

## **Changing environment**

### **6 sessions:**

#### **1. The Reality of Place-Based Conservation in a Changed and Changing World**

**Session organiser:** C. Patrick Heidkamp , Southern Connecticut State University, United States, **E-mail:** heidkampc1@southernct.edu

The traditional conservation agenda—focused on preservation and restoring ecosystems to historical, pre-human baselines—is increasingly unrealistic and insufficient in the face of the Anthropocene's accelerating changes and widespread environmental degradation. This panel will move beyond theoretical debates to critically explore the pragmatic realities and necessary compromises of long-term, place-based conservation management. Drawing on the experience of practitioners and researchers working in dynamic, human-influenced, and rapidly changing environments (such as the Nordic and Arctic regions), this session will frame a discussion around a core manifesto of eco-pragmatism. The goal is to articulate an approach that successfully integrates ecological resilience with human well-being and cultural context.

Key questions and discussion points for the panel include:

The Rejection of 'Pristine': How do we—in policy and practice—move past the unattainable ideal of pristine nature and effectively manage ecosystems that are already hybrids or novel? What does this mean for setting realistic conservation goals?

Balancing Ecology and Community: How can successful conservation outcomes be measured when ecological change is slow to manifest? What are the key social, cultural, and economic metrics that must be integrated alongside traditional ecological indicators (e.g., biodiversity, biomass) to ensure long-term, community-backed success?

Adaptive Management in Practice: What specific mechanisms and organizational structures are required for conservation efforts to be genuinely adaptive, experimental, and committed to continuous learning (i.e., 'learning by doing') rather than adhering strictly to a static plan?

From Threat to Reality: How do practitioners negotiate environmental changes (like climate change impacts or long-term human degradation) that cannot be managed at a site level? How can we avoid simply labelling these as 'threats' and instead incorporate them as the working reality of the environment?

Policy Implications of Pragmatism: If conservation success is inherently dependent on local context, human values, and continuous intervention, what kind of generic, actionable policy recommendations can be synthesized to guide practice at a wider scale?

We have an initial list of panelists, but will reach out to additional panelists to make sure we have a variety of viewpoints on the topic (if the panel session is accepted by the committee).

## 2. Circular cities for sustainable transformation

**Session organiser:** Ida Grundel, Linköping university, Sweden, **E-mail:** ida.grundel@liu.se

The transformation of cities and local communities is often presented as both a solution and a challenge for sustainable development (Albrechts, 2010; Elmqvist et al., 2013; Wolfram, 2016). Cities consume 80% of global energy, produce 50% of waste, and are major contributors to emissions and raw material extraction through the built environment (Heshmati & Rashidgalam, 2021; Joensuu et al., 2020). Reducing the climate impact of the construction and real estate sectors is therefore an essential part of achieving climate goals. To reduce their negative impact, a transformation to a circular economy (CE) has been proposed by, for example, prioritizing reuse and renovation over new construction. Here spatial planning can play a pivotal role in guiding the physical, economic, and social structure of cities. Through effective planning, circular principles can be embedded in urban environments, ensuring sustainable management of buildings, infrastructure, and resources, reducing waste, and minimizing environmental impact (Williams, 2020). This makes spatial planning a key framework for addressing transformative changes, particularly in modifying infrastructures and the built environment and guiding place-based interventions towards a sustainable future (cf. Elmqvist, 2019; Grundel et al., 2023). However, the environmental and social impacts of CE remain unclear, with concerns regarding its limited material focus (Korhonen, 2018; Williams, 2022). It is therefore crucial to evaluate the relationship between spatial planning and CE and whether CE can deliver sustainable benefits for society as a whole (Manninen et al., 2018) and to focus beyond merely technological solutions in the construction sector and include social dimensions and diverse perspectives from different stakeholders (Niskanen et al., 2020). Thus, there is limited knowledge in understanding how circular building practices can be integrated into spatial planning to support a just transformation of the construction sector (Bortolotti et al., 2023; van der Leer et al., 2018). This session wants to address this research gap.

Interesting topics, but not limited to:

Governance of circular cities

Circularity and the built environment

Spatial planning in relation to reuse and renovation

Relationships between the built environment, infrastructure and energy use

Transformative policies and interventions to reduce the construction sector's negative impact and foster just transitions.

Circular economy approaches and initiatives in spatial planning

Circular economy and transformative planning

Degrowth, spatial planning and circular economy

## 3. Can we educate transformative change-makers for better futures?

**Session organiser:** Wim Bosschaart, Wageningen University, Netherlands, Marlies Meijer, Wageningen University, Netherlands **E-mail:** marlies.meijer@wur.nl

While the awareness of planetary boundaries and deep rooted societal inequalities is growing, we can witness a growing urge to seek for alternative pathways for making better futures. In research, policy-making and global debates about sustainable development Transformative Change has become quite a buzzword, that penetrates what and how we teach as well.

In 2019, the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) defined transformative change as “a fundamental, system-wide reorganization across technological, economic and social factors including paradigms, goals and values, needed for the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity, good quality of life and sustainable development” (IPBES, 2019). This definition links system-wide societal reorganization to a normative direction: transformation can also take unsustainable directions, but transformative change scholars aim for a sustainable future that is good for people and planet.

To address these challenges, we need ‘transformative practitioners’: persons who understand and can tackle the root causes of unsustainable practices while creating leverage for meaningful change (see Ziafati Baferasat, et al. 2025; Rydin 2011). As educators, we are often seen as having strong (indirect) transformative potential: we teach the next generation of spatial planners and geographers who will shape and inform future decision-making about Earth.

However, this is easier said than done. We would like to explore how you have approached teaching transformative change in your classes or while supervising students. What kinds of competences should we equip students with? Do we need alternative modes of teaching, and have you experimented with any?

In this panel, we invite you to share your experiences of teaching from the normative perspective of transformative change, or even teaching *in a* transformative way (transformative learning). We are interested both in examples of successful practices and in reflections on efforts that have been more challenging or not successful yet. As a format we would invite participants to shortly present their focused input for the discussion, and then open a plenary conversation where we can exchange and deepen our knowledges on what transformative change involves when we are teaching.

#### **4. Restless ecologies: Vegetal flux in a world of change**

**Session organiser:** Maja Lagerqvist, Uppsala University, Sweden, **E-mail:** maja.lagerqvist@kultgeog.uu.se

Change is certain in a restless world, but where and how do plants and their incumbent multispecies ecologies come to fit, or even to belong? In some places of our restless world, such as cemeteries, parks, gardens, and even roundabouts, vegetation is given important cultural significance. These places can be understood, through Foucault, as heterotopias - dense places that contrast with their surroundings and may carry utopian ideas, motion, and visions of future possibilities, but possibly also strong notions of stability and the unchanged. There are also places where new cultural and botanical elements including species deemed ‘invasive’ or other types of ‘unwanted’ nature, create uncertainty, unease and tensions and raise questions about which vegetation and greenery can adapt, which is considered “correct”, and how, or even whether, we should manage these changes. Such places might be novel, but they might also be edgy and produce prickly political rejoinders about the past and differentiated histories of value. They become hotspots for negotiation about transitionality and which plants are at home in a world of change. Sites of transition rely on plants to produce solutions for liveable urban worlds but reproduce them as infrastructures of endless growth. Here, plants become something else - fuel, fodder, fibre - and risk repair by replicating business as usual. When all else seems to be up in the air, plants must, at least for a time, root into place and fix their metabolic conditions. Can these small confidences help us to understand where plants figure in times of flux, and what we must do to build resilience and solidarity?

In this session on restless ecologies, we invite papers that explore the geographies of the vegetal – and its associated lives – in times of seemingly endless mutability. While we aim to bring plants into the spotlight, we also welcome papers that consider animals and/or other organisms. Diverse disciplinary, theoretical and methodological positions are welcome. Themes may include but are not limited to:

- Similar or assorted heterotopias (parks, gardens, cemeteries)
- Novel ecologies and places on edge (boundaries, borders, thresholds)
- Sites of transformation, transition, circularity, vacillation (region, city, home)
- Places of hope, apathy or despair (habitat, locus, positionality)

The session is organized by:

Maja Lagerqvist, Uppsala University, Sweden

Lars Kaijser, Stockholm University, Sweden

Mattias Frihammar, Stockholm University, Sweden

Jennifer Atchison, University of Wollongong, Australia

## 5. Geography and the Humanities

**Session organiser:** Adam Lundberg, Malmö University, Sweden, **E-mail:** adam.lundberg@mau.se

### Session description:

Over the past decades, the intersection of geography and the humanities has spawned a wide array of trajectories—*geohumanities*, *urban humanities*, *spatial humanities*, *environmental humanities*, and beyond. These approaches promote humanistic engagements with space, place and the environment, yet they diverge in how they understand and conceptualise these engagements. Is the intersection between geography and the humanities best understood as a way of doing humanities in place? As the study of humanistic questions through a spatial lens? Or as a methodological reorientation that reshapes how research itself is conducted?

This session invites papers that engage with these questions from diverse perspectives. By juxtaposing different understandings of geography-humanities scholarship, the session aims to illuminate conceptual overlaps, highlight tensions, and explore how these fields contribute to broader debates about interdisciplinarity. Contributors may address theoretical framings, methodological innovations, or empirical case studies that demonstrate how spatial thinking enriches humanistic inquiry—or how humanistic approaches challenge and expand geographical research.

The session's purpose is twofold: first, to support the diversity of approaches that have emerged at this intersection, acknowledging their distinct contributions; and, second, to clarify the contours of these developments by mapping points of convergence and divergence. In doing so, the session seeks to foster dialogue across disciplinary boundaries and to encourage reflection on the future directions of geography-humanities scholarship.

Ultimately, the session aims to provide a platform for rethinking how geography and the humanities intersect—not as a single trajectory, but as a dynamic, evolving, and restless constellation of practices that continue to reshape both fields.

## 6. Nature-Based Solutions in Nordic Countries

**Session organiser:** Daniele Stefano, Agricultural University of Iceland, Iceland, **E-mail:** daniele@lbhi.is

In Iceland, solutions based on engineering and nature have been growing in recent times. These actions aim to address a range of social concerns, including wetland restoration, coastal and marine protection, flood risk reduction, and habitat regeneration to increase biodiversity and plant life. The Nordic Co-operation, a broad regional cooperation comprising Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden, and the Faroe Islands, has conducted extensive research on that topic. Still, more priority should be given to long-term goals and projects that support this integration, as soon the study of environmental and cultural factors has contributed significantly to the preservation of well-being and quality of life across all Nordic nations. The session promotes sustainable experiences in development, grounded in a balanced and harmonious relationship among the environment, economic activity, cultural elements, and social demands.

