
IN A FEW WORDS / EN POCAS PALABRAS

TRACK CHANGES: REFLECTING ON A TRANSFORMING WORLD
CONTROL DE CAMBIOS / RASTREA LOS CAMBIOS / EL CAMINO CAMBIA:
REFLEXIONES SOBRE UN MUNDO EN TRANSFORMACIÓN

Cristina Sánchez-Carretero¹

Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, CSIC
SIEF 2019 Congress Convener

Nevena Škrbić Alempijević²

University of Zagreb, Department of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology
SIEF President

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ABSTRACT: “Track changes: Reflecting on a transforming world” was the theme chosen to invite panels, papers, posters and alternative presentations to be part of the 2019 international congress of SIEF that was held in Santiago de Compostela, Galicia (Spain). This introduction includes a description of the content of the congress, the rationale of the choice of plenaries and some reflections about the outcomes of the congress.

KEYWORDS: SIEF; Congresses; Transformations; Pre-Covid Era.

RESUMEN: El lema elegido para presentar paneles, ponencias, posters y presentaciones en formatos alternativos para el congreso internacional 2019 de SIEF -que tuvo lugar en Santiago de Compostela, Galicia (España)- fue “*Track changes: Reflecting on a transforming world*”. Esta introducción incluye una descripción del contenido del congreso, la idea para la elección de las plenarias y algunas reflexiones sobre los resultados del congreso.

PALABRAS CLAVE: SIEF; Congresos; Transformaciones, Era pre-Covid.

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1 Email: cristina.sanchez-carretero@incipit.csic.es ORCID iD: <<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3900-3976>>.

2 Email: nskrbic@ffzg.hr ORCID iD: <<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8653-7954>>.

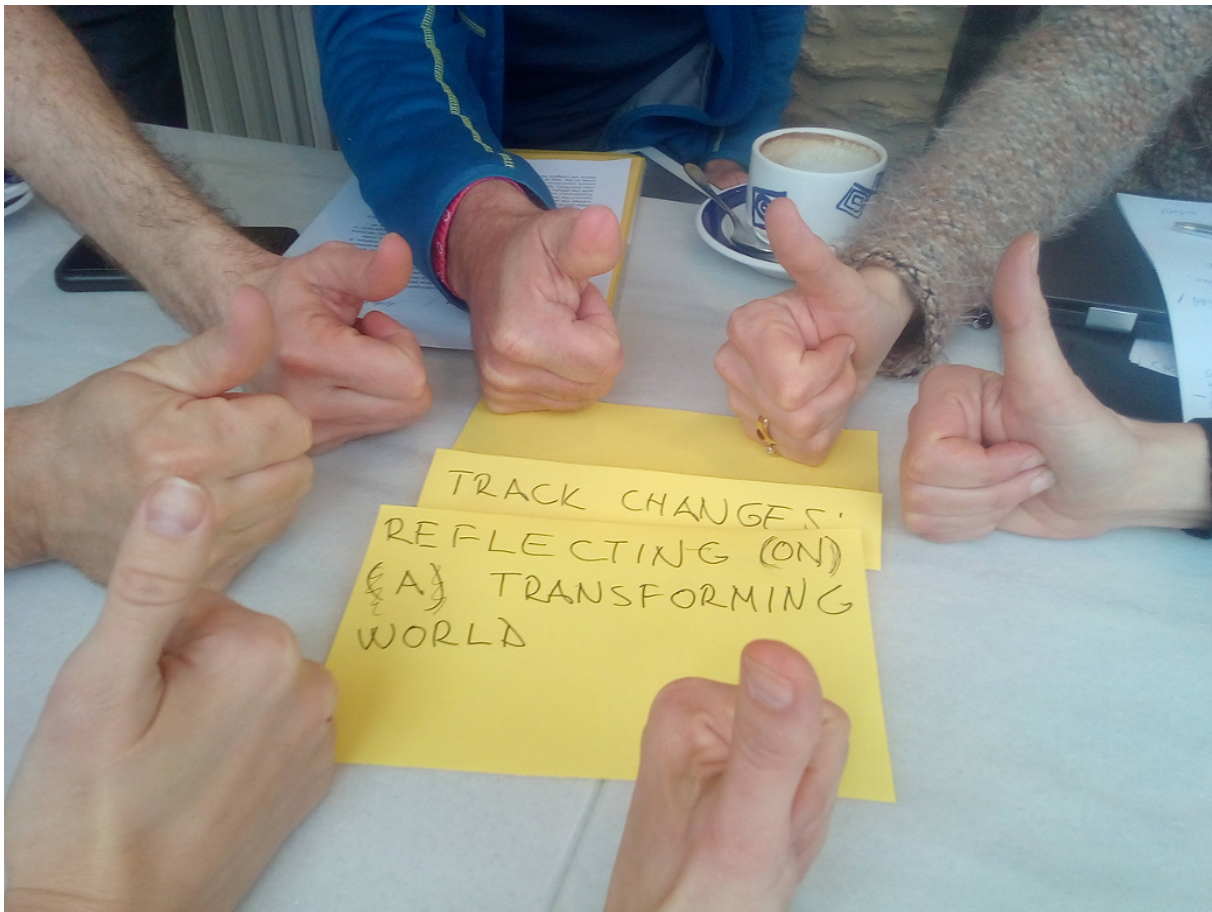


ILLUSTRATION 1.— Cards with some of the different proposals that generated the final theme of the Congress. Source: Cristina Sánchez-Carretero

“Track Changes: Reflecting on a Transforming World” was the theme of SIEF’s 2019 International Congress held in Santiago de Compostela, Galicia (Spain). *Disparidades* dedicates a section of this volume to the Congress plenaries and we thank the journal’s editors and the board for their support in dedicating the first 2021 issue to this topic. At each SIEF Congress, participants receive the previous Congress plenaries published in one of the host country’s leading anthropology, ethnology, or folklore journals. Participants in the 2021 Congress, hosted by the University of Helsinki, were thus to have receive a wonderful, concrete, touchable printed copy of *Disparidades*. Due to COVID restrictions, SIEF 2021 will be online, and the *Disparidades* journal has gone electronic. This has given us the opportunity to include additional, germane articles that did not stem from the Congress.

We are particularly grateful to be part of *Disparidades*, as it is not only one of the leading anthropolo-

gy journals in Spain, but also the oldest, established in 1944 under the title *Journal of Dialectology and Folk Traditions*. Through its name, contents and publishing policies, it represents the transformations of the disciplines of ethnology, folklore and anthropology that, in the Spanish case, are incorporated in the field of “socio-cultural anthropology”.

Santiago 2019 explores “Track Changes”, a theme that has given us the opportunity to share our thoughts and insights on a transforming world. The programme of the Congress encompassed a variety of meanings and scales of transformations: from slow and silent ones to major crises, from changes that move us forward to those that take us back. It deals with transformations in knowledge production and the scholarly landscape in our fields as well. We discussed changes that bring opportunities and new ways of collaborating, such as wider availability of research results and open access policies, but we also

discussed unfavourable trends that our disciplines face, transformations that instead can limit academic freedom and narrow the public sphere. When facing such challenges, the strength of our scholarly community lies in mobilizing international networks, in cooperation, solidarity and togetherness.

The theme of the Congress itself is an outcome of such cooperation. The concept of tracking changes is the result of a synergy between the local organizers and the scientific committee, joining forces to define a theme that reflects issues relevant and urgent in the local context, but also universal thought-provoking questions that trigger the imagination of ethnologists and folklorists. “Track Changes” is thus a tribute to the transformative role played by Santiago de Compostela and the *Camino*, a pilgrimage route linked with crises and searches, risks and fears, but also with changes, chances, hopes and dreams, and the way people experience and imagine them. But a focus on transformations also highlights the ability of our disciplines to document and analyse –and positively and actively contribute to– the complex and ever-changing character of social life.

“Track”, the noun “track” is primarily defined as a rough path made of soil, suggestive of movement, displacement, pilgrimage, and travel. It points to a physical way followed by someone, as well as to an abstract course of action or line of thought. In that sense, it directs us to considerations of how people’s ways of living, narrating, acting, imagining and sensing the world can change, but also how *they* can be changed by taking a certain route. The noun has a further meaning: a song or musical piece. The topic thus also speaks of the intimate transformations, and wider social changes, that can be brought about through artistic experience.

“Track Changes” can be read as an imperative, or as a call for us to follow our quarry by interpreting the marks or signs that it has left behind. It thus refers to our disciplines’ abilities to document and analyse social life, both diachronically and synchronically.

We want to dedicate a few lines tracking how the call itself was written.³ Conference calls are usually written by small groups, in most cases the Scientific Committee or the main organizers. For SIEF 2019,

3 Readers can see a visual tracing of the process at <<https://www.siefhome.org/videos/sief2019.shtml>> Accessed: 7 June 2021.

the local team asked for feedback at the 2017 General Assembly in Göttingen, which was followed by a one-day Collaborative Call Writing Meeting at the INCIPIT-CSIC (Santiago de Compostela) in March 2018. Using Participatory Action Research techniques, we put together a group of diverse participants and many ideas and experimental formats were discussed out of which the Scientific Committee forged the final theme (<<https://www.siefhome.org/congresses/sief2019/theme.shtml>>).

Almost 1000 specialists in ethnology, folklore and anthropology, and related disciplines, from more than 50 countries gathered at the 2019 SIEF Congress. Topics of essential social relevance were addressed, such as migratory movements and the refugee crisis, gender issues, processes of heritage and tourism consumption in contemporary society, transformations in the rural world and in the everyday life, environmental issues related to climate change, rituals of/and change, transformations and the digital sphere, and more. Around 900 presentations were delivered, including keynotes, papers, audiovisual formats, posters, roundtable discussions, workshop contributions and alternative formats.

At the 2019 SIEF congress, the inaugural address was given by Susana Narotzky, Professor of Social Anthropology at the University of Barcelona: “The politics of evidence in an uncertain world: experience, knowledge, social facts and factual truth”, with subsequent plenaries by Tim Ingold, Emeritus Professor of Social Anthropology at the University of Aberdeen (UK); Coppélie Cocq, Professor of European Ethnology at the University of Helsinki (Finland); and Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, Professor Emerita of Performance Studies at New York University and Chief Curator of the Core Exhibition at POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews in Warsaw. A final event, “The materiality of transformations: Listening to objects” was performed by Sharon Roseman, Professor of Anthropology at Memorial University of Newfoundland (Canada); Regina Bendix, Professor of Cultural Anthropology/ European Ethnology at the University of Göttingen (Germany); Dorothy Noyes, Professor in the Department of English and Comparative Studies, a faculty associate of the Mershon Center for International Security Studies, and former director of the Center for Folklore Studies, all at the Ohio State University (USA). This transformative final event was moderated by Francisco Cruces Villalobos, professor at the Department of Social and Cultural Anthropology at UNED, Madrid (Spain), who



ILLUSTRATION 2.– Still image from the video of the closing event (<https://vimeo.com/362078953>).

has contributed a piece about the event itself and the silent power of things in everyday life to this volume. The plenary lectures are included in this volume as research articles, whereas the final event, due to its performative character, is part of a *Disparidades* section called “In the Wild”.⁴ Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett’s inspiring closing lecture is not in written form but it can be seen at <https://vimeo.com/362078953> from minute 00:10:30 to 00:47:15.

For “The materiality of transformations”, each participant contributed a couple of images of “objects that tell stories” and, after an introduction to the experimental format (00:54:30), Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett selected an image to be put up on the big screen. The object’s owner then narrated its story in relation to the theme of the congress. In this journal’s “In the Wild” section, Regina Bendix, Dorothy Noyes and Sharon Roseman include the photographs of their objects and the texts that accompany them.

4 The video of the final event is available at <https://vimeo.com/362078953> or at the sief web page (<https://www.siefhome.org/congresses/sief2019/keynotes.shtml>) Accessed: 7 June 2021. The performance/roundtable/storytelling event can be seen from minute 00:52:50 to 01:31:00.

The order follows the random choice that Barbara determined directly from the stage (Illustration 2).

In addition to the plenary lectures and the experimental pieces of the final event, this SIEF Congress issue includes a “cartography” section, an annual feature in *Disparidades* reflecting on the state of the art of a field of study. In this case, linked to the opening plenary, Bibiana Martínez (a member of organizing committee) and Patricia Homs have prepared a cartography exploring the moral economy of farming.

We invite the readers to enrich their reading experience by listening to the sounds of the author’s voices:

- You can find the opening remarks by the authors of this introduction at <https://vimeo.com/360552621> (00:33:51);
- the opening address by Susana Narotsky (<https://vimeo.com/360552621> 00:51:00);
- the plenary by Tim Ingold (<https://vimeo.com/360550003> 00:10:50);
- the plenary by Coppélie Cocq (<https://vimeo.com/362032817> 00:07:00);
- and the closing lecture by Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (<https://vimeo.com/362078953> 00:10:30).

We also had inspiring introductions to the keynote lectures by Lourenzo Fernández Prieto (<<https://vimeo.com/360552621>> 00:46:05), Felipe Criado-Boado (<<https://vimeo.com/360550003>> 00:02:10), Robert Glenn Howard (<<https://vimeo.com/362032817>> 00:03:28), and Francisco Cruces (<<https://vimeo.com/362078953>> 00:04:10).

The congress included a special panel dedicated to “Track Changes in Galician Anthropology” with a roundtable moderated by Sharon Roseman and the participation of Xaquín Rodríguez Campos and Antonio García Allut (<<https://vimeo.com/360597711>>). This special panel also included an event celebrating Carmelo Lisón Tolosana in which Xerardo Pereiro introduced his works and his passion for Galicia (<<https://vimeo.com/360597711>> 00:41:15) followed by a lecture by Carmelo Lisón Tolosana (00:50:30). Don Carmelo left us in April 2020, but the impact and relevance of his work remains as a long-lasting contribution to our disciplines.

In addition to the words of the participants, the sounds of the Congress took various forms. In the survey conducted at the end, many attendees commented that the sound of laughter permeated the meeting. The sounds also took the form of music, as the event included many special acoustic moments. We want to thank especially the musicians and dancers who accompanied us, coordinated by Mauro Sanín, Paula Ballesteros Arias and Sonia García. The opening ceremony at the *Cidade da Cultura*, included a performance by the group Tralo-Valo (Ariel Nines and Carme da Pontragha, <<https://vimeo.com/360552621>> until minute 00:10:00), while at the closing event, a dance performance dealing with materiality, sounds and stories was created specially for us (performed by Mercedes Prieto and Serxio Cobos <<https://vimeo.com/362078953>> 00:48:05 to 00:52:15). The final musical event ended with a performance by Mauro

Sanín playing a hurdy-gurdy (zanfona), with Mercedes Prieto and Serxio Cobos dancing (<<https://vimeo.com/362078953>> 01:34:20).

Finally, we would like to mention an important outcome of the Congress: its anti-harassment protocol. This is the first time that such protocol is established at SIEF congresses. A purple point was set; it followed the initiative of the Spanish Association of Anthropology (ASAE).

This text also tracks the changes that have come to all of us over the last year. 2019 was the last SIEF congress of the pre-COVID era and no doubt many of the transformations and materialities involved will affect future ways of being together. Due to the epidemic and its consequences, the policies that regulate our everyday lives, perceptions and worldviews, the ways in which we define our work and our homes have changed significantly, which points to the fragility and changeability of the social contexts and freedoms that we too often take for granted. But individual and collective reactions and actions also reflect the resolve to carry on with social interaction, albeit by different means. Despite the uncertainty and obstacles that we all face, these events have also revealed the creativity and adaptability of our fields. Many ethnologists, folklorists and anthropologists are currently conducting research on political, economic and social frameworks for “crisis management”, in order to explore how the COVID makes visible and reinforces inequalities and people make sense and act in a transformed world.

Memories of the Santiago de Compostela SIEF Congress remain vivid and we owe a debt of gratitude to the local team for making Santiago an impressive refuge along SIEF’s *camino*. We truly hope and believe that the sense of togetherness created during SIEF 2019 will encourage new paradigms and bring new opportunities for anthropology in Galicia.