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Anthropology. (2007). In Encyclopædia Britannica. Retrieved August 24, 2007, from Encyclopædia Britannica Online: <http://www.britannica.com/eb/article-236870>

Special fields of anthropology > Applied anthropology

Applied anthropology is the aspect of anthropology that serves practical community or organizational needs. In Europe this subfield started in the 19th and early 20th centuries, when ethnographic information was collected and used by colonial Belgian, French, British, Dutch, and Russian administrators. In North America the Mexican government in 1917 was the first to officially recognize its usefulness.

All branches of anthropology have applied aspects. Physical anthropologists work in forensics and industrial design. Archaeologists support historic preservation. Anthropological linguists have designed educational programs and whole writing systems. Some degree of identification with other disciplines, especially sociology, is frequent. Practitioners may have supplementary credentials in fields such as public health or law.

Among the many professional groups associated with applied anthropology are Anthropology in Action (in Britain), the Society for Applied Anthropology (SfAA) and the National Association for the Practice of Anthropology (in the United States), and the Society of Applied Anthropology (in Canada). France, Russia, and India have government departments devoted to anthropological research, some of which has applied value. Since the 1980s anthropologists working outside of research institutions at times have been called “practicing anthropologists.” Applied or practicing anthropologists are almost never licensed or certified. They may, however, perform legally mandated studies, such as environmental impact assessments or gender analyses, for governments or international agencies.

The support of policy-related decision making is common to much of applied social or cultural anthropology. The typical approach is holistic and gives attention to context. Flexible research methodologies often combine statistical techniques with participatory, qualitative methods such as participant observation, case studies, focus groups, key informant interviews, or rapid appraisal. The work may entail service as a “culture broker” or even conflict mediation. Some practitioners become advocates promoting specific groups' interests. “Action anthropologists” work as insiders to help manage change and build self-sufficiency. Applied activities are rarely documented in widely accessible publications.

Applied anthropology has made positive contributions to public life. Industrial research in the 1930s and '40s influenced modern business administration and management techniques and theories. In many countries, including Australia, Canada, India, Mexico, Russia, and the United States, anthropologists have helped to negotiate or implement policies strengthening indigenous peoples' rights. On a global scale, Franz Boas deserves credit for stimulating the research that proved, as a 1963 United Nations declaration states, “that any doctrine of racial differentiation or superiority is scientifically false.”

Present-day employment of applied anthropologists by industries such as mining (e.g., in Western Australia) shows, on the other hand, that practitioners may work against indigenous peoples' interests rather than for them. Anthropologists working on behalf of governments (e.g., Mexico or China) have at times promoted an approach to “acculturation” that disregards indigenous peoples' social needs and values.

Applied anthropology tends to be a controversial pursuit. Early anthropologists' claims of “ethical neutrality” vis-à-vis colonial policies were challenged in France and Great Britain. Conflicts about involvement in the Vietnam War and other Cold War projects created deep rifts in American anthropology during the 1960s and '70s. In the 1980s American, British, and Canadian professional associations responded to such conflicts by writing codes of ethics establishing minimum (but nonenforceable) standards for professional conduct. Ongoing debates sustain a wholesome concern about moral and political dilemmas posed by some applied projects. Some of the most vigorous critiques are written by applied anthropologists themselves.

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Additional Reading > Special fields of anthropology > Applied anthropology

Overviews of applied anthropology and some subspecialties are provided by John van Willigen, *Applied Anthropology: An Introduction*, 3rd ed. (2002); Alexander M. Ervin, *Applied Anthropology: Tools and Perspectives for Contemporary Practice* (2000); Ralph Grillo and Alan Rew, *Social Anthropology and Development Policy* (1985); Erve Chambers, *Applied Anthropology: A Practical Guide* (1985, reissued 1989); Marietta L. Baba, *Business and Industrial Anthropology: An Overview* (1986); and John W. Bennett, “Applied and Action Anthropology: Ideological and Conceptual Aspects,” *Current Anthropology*, supplement, 37(1):S23–S53.

A widely read work comparing Marxist and non-Marxist approaches is Roger Bastide, *Applied Anthropology*, trans. from French by Alice L. Morton (1973). The history of the field and international variations are reviewed by Anthony F.C. Wallace et al. (eds.), *Perspectives on Anthropology 1976* (1977); Walter Goldschmidt (ed.), *The Uses of Anthropology* (1979); Lucy Mair, “Applied Anthropology,” in David L. Sills (ed.), *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, vol. 1 (1968); and A. [Alfred] Métraux, “Applied Anthropology in Government: United Nations,” in A.L. Kroeber (ed.), *Anthropology Today: An Encyclopedic Inventory* (1953). Marietta L. Baba and Carole E. Hill (eds.), *The Global Practice of Anthropology* (1997), discusses Australia, Canada, Costa Rica and Central America, France, Great Britain, India, Israel, Japan, Mexico, Nigeria, Russia, the United States, and the United Nations. Critical studies of specific issues, projects, and approaches are presented in Akbar S. Ahmed and Cris N. Shore (eds.), *The Future of Anthropology: Its Relevance to the Contemporary World* (1995); Dell Hymes (ed.), *Reinventing Anthropology* (1972, reissued with a new introduction, 1999); Thomas Weaver, *To See Ourselves: Anthropology and Modern Social Issues* (1973); Barbara Rose Johnston (ed.), *Who Pays the Price? The Sociocultural Context of Environmental Crisis* (1994); and Jim Yong Kim et al., *Dying for Growth: Global Inequality and the Health of the Poor* (2000).

Special fields of anthropology > Development anthropology

The final quarter of the 20th century saw an increasing involvement of social anthropologists with the process of accelerated incorporation of formerly colonial countries into the world economic system. Referred to as development, the process of incorporation involves the transfer to poor countries of technology, funding, and expertise from countries of the industrial north through multinational, governmental, and nongovernmental organizations and increasingly by private-sector corporations. Although some anthropologists were involved in the immediate post-World War II period of decolonization, the emergence of development anthropology as an academically acceptable subfield dates only from the 1980s. At the turn of the 21st century, most graduate departments of anthropology in the United States, Great Britain, and France included at least one specialist in the application of anthropological theory and methods, particularly those of political ecology, to the achievement of an economic development that is also equitable, environmentally sustainable, culturally pluralistic, and socially just. A perhaps larger number of development anthropologists are employed outside of academia, by government aid agencies, the World Bank, United Nations agencies, and various nongovernmental organizations such as OXFAM, World Union for the Conservation of Nature, and CARE. Over time, anthropologists have moved from being peripheral members of the teams to being team leaders, responsible for assuring that the work of all technical specialists is socially sound.

The legitimacy of a specifically development-oriented anthropology has been challenged by persons fundamentally wedded to cultural relativism, who argue that anthropologists might describe social change but should never participate in causing it. Increasingly, though, the profession has acknowledged the moral necessity of rejecting those who hold to an inviolability of local culture, even when this position results in poverty, infant mortality, child labour, gender hierarchies, and the general exclusion of the poor from democratic participation in government. This commitment to improving the well-being and the political power of the poor has been challenged also by some other development specialists, particularly neoliberal economists, for whom the prime measure of national development is not increasing equity but growth in gross national product (GNP) per capita.

Perhaps the greatest achievement of development anthropologists has been the demonstration to economists and technical specialists that the “beneficiaries” of development, the low-income majorities in poor countries, must be active participants at all levels of the process if it is to be successful. This means that their expertise as resource managers must be acknowledged and fully incorporated in the identification, design, implementation, and evaluation of development projects. Anthropologists have also demonstrated the internal complexity and socioeconomic differentiation (by class, age, gender, ethnicity, education, etc.) of local communities that were assumed by outside “experts” to be homogeneous. Development anthropologists have repeatedly demonstrated that projects assumed to be broadly beneficial have too often created more losers than winners.

Among the areas where anthropologists have had a substantial impact on development thinking are river basin interventions, especially involving population resettlement upstream and downstream from large hydropower dams; pastoral production systems on semiarid rangelands;

community environmental management and social forestry; the gender dimensions of development; ethno-medicine and the incorporation of indigenous practitioners within health delivery systems; and indigenous knowledge and biodiversity.

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Additional Reading > Special fields of anthropology > Development anthropology
Studies include David Brokensha, D.M. Warren, and Oswald Werner (eds.), *Indigenous Knowledge Systems and Development* (1980); Michael M. Cernea (ed.), *Putting People First: Sociological Variables in Rural Development*, 2nd ed. (1991); R.D. Grillo and R.L. Stirrat (eds.), *Discourses of Development: Anthropological Perspectives* (1997); Peter D. Little and Michael M Horowitz (eds.), *Lands at Risk in the Third World: Local-Level Perspectives* (1987); and Hari Mohan Mathur (ed.), *The Human Dimension of Development: Perspectives from Anthropology* (1990).