

# Spatialising Alternative Imaginaries of Planning and Development for Prosperity Beyond Growth

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**ESPPRIT Workshop Programme | 18<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> June 2025**

Kellogg College, University of Oxford

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# Programme

In the face of escalating ecological and social crises, progressive ideas are urgently needed to promote alternative development pathways that respect ecological boundaries while addressing human needs. Recent years have seen the emergence of diverse visions and imaginaries that rethink how eco-social risks can be managed and how transformations can be designed. While visions often provide frameworks for desired future states, shaping innovation and policy directions, imaginaries are collectively held and institutionally stabilised constructs of desirable futures, rooted in social norms and scientific progress (Rohracher & Konrad 2024). These prospective structures guide actors in aligning efforts and resources towards shared goals, particularly in fields characterised by uncertainty and complexity.

Progressive economic development models, such as the Wellbeing Economy, Doughnut Economics, the Foundational Economy, or Community Wealth Building, exemplify these forward-looking ideas. These approaches prioritise meeting human needs within planetary boundaries, shifting focus from GDP growth to revalue social and ecological wellbeing. Similarly, the concept of a 'just transition' has gained traction as a framework for ensuring that eco-social transformations are equitable and inclusive. National and international visions have emerged, highlighting the importance of fair policies that support workers and communities affected by the shift to sustainable economies. However, the translation of these visions into actionable policies often encounters challenges at the intersection of local and global scales.

Visions and imaginaries are often contested, reflecting broader societal power struggles and competing narratives, particularly visible in specific spatial and geographical contexts. Urban development models, such as Garden Cities or the 15-minute city, have attempted to align ecological and social objectives by emphasising compact, accessible, and green urban environments. Yet, as Feola et al. (2023) note, there is often a mismatch between future imaginaries and the collective memories of place, underscoring the importance of integrating local histories and identities into transformative agendas. Greater attention to the geography of transitions - how place, space, and scale shape the development and implementation of these imaginaries - is needed to deepen our understanding of the challenges and opportunities in shaping development beyond growth.

This workshop will address these and related issues, focusing on, but not limited to the following questions:

- What are the imaginaries and visions of progressive development models and how can they be operationalised to balance ecological boundaries and human wellbeing in diverse socio-spatial contexts?
- How do spatial factors influence the development, contestation, and implementation of eco-social visions and imaginaries, particularly in urban contexts?
- What mechanisms enable or prevent these types of transitions across different scales, and how can these mechanisms be adapted to address local challenges and opportunities?
- How can mismatches between future imaginaries, realities, and collective memories of place be navigated to enhance the legitimacy and effectiveness of eco-social transformation initiatives?

# Timetable

## Day 1 - Wednesday 18<sup>th</sup> June

Time	Location	Activity
09:00 - 09:30	The Hub	Registration & Coffee
09:30 - 10:00	The Hub	Introduction & Welcome
10:00 - 12:30	The Hub	<p><b>Lightning Rounds: Your Current Focus</b> Each participant gets 3 minutes to pitch their idea (Prompts: What's the core argument? Why does it matter?) on one slide introducing your research</p> <p><b>Group discussions: Exploring shared perspectives</b> Breakout tables: Participants are organised into small groups based on key themes (see below) to identify and discuss synergies and connections between research perspectives</p> <p>We will then come back together for a short recap and closing of the first session.</p>
12:30 - 14:00	The Hub	Catered Networking Lunch
14:00 - 16:00	Seminar Room	<p><b>Keynote 1 by Julie Froud (University of Manchester)</b> <i>Rethinking infrastructure for people and places: the tricky case of water in England and Wales</i></p> <p>The keynote will be followed by another round of small group discussions to explore core themes that have emerged</p>
16:00 - 17:00	Seminar Room	Break
17:00 - 17:30	The Hub	Coffee service before public seminar
17:30 - 19:00	The Hub	<b>GCHU Public Seminar and Drinks Reception</b>
19:00	Dining Hall	Dinner at Kellogg College

# Timetable

## Day 2 - Thursday 19<sup>th</sup> June

Time	Location	Activity
09:00 - 09:30	The Hub	Coffee and Introduction
09:30 - 10:30	The Hub	<b>Keynote 2 by John Tomaney, University College London</b> <i>Global universities and left-behind places: UCL's emerging Regional Communities agenda</i>
10:30 - 12:30	The Hub	<p><b>World cafe: Mapping thematic synergies</b></p> <p>Thematic groups come together to revisit their discussion points from the previous day, add additional thoughts, then break into world cafe format where each group reviews and adds to discussions from other groups.</p> <p>Come back to original flipchart, review and discuss in thematic group (15 mins), feedback/summarise thoughts to group (5 mins)</p> <p>Come back together for full group discussion and reflections</p>
12:30 - 13:00	The Hub	Workshop wrap up & future ESPPRIT activities
13:00 - 14:00	tbc	<i>Collective lunch (self paid)</i>
14:00 - 16:00	tbc	Optional Site Visit (e.g., Oxford Community Land Trust or OxFarmToFork or TapSocial or Flo's in the Park or Oxford City Farm)

# Key Themes

To help structure the discussions and anchor them in the participants' interests, we have identified four initial themes for the workshop. These themes were heuristically derived from the submitted abstracts and offer orientation for the upcoming conversations. They will serve as starting points for small group discussions, where we invite participants to further develop, adapt, and refine them throughout the workshop.

**1. Tools for spatial practices and design:** Several submissions examine how spatial tools and the built environment can actively shape pathways toward eco-social transformation. Techniques such as thick mapping and conscious spatial planning are used not only to generate new imaginaries and foster participatory knowledge production, but also to develop the human and collective capacities essential for just transitions. Contributions also highlight rural and land-based practices, including communal infrastructure and alternative ownership models, pointing to a re-enchantment of spatial practices that transcend growth-based paradigms and prioritize care, responsibility, and more-than-human relations.

**2. Contestation, cultural politics, and transition imaginaries:** A prominent theme running through the submissions is the political and cultural contestation of eco-social transformation. Case studies, from urban mobility debates in London and Barcelona to long-standing struggles in Southern Italy, reveal the importance of narrative struggles, historical place attachments, and political resistance. These contributions call attention to transition not as a purely technical process, but as a site of cultural politics and deep societal negotiation, where imaginaries are shaped, challenged, and redefined through conflict and collective memory.

**3. Spatialising post-growth approaches:** Several abstracts focus on alternative economic models such as Doughnut Economics, Community Wealth Building, and the Foundational Economy, exploring their application in diverse urban contexts. These works analyse how post-growth strategies are locally adapted, and how dialogues between the Global North and South can enrich more planetary approaches to development.

**4. Governance contexts and institutional capabilities:** A set of contributions address how governance mechanisms and institutional structures mediate sustainability transitions. This includes spatial analyses of regional development policies in Italy, research-action initiatives in France, and the shifting roles of local authorities in economic development. Authors explore the need for multi-scalar, inclusive approaches that align socio-ecological goals with concrete institutional capabilities.

# Abstracts<sup>1</sup>

## Measures of care. Developing new landscape imaginaries through a thick mapping approach

*Emilie Stecher, Institute of Landscape Architecture, BOKU University, AT*  
*Jennifer Fauster, Institute of Landscape Architecture, BOKU University, AT*  
*Cecilia Furlan, Institute of Landscape Architecture, BOKU University, AT*

Life on Earth faces critical risks, with six of nine planetary boundaries already exceeded, exacerbating socio-environmental injustices (Richardson et al., 2023). The widening social divide and increasing ecological degradation demand multiple actions for justice and revolutionary care (Hamigton, 2024; Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017), including innovative mapping and design approaches. In light of this workshop, we propose a Thick Mapping approach to engage with the triple planetary crisis (UNEP, 2020). As a multidisciplinary tool, thick mapping enhances the understanding of socio-ecological complexities, mitigates injustices, and co-produces spaces (Favaro, 2018). Rooted in digital humanities and the geospatial turn (Presner et al., 2014), thick, or deep, mapping fosters public participation and collective knowledge production.

Deep cartography reveals latent relationships within landscapes and cities, recognising maps as constructors of reality. Building on Haraway's (2016) notion of 'staying with the trouble,' this study explores how mapping biophysical and sociocultural layers exposes hidden synergies. Landscapes, as evolving entities, embody past impositions while informing future imaginaries (Corboz, 1985). By mobilising mapping as an agent of inquiry (Wall & Waterman, 2017) and embedding landscape-driven perspectives (Belanger, 2020), thick mapping amplifies multiple human and more-than-human voices, fostering new spatial interpretations. As Favaro (2017) asserts, thickness in mapping is a measure of care and responsibility, expressed through radical listening, inclusive relationship-building, knowledge exchange, and the co-production of new imaginaries.

For this workshop, we present the preliminary findings from thick mapping processes developed through research and academic exercises conducted in three situated learning environments with master's students (2024–2025). Focused on the Austrian urban landscape, these explorations leverage thick mapping to envision alternative spatial imaginaries and utopian design possibilities (Hartman, 2019). It is essential to assess new imaginaries not as fantasies but as a critical means of examining realities (Viganò 2021).

<sup>1</sup> Submissions are in random order.

# Abstracts

## The spatial perspective and political model for achieving a just socio-ecological transformation

*Dominik Gager, Darmstadt Business School, Darmstadt University of Applied Sciences, DE*

A just socio-ecological transformation can be understood as the goal of achieving a good life for all within planetary boundaries (O'Neill et al. 2018). This means, on the one hand, that all basic human needs are met and, on the other hand, that a globally sustainable level of resource use is maintained. This goal is not only challenging in that there is still no country that manages to achieve both (Fanning et al. 2022). It is also challenging in that continued economic growth is almost certainly incompatible with the second sub-target (Vogel and Hickel, 2023). For the prosperous Global North, this requires a break with the fossil-fuel-based prosperity model of Fordism (Schaupp 2021), while for the Global South, the challenge is to fulfil basic needs without the resource footprint of industrialised nations (Hickel/Sullivan 2024). In a sufficiency-oriented transformation approach, the global North would have to drastically reduce less necessary forms of production and consumption, while development models in the global South would have to evolve away from an export orientation that satisfies the needs of the global North and towards fulfilling basic national needs (Hickel/Sullivan 2024).

Such a transformation strategy is hardly achievable in a capitalist market economy due to its need for growth (Binswanger 2009; Herrmann 2022). However, it is not only the economic and social form of organisation of such a transformation that is questionable, but also the political and spatial level at which it can be organised. There are a number of arguments in favour of such a transformation requiring strong global governance. Important planetary boundaries, such as greenhouse gas emissions, must be observed on a global scale; economic value chains are often organised globally, and the losses in quality of life that will probably be necessary in the North are hardly likely to be enforceable as local individual efforts. Conversely, however, the local level is considered as a key area of transformation. Furthermore, prehistoric and protohistoric studies show that it was the emergence of larger state structures that made the creation of surpluses and accumulation necessary in the first place (Scott 2017).

At the same time, state perspectives have also contributed to the disappearance of important local ecological knowledge (Scott 1998). In turn, a transformation perspective for a planet with more than 8 billion people is hardly likely to be a way to reconnect with the production and natural conditions of non-state hunter-gatherer and nomadic societies that live without surpluses. The exploratory presentation aims to initiate a conversation about the vision of a just social-ecological transformation and the political and spatial perspectives required for it, without being able to offer any ready-made answers.

# Abstracts

## Eco-Social Controversies and Contestations: A Conceptual Framework

*Guldem Ozatagan, Global Systems Institute, University of Exeter, UK*

*Karen Bickerstaff, University of Exeter, UK*

*Rebecca Sandover, Global Systems Institute, University of Exeter, UK*

Eco-social visions and imaginaries have become one of the most powerful mobilising forces in contemporary politics, undermining their legitimacy and challenging the prospects for eco-social transformations. Emerging research has highlighted the hostility eco-social visions and imaginaries receive from conservative and populist politicians in their attempt to retain their previous positions (Batel and Devine-Wright, 2018; Caprotti et al., 2024; Gössling et al., 2024; Marquet et al., 2024). However, knowledge gaps remain as to how eco-social imaginaries and visions become issues of contestation, how these contestations evolve, and with what consequences for policy.

This presentation will address this gap by drawing on the recently funded ESRC project 'Governing Sustainable Futures'. It will discuss an emergent framework that is focused on what we refer to as 'flashpoint' controversies, place-based manifestations of contestation around environment and sustainability transformations that have complex and diverse spatial and temporal roots. We outline the conceptual work that underpins our theorisation of eco-social contestations through the lens of flashpoints controversies – drawing on multi-disciplinary work, including from human geography, planning, STS and political science. Our overall aim is to better situate so-called place-based or located eco-social controversies with their wider relational geographies (Bickerstaff, 2012) e.g. histories of conflict, multi-level governance relations, politicisation of climate issues. We also offer some early reflections from our empirical work into flashpoint dynamics focused on case studies across Devon, UK where mobility, dietary and coastal transitions have become, or may become, contested.



# Abstracts

## Assessing Sustainable Transition: A Spatial Analysis of Regional Development Policies in Italy

*Loreta Isaraj, CNR, The Institute for Research on Sustainable Economic Growth (IRCrES), IT  
Lucio Morettini, CNR, The Institute for Research on Sustainable Economic Growth (IRCrES), IT*

*Andrea Filippetti, CNR, The Institute for Research on Sustainable Economic Growth (IRCrES), IT*

*Bianca Potì, CNR, The Institute for Research on Sustainable Economic Growth (IRCrES), IT*

The POTION - Policies for Transition, Impact and Governance project aims to develop innovative methodologies for assessing transition policies, focusing on governance structures and their spatial inclusiveness. The research builds on the recognition that sustainable transition, as outlined in the European Green Deal, requires not only economic and technological shifts but also institutional and governance adaptations to ensure inclusivity and effectiveness at different spatial scales. Our study examines how Italian regional calls funded under the European Regional Development Fund (FESR) 2014-2020 align with the seven pillars of sustainable transition, which include energy decarbonization, circular economy, biodiversity protection, sustainable agriculture, digital innovation, mobility transformation, and social inclusion. We developed Transition Indexes using BERT-based natural language processing models (paraphrase-mpnet-base-v2), fine-tuned to detect the implicit and explicit presence of transition elements in policy documents. This approach allows for a quantitative and spatial mapping of sustainability-oriented funding priorities across Italian regions.

By integrating machine learning-based policy evaluation with spatial analysis, our research contributes to the broader discourse on progressive economic models and governance mechanisms for just transitions. The study highlights the mismatch between ideal sustainability frameworks and their practical regional implementation, proposing a governance approach that harmonizes local development needs with global sustainability goals. Our work provides policymakers with concrete guidance on spatially optimizing transition policies to maintain balanced ecological boundaries and socioeconomic well-being. Our findings reveal significant heterogeneity in how regions prioritize different transition elements. While some regions show a diversified approach across multiple Green Deal pillars, others exhibit strong emphasis on digital innovation for sustainability. Notably, climate adaptation and social justice transitions remain underrepresented, suggesting potential gaps in governance structures and policy design.

# Abstracts

## **Alternative imaginaries of planning and development: Beyond eurocentrism and in light of planetary thinking**

*Diana Morales, Centre for Technology, Innovation and Culture TIK - INTRANSIT, University of Oslo, NO*

*Emil Evenhuis, PBL – Netherlands Environmental Assessment Agency, NL*

Current thinking and practice regarding progressive economic development models in cities and regions (going beyond the orientation on economic growth), is still rather Eurocentric and is lacking a global as well as planetary outlook. In our recent work we have been trying to develop an agenda to address these deficiencies (Cox and Evenhuis, 2020; Evenhuis et al., 2021; Adjei and Morales, 2024; Chlebna et al., 2024; Morales, 2024; Morales et al., 2024; Morales and Marques, forthcoming).

One of such deficiencies is the little engagement between debates on alternative economic development models in the Global North (e.g. Well-being Economy, Community Wealth Building, Foundational Economy, Diverse Economies) with similar debates in the Global South (decolonial alternatives, post-development, and on incorporating elements of indigenous philosophies). Moreover, discourses on alternative economic development models in the Global North, do not sufficiently reflect 'planetary thinking'; they do not pay enough attention to seeing the development of a city or region in the light of planetary boundaries, as deeply connected to the development of cities and regions elsewhere, and as inherently intertwined with ecological conditions and processes (Clark and Szerszynski, 2020).

In our presentation we will put forward how an exchange between the – so far largely separate - debates on alternative models of development in the Global North and in the Global South may be facilitated, by focussing on several shared philosophical / normative premises, as well as conceptual building blocks. Furthermore, we will outline the key considerations for truly taking planetary boundaries seriously as a principal point of reference in our thinking and research about development in cities and regions across the globe.

# Abstracts

## Which abstract ruralities produce through concrete self-organisation of shared bake houses?

*Lukas Dörrie, Institut für Geographie, Universität Münster, DE*

With this research question, I want to contribute to the growing intersection of diverse disciplinary interests into the role of the rural for an eco-social transformation. On the one hand, the spatialisation of degrowth policies points to rural areas and urban-rural relationships, mainly due to resource-availabilities and situated degrowth-practices (Varvarousis et al. 2024). On the other, rural regions often appear as left-behind places with reactionary imaginations, which has (at least in Germany) lately increased the interest of critical studies. By studying self-organised economies, such as communal baking houses which still enjoy widespread voluntary involvement in many places today, I want to learn how materials, practices and imaginaries interact and produce different ruralities. Dengler and Lang (2021) raise awareness that such 'Commons' not necessarily come along with a transformational claim and that regressive politics can easily reproduce within themselves.

Therefore, my research aims to empirically investigate if the complex reality of self-organised economies and if they contribute - with the words of Silvia Federici and Silke van Dyk - to a re-enchantment of the world or rather to a – at worst regressive - community capitalism. I plan to step into the field with a very open ethnographic, participatory approach and deepen my understanding through qualitative methods like walking interviews. However, I am only at the very beginning of my PhD project in economic geography at the University of Münster, supervised by Prof. Dr. Sarah Ruth Sippel. My research interest builds on previous experiences from the project 'Biking Commontauts travel the Rhizome' (Kompost Ensemble 2022) and my job as a 'regional manager' in two different rural regions.

# Abstracts

## The role of land ownership in fostering prosperity beyond growth

*Patricia Canelas, Department for Continuing Education, University of Oxford, UK*  
*Francesca Froy, Department for Continuing Education, University of Oxford, UK*

We support the ESPPRIT workshop's contention that "in the face of escalating ecological and social crises, progressive ideas are urgently needed to foster development pathways that respect ecological boundaries while addressing human needs". A key aspect of this will be better understanding how different models of land ownership contribute to the stewardship of land (in cities and elsewhere) for public purpose and the "common good". Land is a finite resource subject to increasing competition as various demands arise for its use. Many cities in both the Global North and South are expanding at speed, without necessarily respecting ecological boundaries, or protecting valued local socio-economic infrastructure.

At the Sustainable Urban Development programme in Oxford, we are exploring how different models of land ownership influence the existence of "protected spaces" in and around cities which support the provisioning of basic human needs (for example through bottom-up entrepreneurship) and maintain local ecological resources, including nature-based infrastructures. Our contribution to the workshop will emphasise the importance of legal and ownership structures in contributing to "alternative imaginaries for planning and development", and explore, for example, what we can learn from indigenous practices when it comes to managing and transferring ownership of land. Case studies from Oxford, London and Bolivia will help ground the intervention in concrete examples.

# Abstracts

## A holistic toolkit for urban-economic transformation?

*Matt Thompson, The Bartlett School of Planning, UCL, UK*

This presentation introduces the thinking behind, and the preliminary findings of, a three-year urban-comparative research project launched from Wales to investigate, from a critical conjunctural analytic perspective, how diverse post-neoliberal alternatives have been mobilised and harnessed, to varying political-economic effect, in various cities and regions across Europe, including North Wales, London, Amsterdam, Zagreb and Bilbao.

I'll focus specifically on the experiences of Zagreb and Amsterdam as cities where left-green city administrations aligned with the new municipalist movement are experimenting in different ways with post-neoliberal alternatives – reflecting on the differences between these cities, how alternatives have gained traction differently, and the prospects for their wider adoption.

By tracing the conceptual and empirical interrelations between three imaginaries in particular – community wealth building, foundational economy and doughnut economics – I aim to critically unpack their potential for fruitful combination as a holistic methodological toolkit for urban transformation. Finally, I want to question the extent to which this 'family' of 'close cousins' – as the City of Amsterdam's 'Fearless Cities' team presents them – is capable of transforming neoliberal capitalism as a world-ecology in the current conjuncture.

# Abstracts

## **Conscious Spatial Planning as a Catalyst for Eco-social Transitions: Designing Spaces Conducive to the Development of Human Transformational Capacities**

*Milán Zoltán Páczai, University of Gävle & Imperial College London, SE & UK*

My masters research project investigates how conscious spatial planning can support the development of individual and collective capacities needed for eco-social transitions. While most approaches to post-growth transformation focus on external solutions such as macro-level policy or alternative economic practices, this study examines how the immediate built environment can serve as an everyday catalyst for the transition process itself - by developing the inner human, and collective, cognitive, emotional and relational capacities required for profound systems change.

The research integrates multiple disciplines—environmental psychology, spatial cognition, urban planning, and transition studies—to examine how physical environments influence transformation potential across scales. While previous studies have explored spatial impacts on wellbeing, limited research addresses how conscious spatial design can actively support the development and expression of capacities needed for just transitions as summarised on the Inner Development Goals framework. This gap is particularly relevant for understanding how spatial interventions can help manage emerging eco-social risks and transform unsustainable patterns of modern social life.

Using a mixed-methods approach combining systematic literature review with a cross-cultural phenomenological survey, the study examines how specific spatial qualities mediate transformative learning through various mechanisms, including material-economic (physical affordances) and cultural-discursive (perceived meaning). This investigation aims to identify scalable design principles that foster key competencies such as systems thinking and collaborative capacity—capabilities essential for imagining and implementing alternative development pathways beyond growth.

The research contributes to eco-social transformation discourse by examining how physical environments can function as persistent agents of change across governance levels. It addresses spatial justice by investigating how conscious spatial design can democratize access to environments that support transformative learning. The findings will inform a decision-making framework for place-based spatial planning that bridges individual development with collective capacity for transformation, with implications for regional development, urban planning, and transition management.

# Abstracts

## Green Growth or Post-Growth? Unpacking the Material-economic Discourses Shaping UK Energy Policy After Net Zero

*Timothy Foxon, Science Policy Research Unit, University of Sussex, UK*

*Joshua Lait, Energy Demand Research Centre (EDRC), University of Sussex, UK*

Whilst the necessity of a transition in systems of energy production and consumption to meet net zero goals is widely accepted, the dominant framing for this transition is green growth. For example, in its 2024 election manifesto, the UK Labour Party outlined a mission to “Make Britain a clean energy superpower”. This framing tends to prioritise technology-driven energy supply approaches, despite the potential of energy demand reduction options (both energy efficiency and sufficiency measures) to contribute to higher wellbeing (Creutzig et al., 2022) through delivery of environment and social co-benefits (Mininni et al., 2024).

This paper discusses findings from a discourse analysis of the material-economic framings of energy demand reduction measures in the UK since the legally binding commitment to Net Zero in 2019. Whilst investment in energy efficiency measures is sometimes argued to contribute to promoting economic growth, this is more usually framed in terms of goals of cutting household energy bills and delivering warmer homes to address fuel poverty, within an overarching green growth framing. However, a counter-discourse is being developed by some UK local governments and policy think tanks, recognising the many place-based well-being benefits of energy demand reduction measures. We argue that this discourse is more consistent with a post-growth framing.

The contrast between these national and local/regional discourses reveals how the green growth perspective renders some policy measures not acceptable, thereby limiting possibilities for change. For example, within a green growth framing, sufficiency measures aimed at reducing consumption in energy-intensive areas, like air travel, are often dismissed. More broadly, we argue that this discursive critique can help to assess the complexities and mismatches of green growth and post-growth framings and to imagine effective ways forward in energy policymaking communities.

# Abstracts

## **Towards post-growth cities: the cultural politics of mobility transitions in Barcelona**

*Imogen Hamilton-Jones, LSE Cities, London School of Economics and Political Science, UK*

*Catarina Heeckt, LSE Cities, London School of Economics and Political Science, UK*

*Sofia Greaves, Independent Postdoctoral Researcher*

*Ariadna Romans i Torrent, University of Amsterdam, NL*

Post-growth urban planning has in recent years begun to redefine urban development by foregrounding objectives beyond economic growth and towards social and ecological wellbeing. However, this emerging field has not yet considered the cultural politics that we argue are crucial in facilitating such a significant shift. This is particularly evident in the significant sociocultural and political tensions and contestations around recent progressive urban mobility initiatives. To address this gap, we conduct ethnographic and archival research around the cultural politics of two contested mobility initiatives that we consider of interest from a post-growth perspective as 'latent commons' (Tsing, 2015): Low-traffic neighbourhoods ('Liveable Neighbourhoods') in Islington, London, and superblocks ('superilles') in Eixample, Barcelona. Both have encountered backlash and political mobilisation against them, resulting in stalled and downscaled implementation of these ambitious initiatives.

Although there are similarities in how, why and by whom these mobility interventions have been contested, they are also embedded in very different sociocultural, historic and linguistic national and urban contexts, producing distinct cultural politics of transitions that merit further study. In this context, we foreground 'the cultural' as a key site of political struggles over meanings, hopes, visions and historical place attachments. We develop a more thorough account of what cultural politics means: Moving beyond a strong focus on values and imaginaries, as prevalent in post-growth (urban planning) literatures, we introduce an interdisciplinary framework of cultural politics that considers the confluence and tensions between urban planning histories, political imaginaries and affective attachments.

In so doing, we argue for the importance of a more strongly humanities-informed approach to post-growth urban planning and transitions. Finally, we argue that contestation must be dealt with not only as impediments to overcome, but as integral and indeed indispensable part of (democratic) transformative processes towards post-growth cities. This in turn implies that there is a need for urban planners to (1) pay attention to cultural dimensions, loosely defined and including contradictory and messy elements, in both processes and 'results' of post-growth transitions and (2) to be radically open to uncertainty and emergence throughout such processes, embracing culturally diverse and variegated solutions for post-growth, refusing 'cookie-cutter' solutions.



# Abstracts

## Assembling transitions: Projects as spatial constellations of sustainability efforts in Sweden's forest berry industry

*Nils Pettersson, Department of Geography, Umeå University, SE*

*Linn Axelsson, Department of Human Geography, Stockholm University, SE*

This paper focuses on how sustainability transitions unfold through shifting constellations of actors, whose spatial relationships shape the trajectories of change. Specifically, it explores projects as a key form of such constellations, using them as an entry point to examine how actor relations within sustainability transitions take shape in spatial terms.

Projects have emerged as dominant instruments for coordinating sustainability transitions. Often framed as collaborative and flexible mechanisms, projects are seen as key to mobilizing actors and accelerating change. However, the increasing reliance on projects also raises critical questions about the structuring of sustainability efforts and the power relations embedded within them. This paper examines these dynamics through an empirical study of sustainability projects in the forest berry industry in northern Sweden, focusing on how projectification shapes actor relationships in transition processes in a spatial sense.

Drawing on documentary material and interviews with diverse stakeholders—including local entrepreneurs and policymakers—the paper explores interactions across different scales. Using an assemblage perspective, combined with relational and topological thinking in geography, the paper unpacks the laborious work of project-making. Particular attention is given to how spatial relations in project-based transition processes are formed, negotiated, and contested. The paper offers insights into how projects operate as spatially embedded governance tools and how the imaginaries of sustainability transitions intersect with the realities of project-based coordination. In doing so, it critically engages with the challenges and opportunities presented by projectification as a mode of organizing eco-social transformation, particularly in sectors like food production.

# Abstracts

## Learning from the failures of capitalist development? The case of Brindisi

*Deborah Galimberti* Research associate Centre Emile Durkheim (UMR 5116), Sciences Po Saint-Germain-en-Laye - CY Cergy Paris Université, FR

Brindisi is declining port middle-sized city of around 80.0000 inhabitants in Southern Italy culturally known for the smuggling of cigarettes and the pervasiveness of illegal and criminal activities (Pedicini, 2010). The city has a socio-economic structure typical of places experiencing cultural and economic marginality (Pizzorno, 1966, Donolo et al. 1974). State and local political action since the 1960s has been aimed at changing its pre-capitalist structure by promoting the manufacturing and industrialist project leveraged by the employment promise with little concern for environmental and social impacts. However, Brindisi local society is characterized also by a long history of environmental activism, which dates back to the early 1980s when collective actions were organized to protest against the localization of the second biggest Italian coal energy powerhouse in the urban area. ENEL Cerano powerhouse crystallized during the last thirty-five years a strong local environmentalist movement advocating for decarbonization as well as alternatives development ideas for the city (Ravenda, 2018). Moreover, since the 1990s a vibrant public debate engaging intellectuals as well as politicians developed about alternatives to the developmentalist narrative.

One can cite notably the discussions around the so-called 'pensiero meridiano' (Southern Thought) applying postcolonial thought to Southern European peripheries (Ferretti, 2023). Under this perspective, it is a paradigmatic case study for analyzing the mismatch between imaginaries of socio-ecological transformation and the resistance of the developmentalist narrative, in a context of enduring poverty and failure of capitalist development.

In the paper, I will trace back the social history of local mobilizations advocating for alternative models of social and ecological development and the multiple resistances they faced within local society and the ruling business and local classes. Empirically I will analyze how social change of the city was framed (Martin, 2003) within narratives produced by these local epistemic communities. I will zoom in a recent period between 2018 and 2023 characterized by access to office of a progressive leftist coalition, around the list "Brindisi common good" which brought about projects of social and urban regeneration of places.

Beyond institutional and material constraints, I will argue that the hindering mechanism preventing a process of social change towards sustainable and progressive visions of development in the case of Brindisi lies in the disconnection between the imaginaries of social and ecological transition brought about by progressive political and social movements framed around the regeneration of places as communities and those forged around power relations between capital and labor within places of work. Here, we can observe how place and scale (polluting industries are mainly multinational companies) intersects. The reconnection within collective memories of labor experiences and relationships to landscape as a place of both work and living emerges as a viable emancipatory practice to overcome this mismatch and bring about a process of emancipatory social change shared by citizens (Iovino, 2016). The paper builds on an original empirical research carried out during a Marie-Curie grant (interviews and archival research) within a comparative project focused on processes of economic transitions in EU peripheries (Southern Italy and Poland).

# Abstracts

## **Repositioning Local Economic Development in French Municipalities: Lessons from the Bounce Back Research-Action Program**

*Gabriel Renault, PCTE Research Unit, Grenoble Alpes University, FR*

After decades of decentralization, French regions and metropolises have become key actors in local economic development, devising locally sensitive economic strategies to support growth and dynamism. Today, growth is increasingly decried as an inadequate compass for local development. Standard economic development models are being challenged by alternative models which, despite their peculiarities, share a common assumption: the need to prioritize extra-economic spheres on a par with the economic sphere, rather than treating them as secondary objectives. As prominent actors in development, French regions and metropolises are expected to reposition themselves. This raises two fundamental questions at the subnational level: What levers do local authorities have to bolster these new, ambitious models? How far do these new models redefine both the missions and the skill requirements of local economic development units within local authorities?

This contribution addresses these questions through the experience of the Bounce Back research-action program. Led by the 27<sup>ème</sup> Région think tank and launched in September 2023, the program brings together eleven French municipalities—mainly urban metropolises but also rural municipalities—as well as two researchers. Working alongside local economic development officers, Bounce Back explores new pathways for local eco-social development through regular participatory workshops. The project has provided a diagnostic of the wicked problems of local economic development, proposed paradigm shifts identified by local officers, and initiated eco-social experimentations currently underway in several municipalities.

This contribution has two main goals. First, to provide an overall account of the Bounce Back program, which stands as an innovative in itinere action-research initiative. It illustrates how municipalities translate and adapt emerging models, from broad redefinitions to more selective strategy shifts. Second, it offers a preliminary insight into the evolving role of local economic development officers, who must broaden their expertise in eco-social fields while maintaining an economic focus—raising a tension that is difficult to reconcile.

# Abstracts

## Anti-Planning Crisis? Reimagining the Responsible City Through 'Generosity'

*Ying-Chun (Nancy) Hou, School of Geography and Planning, Cardiff University, UK*

Contemporary cities are increasingly framed as being in a state of perpetual crisis—facing mounting challenges such as climate change, energy resource scarcity, cybersecurity threats, and socio-economic and political instability. Amid these overlapping crises, urban policymakers and city inhabitants are expected to adopt a heightened sense of responsibility in mitigating these challenges. Consequently, the concept of the 'Responsible City' has emerged as a focal point in contemporary urban governance. However, dominant debates on planning ethics and spatial justice tend to conceptualise responsibility through the lens of liberal philosophical principles, often reducing it to a rationalised moral duty imposed upon planners and policymakers. Tronto (2015) argues that the prevailing notion of 'responsibility' is narrowly defined, primarily understood as the intentional actions of actors to achieve specific policy outcomes—a perspective akin to a God's eye view (Ewald, 1993).

In this framework, planners and environmental scientists interpret crises as stemming from a 'mismatch' between hazards and the governing institutions designed to control them. This logic, in turn, has fuelled the production of 'fearful' and 'hopeless' discourses, reinforcing a vision of the urban future as one of perpetual crisis and precarious responsibility.

This paper challenges dominant crisis-driven planning discourses by shifting the debate from normative and instrumental responses toward a more reflexive and generative stance on the 'Responsible City.' Deploying Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), it first interrogates the notion of crisis itself (Roitman, 2011), examining how it has been strategically deployed in mainstream planning narratives.

Second, it critiques the universalist moral philosophies that position responsibility as a burdensome obligation, framing planners as duty-bound to impose solutions based on abstract reasoning and technocratic justifications. Moving beyond paradigms of mastery and control, which suggest that "if no one is responsible, then things are out of control", the paper explores an alternative epistemology of responsibility—one that emerges as a collective achievement through 'care-based' practices and an 'ethos of generosity'. By doing so, it reimagines responsibility not as a predetermined burden but as an active and relational process, co-constituted through acts of care, solidarity, and ethical engagement with uncertainty.

# Abstracts

## **Towards sustainable prosperity: Exploring the gap between utopian visions and actual practice in cities**

*Richard Crisp, Centre for Regional Economic and Social Research (CRESR), Sheffield Hallam University, UK*

*Emil Evenhuis, PBL – Netherlands Environmental Assessment Agency, NL*

*Anne Green, Department of Strategy and International Business, University of Birmingham, UK*

*David Waite, School of Social and Political Sciences, University of Glasgow, UK*

Urban policymakers and non-state actors are increasingly adopting 'alternative' economic development approaches such as Doughnut Economics and Community Wealth Building in order to respond to ecological crises as well as enduring social and economic inequalities. These alternative approaches are often combined in 'pick and mix' fashion to realise complementary and mutually reinforcing benefits, mobilise diverse actors including citizens and politicians around plural visions of change, and address a range of city-specific challenges. However, the gap between the somewhat 'utopian' visions put forward by these approaches, and the scope of feasible policy action in cities, remains significant. Challenges include going up against larger systems and interests that are typically not open to alternative ways of doing things; mobilising diverse actors including citizens and politicians around a shared vision of change; and managing tensions when abstract visions become concrete.

This paper explores how such challenges play out in particular socio-spatial contexts, building on documentary, interview and workshop evidence from the Netherlands and the UK. It highlights how the realisation of beyond GDP approaches in cities is both enabled and constrained by place specific factors that shape the degree to which visions become part of an emergent agenda for transformational change (Rohracher and Konrad 2024) and translate into effective local action. The aim is to stimulate discussion and debate about how we analyse and compare the challenge of implementing progressive development models within and across space and tiers of governance.

# Abstracts

## Spatial Autonomy - The politics of defining the 'DNA' of place

*Amy Burnett, Centre for Enterprise, Environment and Development Research, Middlesex University London, UK*

*Richard Nunes, Henley Business School, University of Reading, UK*

*Kate Burningham, CUSP Centre for Understanding Sustainable Prosperity, University of Surrey, UK*

How actors advance visions of place and the pathways that enable them to effect change in their community affect the scalability of local-level climate action and the politics of placemaking. However, the tactics used by individuals to weave narratives and substantiate claims for independent politics and their relationship to place identity remains under-researched. There is a need to understand the conditions under which social and political autonomy manifest at the local level and whether acting autonomously translates into more democratic and inclusive outcomes. In particular, these debates can illuminate how and the extent to which people and places become 'autonomous'. For instance, how does the politics of spatial and collective identities affect routes to claiming autonomy or recognise certain claims to different types of autonomous identities?

These debates are also essential in understanding the extent to which spatially-situated entities can be purposefully designed to effect more sustainable (or autonomous) outcomes. That is, (autonomous) placemaking may challenge core assumptions of civic participation, influence, and power structures of 'community-led' transitions. But the extent to which individual, collective, and spatial identities inhibit or enable the freedom to genuinely act autonomously when crafting or enacting strategies for sustainable action needs to be questioned.

We reveal how independence and autonomy were used to frame territories of political and economic resistance in a pioneering market town in Somerset, England where key instigators of change had strong roots to counter-cultural movements (including Transition (town)) and 'mainstream' local government institutions. In defining identities of autonomy, the town was often bestowed 'spatial agency', reflected through anthropomorphism of associated 'alternative' in-group identity ties. The interplay between stability and change of autonomous territorial identities over time was also key in enabling the town's identity to be (re)appropriated and rebranded as a '21st Century UK market town', for instance in referring to the town's DNA as a market of autonomous creativity, yet this was also co-created by community changemakers.

By exploring the notion of spatial autonomy, we examine how different place-based identities emerge within processes of placemaking. We suggest spatial autonomy—as a lens to view situated claims to sustainability transitions—could help strengthen connections between power, politics, and placemaking as an exercise of socio-political identity. Thus, we reflect on theoretical implications for place-based constructions of spatial autonomy and future research on 'autonomous' strategies of (environmental) politics in practice and the contestation of conferring meaning in the context of political and environmental transition.

To explore the limits of autonomous approaches further, we recommend additional research to deepen appreciation of the boundaries of autonomous identities within different identity domains, transition events, and dynamics; for instance, how socio-cultural tokens of role transitions mediate through different (place-based) identities.

## Locations

The workshop will be held at Kellogg College, located at 60–62 Banbury Road, Oxford, OX2 6PN.

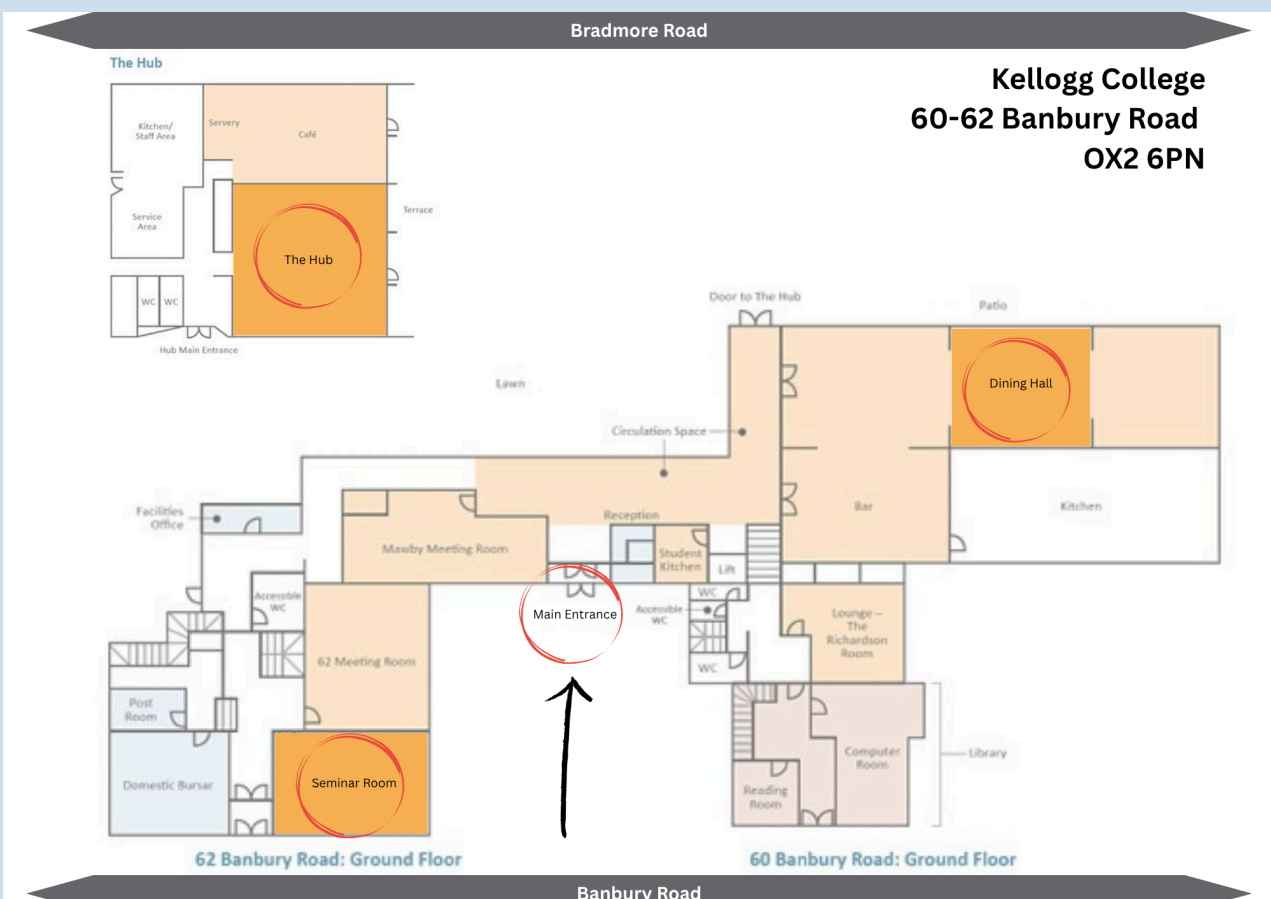
## Getting There:

- From the train station: approximately a 20-minute walk.
- From Gloucester Green bus station: around a 15-minute walk.
- The nearest bus stop to the College is Bevington Road, served by bus lines 2, 2A, 14, S5, S7, and X4.

For up-to-date public transport information, please consult [Oxford Bus Company](#) or your preferred journey planner.

**Workshop Venue:**

- Most sessions will take place in The Hub, the College's café and main event space.
- You can access The Hub via the main College reception, where signage will direct you.
- Some sessions will also be held in the Seminar Room, also accessible through the main entrance and clearly signposted.



## Further Information

If you have any questions before the workshop, please feel free to get in touch with us at [astrid.krisch@kellogg.ox.ac.uk](mailto:astrid.krisch@kellogg.ox.ac.uk). For any immediate questions or concerns during the workshop, you can reach Astrid on site by phone at +44 7901 253099.



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