

**##### Call for Papers 28th Conference of AGEM #####**

**Organizer: “Arbeitsgemeinschaft Ethnomedizin”, the German  
Association “Working Group Medical Anthropology”**

**Theme: Obesity in Focus.  
Controversies, Discourses, Theories and Challenges in the  
‘Interdisciplinary Field of Anthropology & Medicine’**

**Date: June 12 – 14, 2015 in Heidelberg**

**Location: Völkerkundemuseum der J. u. E. von Portheim-Stiftung,  
Hauptstrasse 235, D-69117 Heidelberg**

The symposium is supposed to investigate the scientific, public and popular discourse in context with recent debates about “Obesity Epidemic”, “Culture and Nutrition”, “Overweight and ‘Adiposity’ (Obesity) as Diagnosis (ICD-10: E66.0)”, Eating-“Disorders” as well as “Adiposity, Health Risks and Quality of Life” and other global-health related debates, which currently are conducted in the interdisciplinary fields of (a) medical anthropology, the (b) traditional cultural sciences and (c) medicine, the latter strongly influencing these discourses. Therefore, sensitising for the importance of the cultural and social scientific perspectives, is supposed to follow in a broader frame, allowing a critical view on the arising of public debates. This broad spectrum covers also individually and subjectively perceived issues about the own weight, and also addresses real consequences of extreme obesity on a global level, allocating tasks which require plans and solutions. For convenient analyses of such complex and global problems, problem-related and multidisciplinary working areas with their multi-perspective potentials volunteer. They obtain the ability to take a positive impact on the actors. The given theme is located in the frame of the applied perspective and solution-oriented strategies within the three mentioned disciplines.

### **Global Epidemic: “Obesity”**

According to medical experts, overweight and obesity turned into a global imminence / threat and a quickly growing issue to public health. Particularly, the United States, but also Europe, Asia and Latin America as well as a few African countries recognized a measurable dramatic increase of overweight people in their populations, who at present would be diagnosed with “obesity.” Moreover, the obvious increase of prevalence and incidence of (overweight and) obese children and adolescents – according to these perceptions – is alarming. It is predicted that because a substantial part of those affected keep their overweight until adulthood and suffer from serious secondary damages like hypertension, hormonal dysfunctions, cardio vascular diseases, type-II diabetes, fatty liver, joint damages and spinal disorders need to be individually considered. Furthermore significant health expenses ought to arise. Already in 1997, a WHO committee of experts detected and warned about a global “Obesity Epidemic”. Connected with the ICD-10 diagnosis “obesity due to excess calories” (E66.0), the WHO defines the Body-Mass-Index (BMI) as an indicator for overweight and considers the following standards for adult men and women. The BMI-supported differentiation of overweight of the WHO is mostly accepted. However, as a problem-solving method it is critically discussed especially under discourse analytical aspects by medical anthropologists.

## **Nutrition, culture and environment**

In medical sociology and cultural science reference is made to the change or reduction of “Quality of life”, linked with overweight and obesity. Quality of life here is mainly associated with individual, subjective sensitivities, but could also be discussed as a “multidimensional construct” in the three academic disciplines present in this conference with interpretations reaching from a self-determined lifestyle to a “social disability“. Only a few decades ago, food production, food preparation and consumption were local affairs and therefore culturally and ecological embedded. Up to now, culinary culture is seen as an essential part of every society.

Terms like overweight and obesity, therefore, are interpreted and assessed from the perspective of the respective cultural and historical context. By describing medicine as a complex system and in the same way as a cultural phenomenon, it becomes clear that “medical interventions in culture” (Lenzen) contributed to scandalizing obesity. The until now rather “peaceful coexistence” of the determination of obesity as an indicator of wealth or the negative perception of obese people as “fat” is experiencing a profound change in interpretation. “Obesity” (“Fettleibigkeit” as a German term for the diagnosis “Adipositas”) has gained a new and ambivalent connotation, due to certain healing expectations which are associated with it. This is resulting in an explosive spread of various diets while industrial processed food simultaneously is available on a global level, which is supposed to aggravate the problem. It is postulated that economic globalization, by contributing to a so called “nutrition-transition” and a strong concentration in the food processing sector (Lang), was also responsible for the epidemic spread of obesity. What causes such controversies? What does really differentiate a Fast Food Critique from a Slow Food Movement in its potential of medial change? And yet, traditional, mostly local and herbal combinations of nutrition continually offer inexpensive and feasible alternatives for industrially processed food. Can we see here potential to shape or re-define the direction of the mentioned discourses?

## **Public Health and Global Health as societal projects**

Certainly, the medially scandalized obesity needs to be discussed in connection with the increasingly establishing “slimming industry”, which in the meantime turned into a billion dollar industry (diets, magazines, special programs for weight reduction and nutrition). Not least, obesity surgery plays a significant role in the populations’ spectrum of medically therapeutic procedures getting more and more popular. Besides this, the pharmaceutical industry intensively researches a diet pill/slimming pill – and with this in a culturally constructed concept of healing.

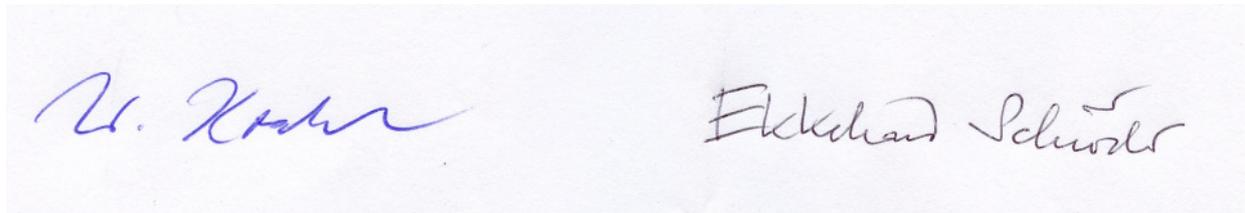
Preventive public campaigns within frames of health educating programs functioning as state interventions into differently acting private sectors, will therefore try to analyze the results of epidemiological changes of overweight and obesity. Possible strategies, furthermore, are designed wherever the expected individual quality of live and the health status of the collective are threatened. Culturally over-shaped and individual nutritional habits as well as

changed mobility patterns in the diversifying daily routine and changed techniques of its constitution as well as societal and socio-economic factors to explain the discussed phenomena should be represented. To which extent can views and theories of medical anthropology bring up new ideas and suggestions – besides the dominating medical and psychological explanations of the variance of overweight – into the dynamic and ‘multidisciplinary working field of Anthropology and Medicine’? The theme of this conference seems to be a threatening phenomenon for pushing practitioners, while theoreticians recognize conceptual issues. How could these stakeholders be brought together?

We invite all those interested in this theme, to contribute to this conference. We especially want to encourage young scholars. The multidisciplinary conferences of AGEM since 40 years offer a forum for a dialogue between representatives of different, also controversial disciplinary viewpoints in the sense of Devereux’ model of complementarity, in which deliberately a parallel, non-confronting dialogue is stipulated. By this approach offers the chance to methodically discover new conclusions and interpretations about patterns of human behavior, which leads to a change of direction in public debates. Funds are not provided.

Your propositions in German or English are welcome till March 22, 2015.

With best regards,



Wolfgang Krahl, Chairman of AGEM, and Ekkehard Schröder, Editor of *Curare*

-----  
**Contact AGEM: see > aktuelle Tagung / the current meeting**  
[ee.schroeder@t-online.de](mailto:ee.schroeder@t-online.de) [www.agem-ethnomedizin.de](http://www.agem-ethnomedizin.de) [info@agem-ethnomedizin.de](mailto:info@agem-ethnomedizin.de)

Gemeinnütziger Verein (VR Hamburg 1970) – [www.agem-ethnomedizin.de](http://www.agem-ethnomedizin.de) – Editor der *Curare* (founded 1978)  
*Curare*. Zeitschrift für Medizinethnologie ▪ ISSN 0344 - 8622 ▪ *Curare*. Journal of Medical Anthropology

1. **Vors. (Chair)** Dr.med Wolfgang Krahl (München) [drwkrahl@yahoo.de](mailto:drwkrahl@yahoo.de) ▪ **2.Vors. (Vice)** Ekkehard Schröder  
Geschäftsadresse (Office) **AGEM / Red. Curare, c/o Ekkehard Schröder, Spindelstrasse 3, D-14482 Potsdam**  
[info@agem-ethnomedizin.de](mailto:info@agem-ethnomedizin.de) Tel: 0331 - 7044 681 ▪ Fax: 0331 - 7044 682 [ee.schroeder@t-online.de](mailto:ee.schroeder@t-online.de)  
**Schriftführerin (Secretary)** Dr. phil. Ulrike Kluge (Berlin) [kluge.ulrike@googlemail.com](mailto:kluge.ulrike@googlemail.com)  
**Kassenwart (Treasurer)** David Brinkmann, M.A. (Bonn) [boni.brink@gmx.de](mailto:boni.brink@gmx.de)

**Verlag VWB** (Vlg. f Wissenschaft u Bildung) A. Aglaster, Pf 110368, 10833 Berlin [www.vwb-verlag.com](http://www.vwb-verlag.com)  
**AGEM (Account)** Sparkasse Heidelberg - BLZ 67250020 - Konto-Nr.: 48607 // **IBAN:** DE 70 6725 0020 0000 0486 07  
**Swift-BIC:** SOLADES1HDB // Steuer-Nr. (VAT) Finanzamt Potsdam 146 /143/06500

**Wissenschaftlicher Beirat (Advisory Board)** Ludger Albers, Wiesbaden – Wolfgang Bichmann, Frankfurt – Claus Deimel, Hamburg – Katarina Greifeld, Frankfurt – Eckhardt Koch, Marburg – William Sax, Heidelberg – Eberhard Wolff, Zürich

**> Literature from the Website:**



[Debora FROMMELD 2013](#)

"Fit statt fett" - Der Body-Mass-Index als biopolitisches Instrument. *Curare* 36,1+2: 005-016

**> Literature from the Humanities:**

Eberhard WOLFF 2013. Kulturelle und gesellschaftliche Zwänge des Gesundseins - am Beispiel des neueren Übergewichtsdiskurses. In HOEFERT Hans-Wolfgang & KLOTTER Christoph (Hg). *Gesundheitszwänge*. Lengerich: Papst Publishers: 54-74.

Hans Jürgen TEUTEBERG (Münster) 2012. Der essende Mensch zwischen Natur und Kultur (2 Teile). *Ernährungsumschau* 2/2012: 65-71, sowie 3/2012: 132-141.

Teil 1: [Link](#) Teil 2: [Link](#)

siehe auch [http://www.ernaehrungs-umschau.de/themen/wissenschaft\\_aktuell/](http://www.ernaehrungs-umschau.de/themen/wissenschaft_aktuell/)

**> Literature from Biomedicine and Insurance:**

Achim REGENAUER (KAS) 2007. *Stoppt die Adipositas- "Epidemie" den Trend zur Langlebigkeit?*



[PDF](#)

**> Literature from classic anthropological authors:**

Hortense POWDERMAKER 1960. An Anthropological Approach to the Problem of Obesity. *Bull. of the New York Academy of Medicine* 36,5; reprint in Carole COUNIHAN & Penny van ESTERIK (eds) 1997. *Food and Culture. A Reader*. New York, London: Routledge: 203-210 (chpt. 15).

Cheryl RITENBAUGH 1982. Obesity as a Culture-Bound Syndrome (with commentary). *Culture, Medicine and Psychiatry* 6,4: 347-365.

Dieter LENZEN 1991. *Krankheit als Erfindung. Medizinische Eingriffe in die Kultur*. Frankfurt am Main: Fischer TB Sozialwissenschaft.

**> Literature from medical sources:**

LANG T. 2005. Food control or food democracy? Re-engaging nutrition with society and environment. *Public Health Nutr.* 8, (Sept) 6A: 730-7.

WHO 2000. *Obesity: Preventing and Managing the Global Epidemic*. Report on a WHO Consultation. Technical Report Series No. 894. Geneva: WHO.

**> Older sources in the journal Curare:**

Ulrich OLTERS DORF 1993. The Use of Traditional Nutritional Wisdom in Modern Nutritional Research - Thoughts on some important Sources of Information for Nutritional Epidemiology. *Curare* 16,3+4: 237-241.

Andreas BODENSTEDT & Christine BROMBACH 1993. Essen und Wissen - Risiko und Gefahr in der postmodernen Gesellschaft. *Curare* 16,3+4: 243-256.

Holle GREIL 1993. Alters-, Geschlechts- und Gruppenspezifik von Körperbau und Ernährungszustand. *Curare* 16,3+4: 275-284.

**> Selected Websites Concerning Nutrition:**

<http://www.agem-ethnomedizin.de/index.php/andere-other-institutions.html#food>