

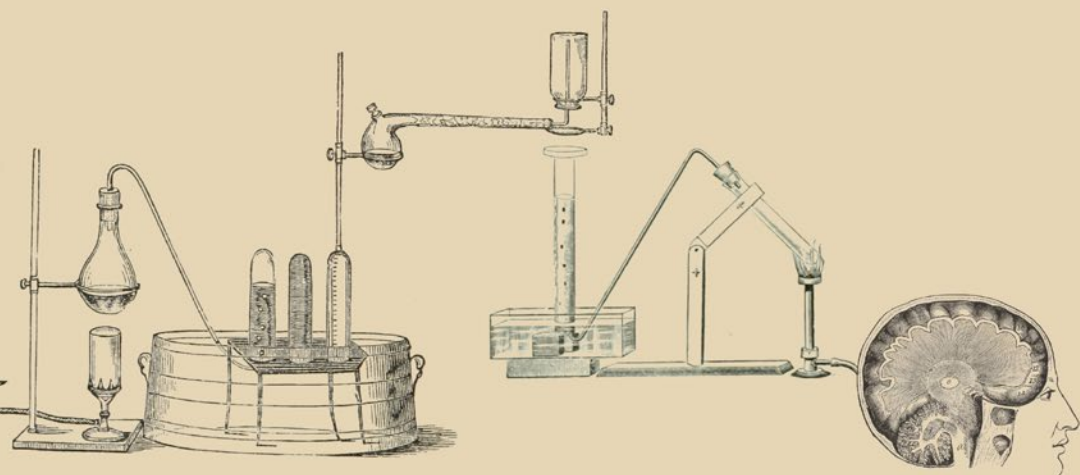
UNIVERSITY OF  
LUCERNE

FACULTY OF LAW

INSTITUTE FOR INTERDISCIPLINARY  
LEGAL STUDIES – LUCERNAIURIS

LABORATORIUM LUCERNAIURIS  
**IS THE EFFORT  
TO FORMALISE THE  
ANTHROPOCENE  
A JURIDICAL EXERCISE?**

ALEXANDER DAMIANOS (UNIVERSITY OF KENT)



**Lucernaiuris**  
Institut für Juristische Grundlagen

MONDAY 23 MAY 2022  
12.15-13.30H  
ONLINE VIA ZOOM

# Is the Effort to Formalise the Anthropocene a Juridical Exercise?

The Anthropocene presents a paradox: it suggests that human activity is so intense as to have fundamentally changed the material constitution of the planet; a geological event on par with the extinction of dinosaurs, or the end of the last ice age. Yet it also confirms human finitude. It implies that humanity is simply a passing event, and that one day the planet will go on without us, albeit substantially altered by our lapsed presence. In this presentation, I want to provide an outline of how such a premise is formalised as scientific fact. I argue that the effort to formalise the Anthropocene as a geological unit unfolds as a juridical exercise. Geologists generate new categories of artefacts, such as the technofossil, in order to elicit accounts of human finitude and planetary dynamics from mundane artefacts of every-day life (the plastic bottle, the bones of genetically engineered chickens, the concrete foundations of buildings and transportation networks). They draw on the formalisation of previous geological units as precedent, according to which they structure their account of the Anthropocene, so as to encourage consensus within the geoscientific community. They engage a formal decision-making procedure, submitting their proposal for an Anthropocene unit to the judgement of their peers. What can law learn from an account of geoscience as a juridical affair? How can attempts to reassure ourselves that law has something to contribute to efforts to respond to ongoing ecological devastation be expanded by an account of geoscience as legal technique? Although I may not fully answer these questions, my account of the Anthropocene Working Group's ongoing formalisation effort seeks to open a dialogue between disciplines in the face of earthly finitude.

**Alexander Damianos** is lecturer of property law and environmental law at the University of Kent. He completed his PhD at the London School of Economics & Political Science under the supervision of Alain Pottage and Stephen Humphreys. His PhD was an ethnographic study of the Anthropocene Working Group, a team of geologists, archaeologists, historians of science, and one lawyer, working to formalise the Anthropocene as an official unit of geological time. He was previously post-doctoral fellow at the Centre for Science & Technology Studies at Leiden University, as well as researcher at Studio Olafur Eliasson.

The talk will take place online via Zoom. Access details can be found [here](#).

The event is free and open to all. No registration is required.