



Max-Planck-Institut für ethnologische Forschung
Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology

CaMP-03: *Wants and their Shadows*

A workshop of the [Cambridge-Max Planck Exchange for Economic Life \(CaMP\)](#).

Date: September 2nd-3rd 2025

Location: Department of Social Anthropology, University of Cambridge, Free School Lane, CB2 3RF

Organisers: [Christoph Brumann](#), [Sian Lazar](#), [Andrew Sanchez](#), [Biao Xiang](#)

The Cambridge-Max Planck Exchange for Economic Life (CaMP) is a collaborative initiative of the Department of Social Anthropology at the University of Cambridge, and the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology in Germany. CaMP seeks to build a dynamic professional community of ethnographers to discuss future directions for the study of economic life; foster innovative modes of research; and develop new forms of public engagement. CaMP is committed to the exploration of questions that are of common concern to ethnographers and the people with whom they conduct research.

‘Wants and their Shadows’ is the third workshop of the CaMP collective, and will be the basis for an edited work comprised of conference papers, and a co-authored manifesto/position piece in a major journal. Previous CaMP workshops in 2023 and 2024 brought together an international community of scholars to explain how their interests in economic anthropology had developed; indicate the concerns, contradictions and hopes in their research participants’ engagements with economy; spell out their research agenda for the coming years; and think about the potential of their work to engage in critical world issues such as wellbeing, inequality and sustainability.

CaMP-03 builds on the collective interests which emerged in previous discussions, by exploring how one might use comparative ethnographic research to engage with the pressing question of ‘what people want’. Such a question was integral to the consolidation of political and economic anthropology in the 20th century, which used ethnographic engagement to generate new insights about struggle, motivations, wellbeing and development. In the current moment, this question has re-emerged as one of the most pressing of our age, as we strive to engage with major changes in structures of political economy; accelerating precarity engendered by economic and environmental crises; and new transformations in forms and styles of political and economic engagement.

A consideration of ‘wants and their shadows’ is a valuable vantage point that informs innovative styles of anthropological engagement, founded on the ethnographic practice of developing

questions from lived experience. Such a focus also highlights a range of topical and conceptual issues that are central to contemporary social science, such as those surrounding drives and desires, agency and power, vocation and ambition, political consciousness and action, living and working conditions, conceptions of hope and the future, satisfaction and alienation.

The workshop will use the notion of 'wants' to interrogate how people determine what is valuable to them, and the effect that such determinations have on social and political life. By critically exploring the complex interaction between wants, needs, interests and desires, the workshop will shed important new light on the meaning of perennial conceptual terms within the social sciences. Through a consideration of how the economic, political, and moral interact in comparative contexts, the workshop will also make a timely contribution to understandings of global transformations of political subjectivity and economic life. Such an approach moves beyond reductive conceptions of 'interest' that fail to capture the complexity and dynamism of social experience.

The workshop will use the notion of 'shadows' to explore the relationship between wants and the societal processes that make structures of exclusion and alienation. By considering the interaction between wants and their shadows, the workshop will interrogate whether an ethnographic focus on needs and desires is a productive means to capture what people are perceived to lack in societal, personal, and political-economic terms. The papers in this workshop will also creatively explore the questions of how 'wants' may cast the shadows of negative, societal, consequences. Such an approach affords new understandings of the social life of status anxiety, resentment, envy and greed.

CaMP is a multi-institutional initiative, which seeks to build productive, long term engagement between different academic and public spaces. The workshop includes scholars from a range of different career stages, and is designed to facilitate the professional development of its participants, alongside the generation of new agendas for the study of economic life. Co-housed in two major centres for ethnographic research, CaMP engages with a broad interdisciplinary community of scholars working in the fields of social anthropology, political economy, sociology, economics, human geography, and development studies.

Wants and their Shadows will apply CaMP's collaborative method to establish new ways of communicating anthropological analysis to an interdisciplinary and popular audience. The workshop will explore how an ethnographic focus on 'wants' might generate important new insights about social structures and processes in comparative contexts; how to understand the interplay between ostensibly pro-social and self-interested wants; the challenges and opportunities of reconceptualising ambitions as contextual, dynamic and inconsistent; the analytic and political potential of exploring why ambitions may be lacking in given social contexts; distinctions between wants and 'interests'. In doing so, the workshop will develop long term collaborations that generate innovative modes of research and communication.

Monday 1st September 2025

- External participants arrive, for accommodation at Wolfson College Cambridge.

Tuesday 2nd September 2025

- 09:30-10:00 Welcome

- 10:00-11:30 Session one

Chair: Andrew Sanchez (Department of Social Anthropology, University of Cambridge)
 Discussant: Shailaja Fennell (Department of Land Economy, University of Cambridge)

Garima Jaju (Centre for South Asian Studies, University of Cambridge)
'Bala's caution: women's intimate speculations of kinship futures amidst a transforming land market in Gurgaon, India'

Ikuno Naka (MPI Social Anthropology)
'Wants and desires in India's speculative real estate market'

Julia Perczel (Department of Social Anthropology, University of Manchester)
'A green businessman: We couldn't fix the environment, so we are becoming millionaires'

- 11:30-12:00 Break

- 12:00-13:30 Session two

Chair: Christoph Brumann (MPI Social Anthropology)
 Discussant: Emma Mawdsley (Department of Geography University of Cambridge)

Andrew Haxby (MPI Social Anthropology)
'The Hidden Economy'

Sohail Jagat (MPI Social Anthropology)
'The Shifting Shadows of Migratory Desire'

Jeremy Rayner (MPI Social Anthropology)
'The Shadow of Interests'

- 13:30-14:30 Lunch

- 14:30-16:00 Session three

Chair: Andrew Sanchez (Department of Social Anthropology, University of Cambridge)
 Discussant: Alice Pearson (CRASSH, University of Cambridge)

Joana Nascimento (Department of Social Anthropology, University of Cambridge)
'Island Futures: reconsidering work, sustainability and social reproduction'

Siqi Tu (MPI Social Anthropology)
'Structures of Global Aspiration: the Perpetual State of 'Becoming' for China's Parachute Generation'

- 16:00 End

- 19:00 Dinner. [Sala Thong](#), 35 Newnham Rd, Cambridge, CB3 9EY

Wednesday 3rd September 2025

- 10:00-10:30 Welcome
- 10:30-12:00 Session four

Chair: Christoph Brumann (MPI Social Anthropology)

Discussant: Xin Zhan (Department of Social Anthropology, University of Cambridge)

Zhipeng Duan (MPI Social Anthropology)

'An Affordance Analysis on Screen-tapping: Convenience and Active Fatigue in Platform Life'

Javier Ruiz, (Department of Social Anthropology, University of Cambridge)

'What do you want?' The problem of conation in the second person during ethnographic research'

- 12:00-13:00 Lunch
- 13:00-15:00 Final Discussion
- 15:00-15:30 Break
- 15:30-16:30 Publication Plans
- 16:30 End
- 19:00 Dinner. [The Granta](#), 14 Newnham Terrace, Cambridge, CB3 9EX