

Restless Political Geographies

8 sessions:

1. The Imagined Geographies of Central and Eastern Europe - Non-existent, Unrecognized, Forgotten and Lost Peoples and Geographical Objects

Session organiser: Marcin Solarz, Faculty of Geography and Regional Studies, University of Warsaw, Poland, **E-mail:** mwsolarz@uw.edu.pl

The concept of imagined geographies originates with Edward Said and can be applied to a set of representations of specific places that refer not to what they actually are but to what they should look like— that is, how they appear in the minds of the people who describe them. A particularly favorable moment for the creation of imagined geographies is the combination of ignorance and power. In such cases, the image of place is often the result of thinking in center-periphery terms. An extreme example of this understanding of imagined geographies in the case of Central and Eastern Europe is the Albert Memorial (1878) in London, where Europe is symbolized by only four figures: Great Britain, Germany, France, and Italy, leaving no room for Central and Eastern Europe. Sometimes, imagined geographies derived from Said's thought become very dangerous, as they become tools for reorganizing real political space, something Central and Eastern Europe experienced at least twice—in 1918 and 1945.

The simplest understanding of imagined geographies, however, might refer to a lack of knowledge about the places around which story is constructed. For example, in the 15th and 16th centuries, the maps of Nicholas of Cusa, author of the first lost map of Central Europe, and his successors shimmer with mythical Hercynian and Lunar forests, or the Riphean, Hyperberian, and Askyburgian mountains.

Finally, imagined geographies can also be understood differently – as the recreation of lost places both in reality and in human memory. A little-known example of this understanding of imagined geographies is the fate of the region of Forest German settlement in southeastern Poland. The history of Forest Germans starts in the Middle Ages and, as a result of assimilation processes, they became a Polish cultural group at the latest until the 19th century. However, the Polish-German conflict at the turn of the 19th century led to the removal of their ethnonym and choronym from all discourses and the construction of artificial regional identities in place of the Forest Germans. However, the process of unfreezing their history is underway in contemporary Poland.

The aim of this session is to discuss these three dimensions of imagined geographies in Central and Eastern Europe. Papers may for example present examples of imagined geographies, methods for creating them, and compare them with the actual geography of the places covered by the imagined geographies.

2. Impact of global land rush on local communities. Contestations over foreign land investments

Session organiser: Anna Karlsdóttir, Geography, University of Iceland, Iceland, **E-mail:** annakar@hi.is, Magnfrídur Birna Júlíusdóttir, Geography, University of Iceland, E-mail: mj@hi.is

This session invites contributions from a critical geography perspective that focus on the interplay between rural/regional development and foreign investments in rural land for various purposes. In the last two decades transformations in land ownership or control in different parts of the world has drawn attention to the new investment trend in rural land as a resource (Deninger et. al. 2011; Cotula, 2012; Li, 2014), commonly labelled as *land rush*, *grabbing*, *acquisition* or *concentration*. Global drivers like food security and emphasis on renewable energy have been prominent in studies located in the Global South, but increased ownership concentration of European farmland has also raised questions of food security in situation of crisis (Slåtmo & Berbert Bruno, 2025). The transformation of land, water and forests, which were once considered to be local assets and sources of livelihoods, into global capital investments (Zoomers & Otsuki, 2017), raises questions on future sustainability and resilience of many rural communities. Both material and affective land imaginaries (Sippel & Visser, 2021)

can create conflicts at various geographical scales in the era of land rush. Iceland has seen an increasing pressure from foreign investors interested in buying farmlands, with motives ranging from carbon sequestration, renewable energy projects, extraction of natural resources like water and pumice, nature conservation and tourist resort developments. These various actual or intended land uses by foreign investors raise interesting questions to explore on differentiated impacts on rural and regional development, as well as acceptance and contestations between national and local interests, and within the local community between different stakeholders and social groups. We welcome papers focusing on these issues in both northern and southern geographical and sociopolitical settings.

3. The green transition – taking stock and moving forward in a new geopolitical context

Session organiser: Patrik Ström, European Institute of Japanese Studies, Stockholm School of Economics, Sweden, **E-mail:** patrik.strom@hhs.se

The escalating climate crisis and mounting global environmental threats have made the transition to a more sustainable global economy one of the most urgent challenges of the 2020s. Yet, the nature of this emerging green economy remains contested, uneven, and spatially differentiated (Jones and Ström 2024). Economic geography is uniquely positioned to address these complexities by examining how green economic development unfolds unevenly across places, industries, and governance contexts.

Recent research has revealed that the green economy is not a singular or uniform process, but rather a geographically and institutionally embedded transformation shaped by diverse policy frameworks, industrial trajectories, and socio-technical systems. Economic geographical perspectives—through their focus on spatial interconnectedness, territorial dynamics, and institutional evolution—offer crucial insights into both understanding and guiding the sustainable economic transition.

At the same time, the shifting geoeconomic and geopolitical context—including trade tensions, security concerns, and changing alliances—will profoundly influence patterns of collaboration, competition, and innovation within the global green economy. These developments highlight the continued importance of place, networks, and knowledge communities in shaping green transitions, as well as the need for nuanced, context-sensitive policy support.

This session seeks to take stock of existing economic geographical research on the green economy and to look ahead towards its future directions. It aims to foster conceptual, empirical, and methodological dialogue across diverse strands of economic geography and related social sciences, to deepen understanding of the green transition and its spatial dynamics. A key goal is to situate economic geography at the heart of interdisciplinary debates on the green economy and to explore how the sub-discipline can contribute to more equitable and sustainable pathways of transformation.

Contributions are welcome that engage with the green transition broadly defined. These may include, but are not limited to:

Circular economy; multi-level implications

Theoretical understandings of the green economy

Geographies of green industries

Uneven development of the green economy

Global, regional and national regulatory contexts for green economic development

Green industrial or sectoral development

Green finance, production networks and regional clusters

Geographies of green innovation

Management, leadership and intercultural understanding in the green global economy

Greenwashing and the political geographies of green economic development

4. Geographies of solidarity and geographers in solidarity

Session organiser: Zinaïda Sluijs, Uppsala University, Sweden, **E-mail:** zinaida.sluijs@kultgeog.uu.se

Session abstract

Neoliberal capitalism has been politically and economically successful in centering individual responsibility while structurally defunding welfare systems and worsening social inequalities. However, people have always resisted marginalisation and violence conducted by racist, colonial, and neoliberal states. Multiple actors – ranging from institutional (state) actors to autonomous grassroots movements – claim to engage in practices of solidarity, albeit adopting different conceptions of what solidarity is, how and with whom it should be practiced, and ranging from inclusive to exclusive (ethno)nationalist conceptions of solidarity. For researchers, the shifting terrain of solidarity presents profound challenges. As solidarity movements are increasingly criminalised, engaged and activist research risks becoming similarly institutionally constrained. These conditions demand renewed reflection on how scholars can responsibly and effectively contribute to struggles against oppression, while navigating the precarity of academic labour and the politics of knowledge production.

This session aims to bring together academic and non-academic voices to reflect on the possibilities and challenges faced by contemporary solidarity movements and the role of research in contributing to these movements and practices. We welcome empirical, theoretical, methodological, and ethical contributions on the role of solidarity countering oppression, discrimination and exclusion in contemporary restless, violent, and politically hostile contexts. We welcome a broad variety of presentations, including papers, essays, and other audio-visual contributions from academic and non-academic presenters of various career stages and geographical locations.

We welcome reflections on questions including, but not restricted to:

- What practices, movements, and networks of solidarity are emerging in response to contemporary state violence and repression, within and across borders?
- How is solidarity conceptualised across different movements and contexts? What tensions result from their differences?
- What limits, threats, and challenges do contemporary solidarity movements and organisations face
- How do grassroots movements navigate these risks?
- How do researchers and activists co-create knowledge in ways which resist neoliberal academic norms
- How can researchers maintain accountability and reciprocity in politically hostile environments?
- What methodological innovations are being used to document and support solidarity practices?
- What role does storytelling, memory and affect play in sustaining solidarity across time and space?

Submission guidelines

If you'd like to present in this session, please submit your title and abstract to zinaida.sluijs@kultgeog.uu.se. Abstracts should be no more than 300 words and should include the title, author(s), affiliation(s), and contact details.

We look forward to receiving your contributions.

5. Violence against civilians in African conflicts: Heterogeneities, vulnerabilities, and responses

Session organiser: Matthew Pflaum, University of Bergen, Norway, **E-mail:** matthew.pflaum@uib.no

This session examines recent theoretical and empirical evidence of impacts of African/global conflicts on civilians. It contextualizes these impacts of violence against civilians within neglected topics like heterogeneity (why are there variations in impacts of violence?), vulnerabilities (who is vulnerable and why?), and responses (how do civilian communities respond to insecurity?). All three of these topics are significantly neglected in the scholarship, although limited recent scholarship has begun to address these deficiencies.

This session welcomes original, innovative, and critical scholarship related to these themes, especially involving conflicts in Africa and beyond. The session hopes to clarify and elucidate the complex dynamics of violence against civilians in recent and current conflicts and address factors contributing to their heterogeneities in vulnerabilities, impacts, and responses.

6. The Geopolitics of Planetary Futures: Contested Time, (De)Growth, and Ecological Territorialization

Session organisers: Tarmo Pikner, Tallinn University, School of Humanities, Estonia, **E-mail:** tpikner@tlu.ee

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The current **socio-ecological crisis** necessitates a fundamental shift in how we analyze territory, demanding a **more-than-human perspective** where the Earth—the 'geo' in geopolitics—is recognized as an active agent, rather than a passive backdrop. This 'terrestrial turn' (Latour) embeds planetary consciousness and deep geohistory into political analysis.

This panel focuses on the **Geopolitics of Anticipation**, arguing that urgent turbulent transformations have imprinted contested future time horizons over porous territories. The core tension lies between two opposing forms of territorialization:

a) Accelerated Resource Extraction and Growth: Spatializing futures through sacrifice zones and the commodification of nature.

b) Ecological Conservation and Degrowth: Spatializing futures through restoration efforts and the radical rescaling of life, emphasizing sustainability and limits.

We seek papers that examine how diverse registers of anticipation, hope, and ignorance are spatialized onto territorial formations, revealing the complex co-existence of extractive legacies and revolutionary potential.

We invite theoretical and empirical papers that investigate the political ecology of these contested futures, focusing on, but not limited to, the following themes:

- **Planetary Subjectivities and the Body Politic:** Analyzing emerging non-state or multi-species territorial subjectivities and their connection to the concept of 'planetary consciousness'.

- **Contested Frontiers of Extraction and Sacrifice:** Examining the politics and legacies of terrestrial and marine sacrifice zones, resource frontiers, and post-industrial ruptures in environmental justice.

- **The Geopolitics of Degrowth and the Commons:** Exploring the legacies and anticipated futures of geopolitical degrowth strategies, transnational conservation efforts, and new models for governing shared resources and commons across borders.

- Time and Contingency in Bordering: Analyzing how integrating time and futurity into bordering practices reveals important durations and contingent realities in territorial formations (e.g., historical futures, slow violence, and rapid transformation).

7. Resistance against autocratization and authoritarianism

Session organiser: Kristian Stokke, Department of Sociology and Human Geography, University of Oslo, Norway, **E-mail:** kristian.stokke@sosgeo.uio.no

Political trajectories in the contemporary world are increasingly defined by the intersection between elite-driven autocratization and popular struggles for democracy, citizenship and justice. Quantitative research shows that autocratization has reached a level where the share of the world's population living in autocratizing countries is larger than that of democratizing countries, while diverse social and political movements are striving to push back against authoritarian discourses, governance practices and accumulation regimes.

Academic responses to this intersection between autocratization and democratic struggles have been substantial but uneven. There is a growing literature that studies autocratization as a process of political and institutional changes that consolidate monopolistic, arbitrary, and repressive power while restricting spaces for public participation, contestation, and accountability. There are fewer studies of the actors, strategies and effects of resistance against autocratization and authoritarianism, and of the contentious interactions between the drivers and strategies of autocratization and anti-autocratization.

It is evident that the current wave of autocratization has been followed by a surge in mass protests: As elected autocrats and military coup-makers transform government, politics, and society towards authoritarianism, they often confront mass mobilization in civil society as well as resistance from political opposition forces and institutional defenders of horizontal and vertical accountability. This raises questions about the dynamics, strategies and transformative effects of such resisters. Although civil society is often hailed as a firewall against autocratization and as an insurgent driver of democratization, questions remain about the durability and effectiveness of civil resistance. Existing studies point to the importance of alliance-building and up-scaling for substantive political transformations away from authoritarianism, but there is a need for both contextual and comparative knowledge on the dynamics of transformative resistance against autocratization. These developments also raise questions about the role of spatiality: how are autocratization processes and anti-autocratization movements spatially structured, and how are authoritarian practices and resistance strategies spatial?

This session will explore these concerns and is open to paper submissions that address this broad theme of resistance to autocratization and authoritarianism.

8. Geographies of race and coloniality in a contemporary polycrisis

Session organiser: Sonja Pietiläinen, University of Helsinki, Finland, **E-mail:** sonja.pietilainen@helsinki.fi

Capitalist modernity is characterised by multiple interconnected crises that interact and exacerbate each other. Climate change, grief over extinct species, economic recession, war, growing inequality, and (neo-)nationalism, just to name a few, are not accidental or divergent examples of intensifying suffering. Instead, they are an outcome of multiple and intersecting oppressions rooted in colonial, patriarchal and racist world order (Ruwanpura et al. 2025; Salami 2024). A growing body of work on geographies of race and coloniality has further highlighted the co-constitutive role of space in maintaining and (re)producing the racial and colonial underpinnings of these crises (e.g., Kekstaite & Vandevoordt 2025; Phinney 2020; Pulido et al., 2019; Sultana 2021). Ranging from environmental governance, neoliberal authoritarianism, and resource extraction, to migration control, and militarism, spatial expressions, constitutions and impacts of race and coloniality permeate across different fields. Taking this emerging scholarship as a starting point, our session attempts to (re)think the

geographies of race and coloniality through the analysis of a crisis and/or across crises. We are interested in both identifying the continuing geographies of race and coloniality in a crisis and across crises as well as exploring how these crises inform and rework the geographies of race and coloniality.

We invite papers addressing the geographies of race and coloniality in themes including, but not limited to:

- Climate crisis and environmental governance.
- Resource extraction and green transition.
- COVID-19 and pandemic.
- Migration control and border politics.
- War, militarism, and military activities.
- Neo-nationalism and authoritarianism.
- Political economy and inequality.
- Fiscal politics and austerity.
- City and urban governance.
- Interactions between these crises.

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