



**UNIVERSITÀ**  
**DI TORINO**

# Reciprocal help, river flooding and a “Flying Herd”. A project for the rehabilitation of Mongolian rangeland in a changing climate



**03/09/24, The 75<sup>th</sup> EAAP Annual Meeting, Florence, Italy**

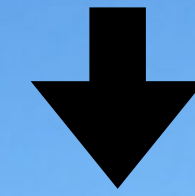
**Nicola Imoli** ([nicola.imoli@unito.it](mailto:nicola.imoli@unito.it)), **Luca Battaglini** ([luca.battaglini@unito.it](mailto:luca.battaglini@unito.it))

University of Turin, Department of Agricultural, Forest and Food Sciences, largo Paolo Braccini, 2, 10095 Grugliasco, Italy





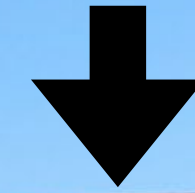
# Introduction to ethnographic research



## Research context



Mongolian geography  
Global Warming vulnerability



Changes in XX century Mongolian  
Pastoralism



Pasture User Group  
formation



## Mogolian perception of the environment

### Research questions



## Fieldwork research main themes



Human/Non-human animals  
relationship



Mutual help



City/Countryside



Changing climate





Introduction to ethnographic research

What is Ethnography?

Qualitative research method

Written report

Participant observation

Writing as epistemological practice

Interviews

Drawing on field notes, recordings,  
theory, experience, intuition...

Life histories

NOT verifying general theory

BUT to offer rich in depth account of specific social setting





# Geography of Mongolia

## Research context

### Landlocked

Avg. Elevation 1580 m

Extreme **continental climate**, cold dry

**3 main ecological zones:**

Taiga, steppe, desert

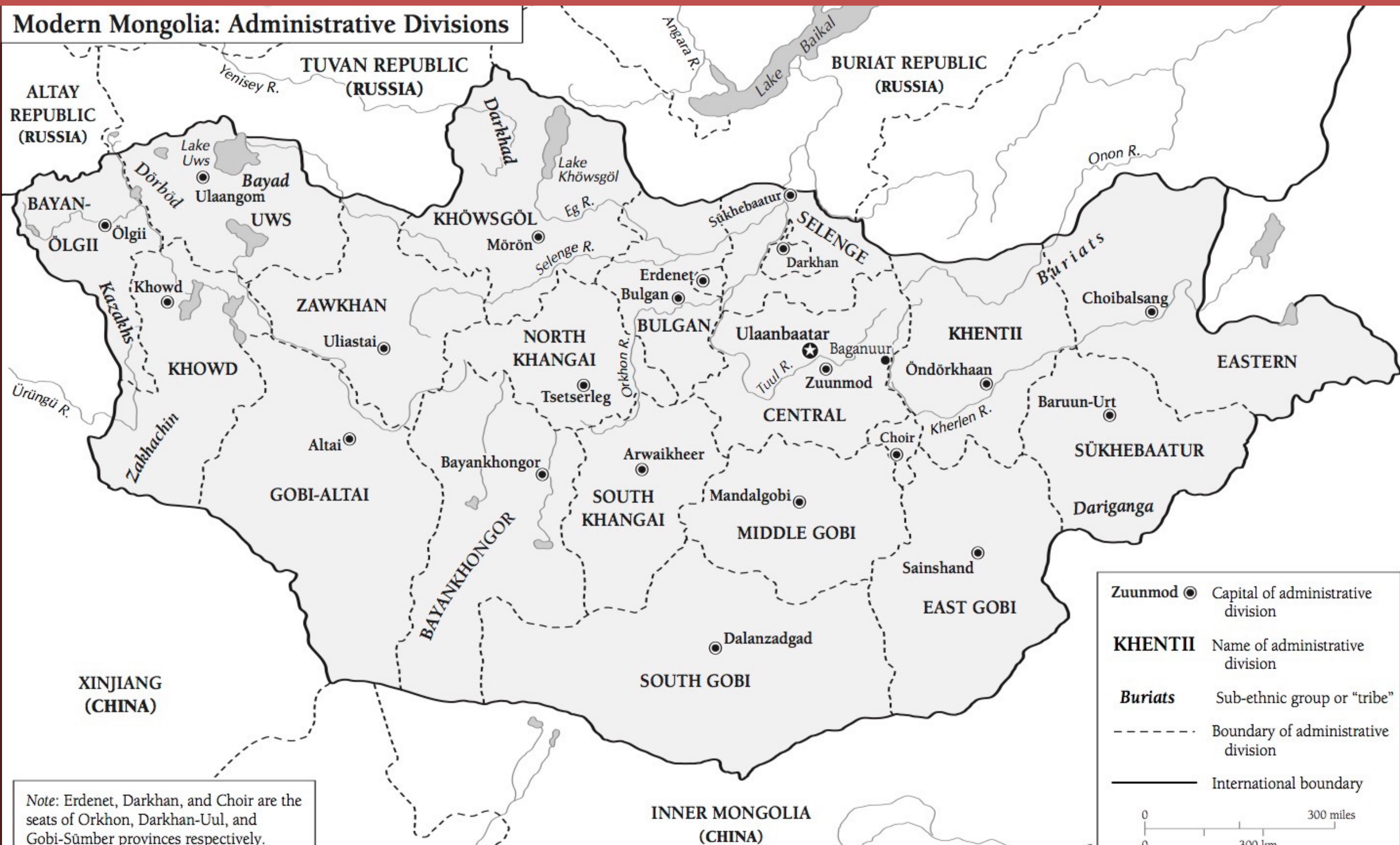


High **vulnerability to global warming**:  
2.25°C increase in the last 80 years

### Desertification:

Gobi moving north at 6-7 km/year

**3.4 million people**, half in UB  
**67 million heads of livestock**





# Changes in XX century Mongolian pastoralism

1924 Abolition of monarchy, **Mongolian People's Republic**

1950s **Collectivisation** of livestock and institution of herder collectives (*negdels*)

НЭГДЭЛ — NEGDEL

Herders tend to **state livestock** for a salary, paid leaves, pensions and veterinary assistance

State helps with **territorial dispersion** building wells and mobility aids

**Seasonal mobility patterns** regulated by the *negdels*





# Changes in XX century Mongolian pastoralism

THE  
BEATLES

1991 Democratic Revolution

Free elections, **free-market economy**

**Privatisation** of livestock, end of *negdels*

**Land reforms:** pasture still public but ownership in cities and winter shelters

End of Soviet aids



Collapse of the economy

Inflation, poverty and **unemployment**

Sharp **increase** in the number of **herders** and **livestock**



Таван хошуу мал – “the 5 kinds of animal”

Адуу – horses

Тэмээ – camels

Хонь – sheep

Ямаа – goats

Үхэр – cattle  
Сарлаг - yak



# Pasture User Group Formation

## Issues

Closure of *negdels*

Privatisation of livestock

Land reforms



**Atomisation** of herding practices

Lack of coordination and aids in mobility

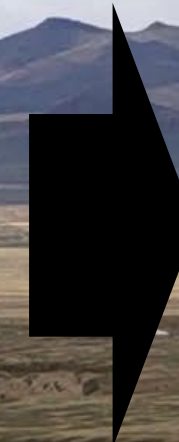
**Bigger herds** needed to thrive



Fewer and shorter migration, **overgrazing**

Pasture **degradation**

Increased vulnerability to ***zud***



## Answers

Formation of **Pasture User Group**

Coordinated at national level by  
**Mongolian National Federation of Pasture User Group**



Implementation of land management, biodiversity  
compensation projects

Development of rangeland resilience  
Herder participatory organizations



# The perception of the environment

Mongolian landscape is inhabited by many different agency-endowed invisible entities like *lus* and *gazryn ezen*

Their presence gives rise to many **prescriptions**

Every **interaction** with the landscape needs to respect those prescriptions, to avoid consequences like wolf attacks



Mostly **ignored** by projects and researches

# Research questions

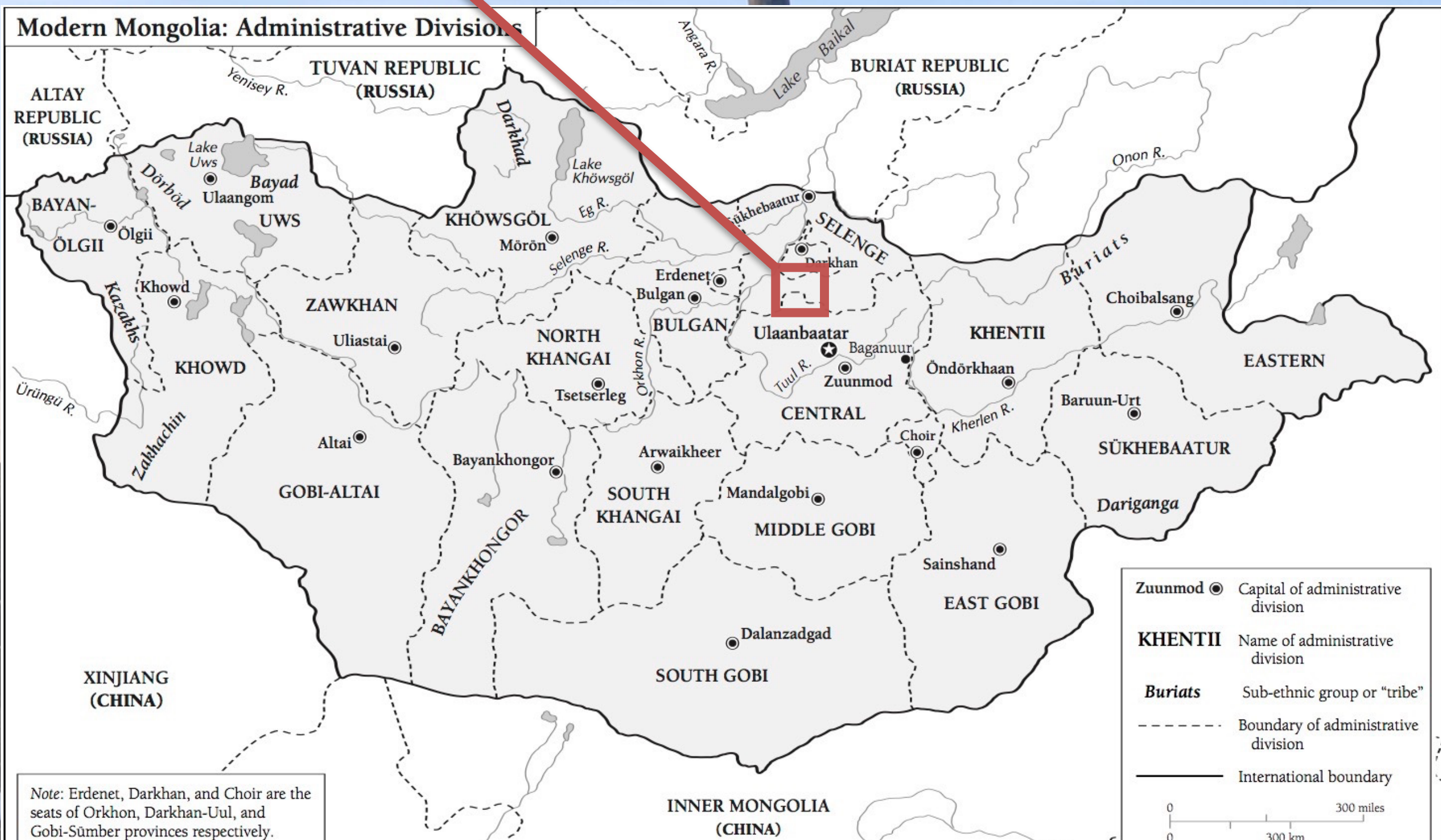
What **meanings** do herders attribute to **climate changes** and how do these fit in the indigenous perception of the environment?

How do **changes** in Mongolian free-market pastoralist **practices** affect **relations** between herders, livestock and landscape?

Upon which **paradigms** are rangeland **management projects** based and how do they take into account herders' perceptions, economic and social needs?



Bayangol sum, Selenge aimag



Fieldwork research

Where?

MNFPUG’s «Boroo Gold Company Biological Diversity Comparative Protection Program» project

Restore an agricultural degraded area

Reforestation, pasture rotation, green fodder planting, haymaking

«Flying Herd» bee keeping

increase households’ income without increasing the burden on pastures and for stability, productivity, and biodiversity of the ecosystem due to pollination

How?

April – October 2018

Participant observation and informal interviews with the herders involved in the project

Semi-structured interviews with MNFPUG representatives

With the theoretical framework emerged from the anthropological lab about

Ontological turn  
Agency and the Anthropocene



Fieldwork research  
main themes

Human/Non-human animals relationship

Predators

Birds of prey



Almost «fatalistic» attitude toward predations,  
mostly of lambs, kids and strained sheep

Wolves



Pre-emptive **wolf hunt** carried out at the end of  
summer

Presence of livestock **guardian dogs** at the  
camp during the night





Fieldwork research  
main themes

Human/Non-human animals relationship

Livestock

Collected the diverse vocalisations  
used for the animals

Different attitude towards animals.  
female vs. male herders

The only non-human animals allowed  
inside the ger: newborn kids and lambs  
(and cats, sometimes).







**Demanding works**



**NO monetary reward:  
lunch and reciprocal help**



**Mutual help**

**Fieldwork research  
main themes**

**“Personal favors”**



**Bringing the milk**

**Buying things from city**

**Picking up children from school  
for the weekend**





Fieldwork research  
main themes

City/Countryside

Schools, markets, hospitals, restaurants...  
Clean the car and dress up  
Different people's character

Presented as one site

But NOT a  
dichotomy!

Main reason to move from Uvs  
to Bayangol sum:

Proximity to Darkhan and UB (railroad)

Access to market for selling  
meat, milk and cashmere





**Fieldwork research  
main themes**

**Changing climate**

**Most severe rain  
since the '60s (?)**

Many families had to move in haste from summer  
camps along the river

**“New” reason to move**

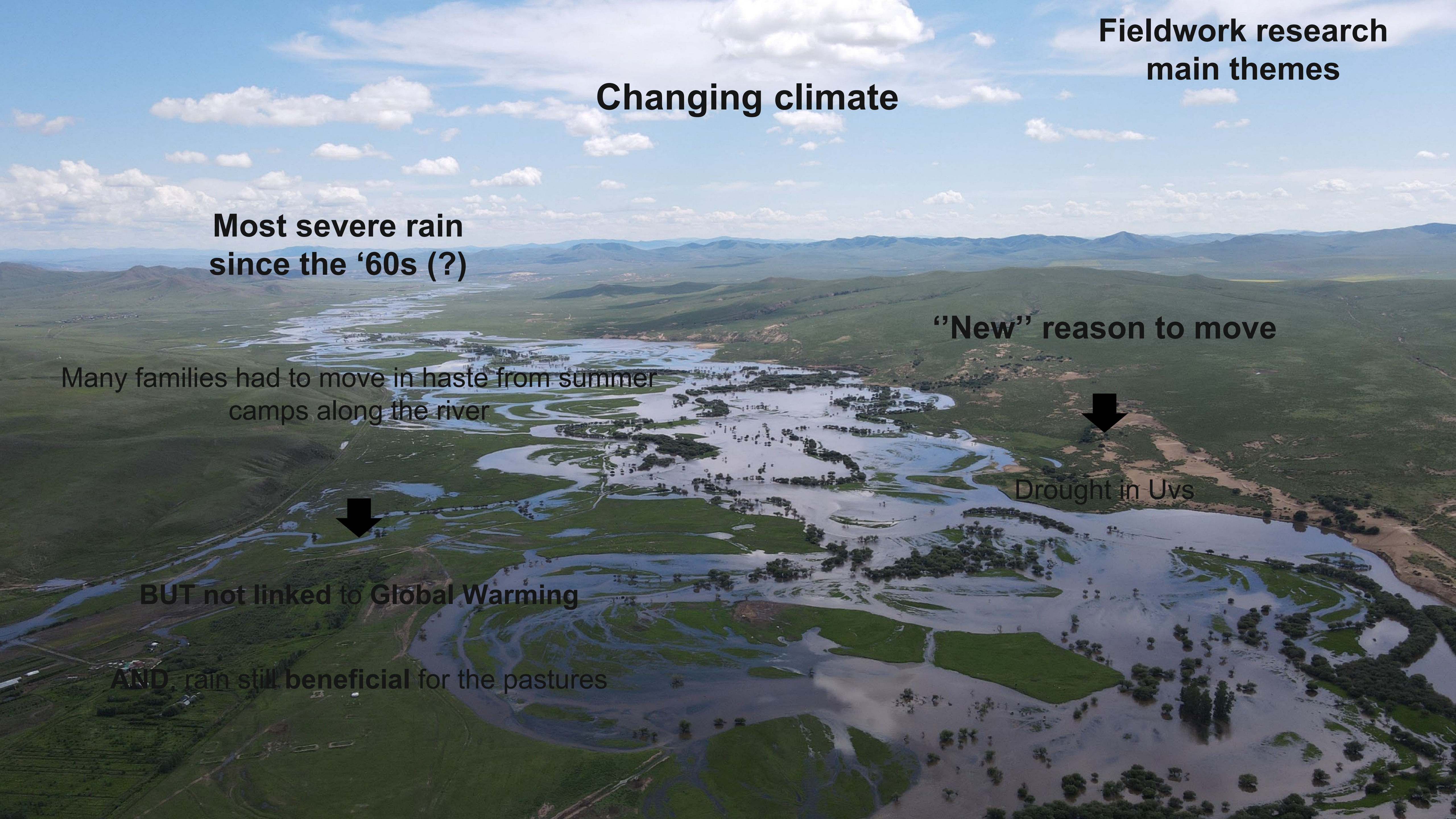


Drought in Uvs



**BUT not linked to Global Warming**

**AND, rain still beneficial for the pastures**







**Thanks for your attention**

[nicola.imoli@unito.it](mailto:nicola.imoli@unito.it)

