut de Recherches en Sciences Sociales* and part of the research centre *Laboratoire d'anthropologie sociale et culturelle (LASC)*. Regular physical attendance at project meetings, trainings in fieldwork methods and analysis software, multispecies methods workshops, a summer school, communal nature residencies and other events will be required, and thus the doctoral student is expected to take up residence in Belgium.

Application:

Applications must be submitted electronically in English to vanessa.wijngaarden@uliege.be latest **7 October 2024** with the message title 'Ph.D. application ANICOM'. The following documents must be attached to the email in three separate PDF files:

- 1) In the first file, named 'ANICOM_applicant last name_A': (a) a motivation letter (maximum 700 words); (b) a full curriculum vitae with detailed information on degree results and language skills; and (c) the names and contact details of two reference persons.
- 2) In the second file, named 'ANICOM_applicant last name B': a short research proposal (single-spaced, maximum 1500 words). In this proposal the applicant may reflect on their personal relationship with IIC, outline how they would carry out their preferred case studies, and give an impression of how they would contribute to the team.
- 3) In the third file, named 'ANICOM_applicant last name C': one writing sample (e.g. article, draft, report, conference paper, essay or MA thesis chapter) in English, preferably showing the applicant's ability to use (ethnographic) methods and theorize (single-spaced, maximum 10,000 words). If the candidate would prefer to submit a sample in French, please enquire into this option with the PI per email (see below).

In a second phase, short listed candidates will be **interviewed remotely** at the start of November 2024. The interview will be based on their application, scientific track-record and proposed ideas and reflections.

Interviewees will be notified shortly after the interview. Successful nominees will be expected to start in Liège early February 2024.

For more information, please feel free to contact the principal investigator, Vanessa Wijngaarden:
Email: vanessa.wijngaarden@uliege.be
Profile: www.vanessawijngaarden.com