**Journal of Urban Anthropology**

**Call for Papers**

**Caucasus**

The geographic space between the Black Sea and the Caspian Sea, bordered to the north by the Greater Caucasus with Elbrus, the highest peak in Europe, and to the south by the Lesser Caucasus, encompasses three countries with relatively small territory – Georgia, Azerbaijan, and Armenia. Additionally, on the northern slopes of the Caucasus, there are several even smaller republics within the Russian Federation. However, there is much more than meets the eye in terms of cultures, ethnicities, and histories. It is an absolutely astonishing and hard-to-describe cultural diversity. It is the region where Europe becomes Asia, and Asia becomes Europe, without geographers ever unanimously agreeing on where the unequivocal boundary between the two continents should be drawn.

The *Journal of Urban Anthropology*, Bucharest, Romania, invites you to contribute to a thematic issue dedicated to exploring the cultures of the Caucasus, with a special focus on Georgia and Azerbaijan. The goal is to highlight the cultural richness and specificity of other peoples and ethnic groups in this complex geographical region. The issue is coordinated by anthropologist Cătălin D. Constantin, professor at the Faculty of Letters, University of Bucharest, based on his travels in the Caucasus and collaborations with ‘Shota Rustaveli’ State University in Batumi, Georgia, and the University of Foreign Languages in Baku, Azerbaijan.

**Context and Motivation:**

"In March 2023, in Azerbaijan, I climbed to Khinalug, one of the highest permanently inhabited settlements in Europe. An isolated village with just over 2,000 residents who speak their own language, unrelated to the languages around them, with distinct traditions compared to the rest of the country. Historians have formulated various hypotheses about the origins of Khinalug residents, none convincing and with sufficient supporting evidence. Linguists cannot trace the without doubts the origins of the spoken language here. The settlement, which has gained some tourist fame recently due to its altitude record and can only be reached by 4x4, remains a mystery in this regard. The example is not unique; in fact, the Caucasus offers plenty. In Georgia, the province of Tusheti, where I visited some villages last summer, is still completely cut off from the rest of the country in winter because the only road leading there, through the Abano Pass, reaches almost 3000 meters in altitude. In contrast, large cities such as Baku, Tbilisi, or Batumi offer the traveler an extremely interesting urban landscape, with worlds layered in a palimpsest, in full expansion. They blend old Silk Road bazaars with splendid European architecture from the late 19th and early 20th centuries, as well as contemporary architecture.

With over 50 ethnicities, as many languages, or even more – depending on how you count them, including only oral, unwritten languages unstudied in schools, still alive, all within a very small geographical area for such a diversity and cultural richness. The Caucasus is incomparable to any other part of the world in this regard. Christianity, Islam, Zoroastrianism, Buddhism – in Kalmykia, animistic altars on mountain slopes in Tusheti and elsewhere, in direct continuity with prehistoric religious practices. Until not too long ago, communication between different areas of the Caucasus was extremely difficult and somehow remains so today. Valleys are deep, most often mountain peaks separating them cannot be traversed on foot because they are too high and steep. In practice, each region historically had high isolation, acquiring over time distinctive customary differences and cultural nuances compared to neighbouring valleys. Yet, simply traveling through different areas of the Caucasus, the traveller’s eye discerns enough common elements of material culture. Different worlds interconnected. The Caucasus is the classic argument of anthropologists against archaeologists who often assume that if identical or similar elements of material culture emerge from different archaeological sites, those sites must have belonged to the same culture. In the Caucasus, ethnicities may lack a common language and origins, not to mention religion, yet a common thread of material culture exists among them. Not far from Romania, just across the Black Sea, a thousand kilometres in a straight line, the Caucasus is an area that resembles us in many ways. The traveller’s gaze quickly captures something reminiscent of home because the countries there went through Soviet communism, and the "transition" after communism follows similar thresholds, sometimes with steps backward, other times with steps forward compared to Romania. The world beyond the sea resembles us because part of it is Orthodox, because Ottoman influences are the same or like those in Romania, from food to some customs, because cultural Europeanization, immediately visible in the architecture of cities, happened there rapidly and convincingly towards the end of the 19th century, and at the beginning of the 20th century. It's strange, therefore, how little is known in Romania about the Caucasus in general. In the whole world, the countries of the Caucasus are far too little known, brought to attention from time to time by the eruption of smouldering military conflicts in the post-Soviet era.

Beyond a rapidly changing and modernizing present, the Caucasus remains a region of beginnings. Unlike the general public, the international scientific community often focuses on the evidence emerging from the countries on the border of Europe and Asia. In Georgia, the story of wine most likely begins, and also in Georgia, in Dmanisi, a remarkable discovery was made in the early '90s! – the oldest remains of humanoid skeletons in Europe were found, with an estimated age of not less than 1,800,000 years."

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Cătălin D. Constantin

University of Bucharest

Ph.D. in Philology

Ph.D. in Architecture

**Proposed Topics:**

The proposed themes are indicative; any interesting contribution regarding the historical and cultural space of the Caucasus is welcome. Articles must be written in an internationally circulated language (English, French, Italian, German), preferably in English.

1. **Identity and Ethnic and Linguistic Diversity**. We welcome contributions that analyse the diversity of languages and ethnic groups in the region.
2. **Urban Anthropology. Urbanism and contemporary architecture in Caucasus cities.** Urban centres in the Caucasus, such as Tbilisi, Baku, Batumi, concentrate significant social and cultural changes and have become the stage for new, astonishing modern architecture. Urban planning and the influences of globalization on urban planning are increasingly important research topics. How urban communities adapt to economic and technological changes, how traditional lifestyles are modified, are relevant questions in anthropological research.
3. **Literary Anthropology. Literature and theatre today**. We expect articles on the treatment of old myths and literary themes from Caucasus countries in contemporary literary creation and in the staging of current theatre performances.
4. **Ethnology. Archaic and Contemporary Social Practices**. Articles that examine the cultural traditions, customs, and local practices of different Caucasian communities. Articles can address aspects of daily life, traditions, ceremonies, and specific social practices of Caucasian cultures. Social traditions, such as those related to the extended family, wedding ceremonies, and rites of passage, constitute another important area of anthropological research in the Caucasus. How these traditions evolve in the context of social changes and modernization is essential for understanding current social dynamics.
5. **Traditional Art and Material Culture**. Contributions that explore traditional art (such as Georgian icons or Azerbaijani carpets) and how they reflect aspects of identity. Proposed articles can analyse the significance of symbols, artistic techniques, and the role of art in the process of transmitting cultural values from one generation to another.
6. **Impact of Modernity**. Analysis of how social and economic changes, as well as globalization, have rapidly shaped traditional cultures in the Caucasus.
7. **UNESCO Heritage** in Caucasus Countries.

**Selection Criteria:**

We particularly appreciate articles that make significant contributions to understanding the cultural diversity of the Caucasus, addressing interdisciplinary aspects, and providing critical and innovative perspectives. Comparative approaches are also encouraged.

**Submission Procedure:**

Please submit article proposals and an abstract (approximately 300 words) by April 1st, 2024, to the email address [antropologie@muzeulbucurestiului.ro](mailto:antropologie@muzeulbucurestiului.ro) .

Selected articles will be announced by May 1st, 2024. Full papers must be submitted by June 1st, 2024. Formatting guidelines will be provided simultaneously with the acceptance of the abstract.

We look forward to your contributions to shape a complex and captivating thematic issue.

With all due consideration,

The Editorial Team of *Journal of Urban Anthropology*