A Brief History of the First Global Survey of Anthropological Practice and Some Lessons Learned

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Abstract

This brief article is intended to complement "The WCAA Global Survey of Anthropological Practice (2014-2018): Reported Findings" in this issue of *ViBrAnt*. The article details the internal processes within the World Council of Anthropological Associations through which the Global Survey of Anthropological Practice (GSAP) was initiated and developed. It also discusses the issues and challenges the research team faced, as well as how it endeavored to address them, in carrying out a global survey of anthropologists. The principal aim of the GSAP was to create a knowledge base about the professional practice of anthropologists globally that could be used by the World Council of Anthropological Associations (WCAA) and its member associations to help promote the value and relevance of the discipline. With its fifty-odd member associations from all continents, the WCAA was uniquely positioned to gather these data, and the GSAP process effectively remade this network of associations into a large-scale research consortium. The development and intent of the survey, the particular actors involved and actions taken in its development, are thus critical to its fruition, as well as its shortcomings. The historical process itself contains valuable insights for any future endeavors to survey practitioners of anthropology on a global scale.

Keywords: Global, research, collaboration, world anthropologies, anthropological practice.

Breve História da Primeira Pesquisa Global de Práticas Antropológicas e Algumas Lições Aprendidas

Resumo

Este breve texto pretende complementar o artigo "The WCAA Global Survey of Anthropological Practice (2014-2018): Reported Findings", incluso nesta edição da *ViBrAnt*. O texto detalha os processos internos do Conselho Mundial de Associações Antropológicas por meio dos quais a *Pesquisa Global de Práticas Antropológicas* (GSAP) foi iniciada e desenvolvida. Também discute questões e desafios enfrentados pela equipe de pesquisa, bem como os esforços para abordá-los, ao realizar uma pesquisa global sobre antropólogos. O principal objetivo do GSAP era criar uma base de conhecimento sobre a prática profissional de antropólogos em todo o mundo que pudesse ser usada pelo Conselho Mundial de Associações Antropológicas (WCAA) e suas associações membros para ajudar a promover o valor e a relevância da disciplina. Com suas mais de cinquenta associações-membro de todos os continentes, a WCAA estava posicionada de forma única para coletar esses dados, e o GSAP efetivamente transformou essa rede de associações em um consórcio de pesquisa em grande escala. O desenvolvimento e a intenção da pesquisa, os atores particulares envolvidos e as ações tomadas em seu desenvolvimento são, portanto, fundamentais para sua fruição, bem como suas deficiências. O próprio processo histórico contém insights valiosos para quaisquer esforços futuros para pesquisar as praticas antropológicas em escala global.
Palavras-chave: Global, pesquisa, colaboração, antropologias mundiais, prática antropológica.

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Introduction

The overarching objective of the Global Survey of Anthropological Practice (GSAP) was to create a knowledge base about the professional practice of anthropologists globally that could be used by the World Council of Anthropological Associations (WCAA) and its member associations to help promote the value and relevance of the discipline. A major aim of this global survey of anthropologists' practice was to complement the focus in previous publications by anthropologists allied with the World Anthropologies network on the intellectual content and knowledge production in various national and regional traditions throughout the globe (e.g. Ribeiro and Escobar, 2006) with data on anthropologists' activities, movements and avenues of impact. With its fifty-odd member associations from all continents, the WCAA was uniquely positioned to gather this data, and the GSAP process effectively remade this network of associations into a large-scale research consortium.

Brief History of the GSAP

The GSAP was approved as the WCAA's principal research project at the WCAA Biennial Meeting in Taipei (October 2014). Greg Acciaioli made the initial proposal for a global survey of anthropological practice and his proposal was supported by the newly elected WCAA Organizing Committee, chaired by Vesna Vučinić Nešković. A Task Force comprised of Greg Acciaioli (project coordinator), Lorne Holyoak (WCAA secretary), Chandana Mathur (WCAA deputy chair), and Vesna Vučinić Nešković (WCAA chair) worked on conceptualizing a project that would include institutional as well as individual aspects of the profession. All aspects of the project were discussed at regular monthly WCAA Organizing Committee meetings and via intensive e-mail communication.

The GSAP Project was implemented by the WCAA Organizing Committee over a four-year period, in two phases. The first phase took place between October 2014 and May 2016, the period between the WCAA biennial meetings in Taipei and Dubrovnik. During the first phase the GSAP task force compiled surveys and other data sets that had already been undertaken by member associations. Greg Acciaioli recruited two other Australian colleagues, Pamela McGrath and Adele Millard, to be involved in the survey design and implementation. At the May 2015 CASCA meeting in Québec City, the GSAP Task Force held a roundtable on "The Global Practice of Anthropology," organized by Lorne Holyoak. GSAP design and implementation was further discussed at the WCAA Delegates Meeting in Bangkok, Thailand, in July 2015. Early in 2016, the survey designers carried out a pilot questionnaire using Survey Monkey with the Australian Anthropological Society, and its preliminary results were analyzed and reported later that year (McGrath and Acciaioli, 2016). In May 2016 at the International Union of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences (IUAES) Inter-Congress in Dubrovnik, the Task Force organized a two-day GSAP Panel Stream. During the event, the WCAA delegates presented 27 papers on anthropological practice in different national contexts, as well as debated the intellectual, methodological, and technical issues related to implementation of the survey around the world. These papers were presented

across five sessions, which were: 1) Profiling through Survey and Interviews: What Anthropology Graduates Do and How They Identify, 2) Relating Anthropological Practice to the State: Perils, Possibilities, and Policies, 3) Confronting the Challenges of Neoliberalism and Globalization, 4) Organizing the Diversity of Anthropological Practice through Associations, and 5) Teaching Anthropology outside the Traditional Anthropology Program. The concluding 6th session presented and discussed the preliminary results of the pilot survey conducted by the Australian Anthropological Society, with a focus on what lessons could be gleaned from that pilot for the final design of the GSAP.

The second phase took place between June 2016 and July 2018, the period between the meeting in Dubrovnik and the WCAA meeting in Florianopolis. In the second phase, the 2016-18 WCAA Organizing Committee made it a priority to seek further input of WCAA member associations into the survey design process. At a well-attended interim WCAA meeting held in Minneapolis in November 2016, then WCAA Chair Chandana Mathur led a line-by-line discussion of the draft survey instrument, and the useful and detailed feedback gathered there was passed on to the GSAP team. Olga Jubany, the Chair of Institut Català d'Antropologia, a WCAA member association, offered to arrange for the translation of the survey instrument into Spanish. Throughout this phase, at interim meetings and via regular communications, there were continuous efforts to involve WCAA member associations in the GSAP process since sustained participation of associations at all stages of the project was understood to be the key to higher final response rates. A grant proposal submitted by a sub-committee of the WCAA Organizing Committee to the Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research was successful, and the GSAP was awarded funding in August 2017.[1]

The GSAP was conducted online using Survey Monkey[2] between October 2017 and February 2018 and was offered only in English and Spanish. The survey was promoted through the WCAA website and professional anthropology networks such as AASNet, an Australian listserv with a public subscription base. Information about the survey and a link to it were provided to representatives of WCAA member associations for distribution to their members. Anyone who self-identified as an anthropologist, whether or not they were a member of one or more member associations of the WCAA, was invited to participate.

A final GSAP symposium was held in July 2018 as part of the WCAA biennial meeting immediately preceding the IUAES World Congress in Florianopolis Brazil, during which presentations of GSAP findings for subsamples of various nations or regions were made. After opening comments by incoming WCAA chair Carmen Sílvia de Moraes Rial, Chandana Mathur (outgoing WCAA chair), and GSAP coordinator Greg Acciaioli, the symposium began with the keynote address by Pamela McGrath of the National Centre for Indigenous Studies and the Australian National University entitled "Is Global Anthropology Many Gods, or a God with Many Faces? Findings from the Global Survey of Anthropological Practice." This keynote was later expanded and submitted to the Wenner-Gren as the "Report on the Preliminary Findings of the 2018 Global Survey of Anthropological Practice: How We Move through the World, How the World Moves through Us," a report now available online (McGrath, Acciaioli and Millard, n.d.). The papers following the keynote were organized into five sessions – 1) Thematic Foci of Institutional Practice, 2) Visibility/Invisibility of Anthropology beyond the Academy, 3) From Colonial Heritage to Decolonization and Reconciliation in Anthropological Practice, 4) Changing Employment and Engagements: Graduate Trajectories, and 5) Changing Employment and Engagements: Neoliberal Impacts

– along with a final discussion. Of the 18 papers presented during these sessions, six were almost wholly concentrated on the GSAP results for the subsample from their nation or region, while 12 were primarily drawing on other sources, in part due to the low response numbers for those regions, which we discuss below.

Issues and challenges of the GSAP Design

Participation

The GSAP received 3836 valid responses from around the world, 15 percent of which used the Spanish survey instrument. One of the aims of the GSAP project was to collect data that the member associations of the WCAA would be able to use to address their members' needs and issues. Most (86%, n=3618)[3] respondents were members of at least one WCAA member association. Almost every WCAA member association is represented in the responses to some extent; however, some associations are better represented than others, with participation rates likely influenced by the strategies each association used to promote the survey to their members, as well as language accessibility. Participation was limited by the fact that the survey instrument was only available in English and Spanish.[4] As a result, there are major gaps in the global representativeness of the findings.[5]

The member associations with the highest response rates[6] were Anthropology Southern Africa (ASnA) (with 76.5% of its members participating in the GSAP), Anthropological Association of the Philippines / Ugnayang Pang-Aghamtao, Inc. (UGAT) (with a participation rate of 61.2%), the International Association for Southeast European Anthropology (InASEA) (with a 50.7% participation rate), the Canadian Anthropology Society/ Société canadienne d'anthropologie (CASCA) (with a 45.3% participation rate), the Colegio de Graduados en Antropología de la República Argentina (CGA) (with a 41.4% participation rate), and the Serbian Ethnological and Anthropological Society (SEAS) (with a 41% participation rate). Part of this had to do with members of the WCAA Organizing Committee actively recruiting participants in their home associations. Many other representatives of WCAA associations also endeavored to recruit respondents, but not all members succeeded,[7] and UGAT's high participation rate cannot be explained simply as a result of Organizing Committee member efforts.[8] There are some additional factors that limit the global representativeness of the data, which we discuss below.

3   Whenever possible, we list the number of valid responses to any given question ("n"). Not every respondent answered every question. Percentages, when possible, are figured based on the number of responses to a given question.

4   Providing an opportunity for all respondents to complete the GSAP in their first or preferred language was impossible, primarily because of the time and complexity of creating a single database into which responses to a multilingual survey instrument could be collated and analyzed. The survey team invested considerable time and energy into creating a Spanish version of the survey instrument, which in the end 568 (almost 15%) respondents used. This required translation of the survey instrument from English into Spanish, and then manual coding of the translation into Survey Monkey, a task that was both technically challenging and labor intensive. The resulting bias towards English and, to a lesser degree, Spanish, excluded many potential respondents.

5   For example, the dataset would seem to suggest that very few anthropologists live in north or northeast Asia; however, due to a variety of constraints, the survey was not widely distributed among members of north or northeast Asian anthropological associations and their response rates were very low, which would be the more accurate interpretation. In the case of the Peoples Republic of China, for example, despite the notable efforts of the Chinese Anthropological Society's representative to foster participation in the GSAP, the lack of a version in Mandarin led to a very low response rate.

6   The memberships of anthropological associations around the world vary significantly in size, so these participation rates do not necessarily reflect the greatest absolute number of respondents to the survey.

7   Despite vigorous attempts to promote the survey among members of the Australian Anthropological Society, the response rate was lower than anticipated, in part because some AAS members reported a certain amount of survey fatigue after having participated in the similar pilot survey two years earlier.

8   High levels of proficiency in English in the Philippines due to its status as a former American colony certainly contributed to the accessibility of the survey to UGAT members.

Besides difficulties with participation and language accessibility, the survey design team encountered some important challenges in crafting a survey instrument with global reach. Broadly speaking, two of the most challenging problems were international differences in terminology and navigating a shifting and contested geopolitical landscape. As a result, the survey instrument was long and complex. The 23-question survey included multiple-choice and write-in questions and allowed for a large number of possible responses and resulted in an unwieldy dataset.[9]

Terminology – International Differences

During the drafting of the survey instrument, it became apparent that there were significant variations in the structures and terminology of anthropological education and practice around the world. For example, we realized that there were differences in the structure of (post-)graduate research programs around the world, and in the focus and nomenclature of sub-disciplines. For example, archaeology is generally considered a sub-discipline of anthropology in the USA, but in many other countries it is a discipline in its own right, sometimes more closely allied to history and classics than to anthropology. The terminology used in the survey instrument tended to have an Australian bias due to the all-Australian team involved in design and analysis, despite efforts to mitigate this bias by soliciting comments on the draft instrument from the WCAA Advisory committee and the WCAA delegates in the various phases of consultation described above.

Variations in terminology and ideology around gender and race also posed significant challenges in the global survey. The terms used in the GSAP for gender – male, female, and other– do not begin to represent the diverse range of gender identities and expressions. Definitions and manifestations of racial hierarchies and racial identities vary so widely around the world, not to mention the vexed character of the term race as an etic analytic concept as opposed to an emic identity term, that it was decided to exclude questions of race altogether. However, doing so has limited the GSAP's ability to provide insight into employment patterns and inequity along such dimensions, as well as other professional trajectories within the discipline.

Geopolitical Landscape – Shifting and Contested

The survey team received advice from the WCAA early in the process that a coarsely grained regional approach (e.g. Eastern Europe, Southeast Asia (Huxley, 1996), etc.) to place-based questions would be inappropriate, in part due to colonial, Cold War and contemporary geopolitical biases in delimitations of such regions. A decision was made to include only formally recognized nation-states in questions relating to geography (noting that the definition of these is itself disputed). Disputed territories and Indigenous nations within settler states were not included as individual units. One consequence of this was that a number of respondents were born or educated in countries that no longer exist, such as Yugoslavia. Furthermore, respondents who identified as being born in, or living in, places such as Catalunya, the West Bank, Palestine, Kosovo, Puerto Rico, and the Blackfoot confederacy were understandably upset about the exclusion of their home nations from the survey's standard list of responses. The WCAA apologizes to these individuals; yet, these were very difficult issues to resolve in the context of a global survey where the inclusion of too many possibilities might obfuscate patterns emerging from cross-tabulation. Doubtless, the decisions taken could have benefited from even further consultation with WCAA member associations before administering the survey.

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9   Raw data were extracted from Survey Monkey into a csv file for cleaning and analysis. Because of the format of the survey instrument, the export file was extremely large (many hundreds of columns wide) and unwieldy. With assistance from our volunteer statistician, the dataset was imported into statistics software for reformatting. The dataset was then cleaned, and invalid or problematic responses were removed. Analysis of the dataset undertaken for the purpose of the final report was done in Excel, primarily using Excel pivot tables.

Conclusion

All of the above factors should be taken into consideration when seeking to use the GSAP dataset to draw conclusions about the nature of global anthropological practice as a whole. Despite all these challenges, however, the survey has produced a large and potentially very useful dataset about the professional lives of anthropologists around the world, and the GSAP provides a solid foundation for future surveys of this kind. Notably, the GSAP Project showed that a global attempt to collect data about anthropological practice is indeed possible. It is as of yet the discipline's most spatially extensive glimpse of the everyday life of non-hegemonic anthropologies. By applying more complex quantitative analysis, the acquired data set may yield additional findings about geographical distinctions and global trends in the present-day practice of anthropologists from around the world. Moreover, assembling the articles in this special issue will hopefully stimulate subsequent surveys that can take our knowledge about the anthropological profession further in order to investigate emergent trends in anthropological practice and the discipline's potential to participate in the solving of acute world problems even further.

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